

Radio for Social Development

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INTRODUCTION

"*Tell me a story*" is an established educational technique. "*Tell me a story*" using radio is an application of this technique, but instead of having one or several listeners, it is possible to reach thousands or millions of people throughout both urban and rural areas. *The Archers*, was a British radio drama serial that started its life with educational objectives and has been broadcasting for decades to a large dedicated audience of millions (Gallagher, 1975). This article will describe how a radio drama education project expanded into small local communities, each with its own community radio station, and how the actors in the radio drama addressed specific health issues of a particular area through the use of live performances.

BACKGROUND

As far back as the 1970s, McAnany (1976) found in his Mexico study that in radio projects over two-thirds of listeners preferred to listen to music and drama and that few tuned in to local educational programs or programs from the capital city.

Supporting radio drama for behavior change with other resources is a key part of any radio education project. In a presentation on behavior change, Brooke-White (1985) saw non-formal radio education for adults as being concerned with change. She said the role of the media educator is based on the principle of learning by choice, and that change came from within the individual listening to the programs. Her comments referred to writers, editors and producers who needed "skills in the communication of structured information geared to facilitate change" (p. 1).

Fossard (1996) has written extensively on the development of drama for radio, giving particular attention and emphasis on making the messages suitable and credible to the listening audience. With a particular focus on soap opera in bringing about social change, Nariman (1993) suggests that radio drama is very effective if it makes sense to the listener, and it addresses issues similar to

those faced by the listening audience using characters who are believable and who deal with the issues in a recognizable way.

In Africa, radio drama is regarded as being very effective in the education of rural people if it "encompasses cultural factors such as the oral tradition and social learning through performance" (Morrison, 2003, pp. 1-4). Other factors that make drama an effective medium include the recognition that rural people tend to have lower literacy rates than urban people, they cannot be reached by other means of communication such as newspapers or television and that generally, there is homogeneity and social cohesion in small villages. The spoken word and traditional forms of drama incorporating cultural values and beliefs are the primary ways of educating the young and to sustaining cultural mores among adults in such situations.

An example that showed the impact of broadcasting radio drama programs took place in Tanzania during the period 1993 to 1997 (Ryerson, 2003). After four years of broadcasting, a Radio Tanzania drama serial had succeeded in attracting 58% of the population between the ages of 15-45 in the broadcast regions. Evaluation research of the radio drama conducted by The University of New Mexico and the Government of Tanzania showed that this radio serial stimulated behavioral changes. More than half of the population in the areas where the serial was transmitted identified themselves as listeners. HIV/AIDS is a huge problem in Africa and this story had, as one of the key characters, a truck driver with numerous girlfriends dotted along his truck journey route. He became HIV positive. Of the listeners surveyed, 82% said the program had caused them to change their own behavior to prevent HIV infection by using condoms and limiting their number of sexual partners. Independent data from the AIDS Control Program of the Tanzania government noted over a 150% increase in condom distribution in the broadcast areas during the first year of the soap opera.

Other data collected through Ministry of Health clinics indicated that the radio soap opera had influenced family planning methods in four out of ten new adopters. This included a quarter of the respondents who could cite the soap opera by name. Another 16% cited "something

on the radio” and then identified the soap opera as their source when shown a list of programs being broadcast.

While radio serials obviously build up a regular listening audience and the potential for behavior change, it is also possible to use radio drama as a tool with campaign radio.

In Vanuatu, a small South Pacific nation, a radio drama project on health advice has strong links with the running of a local clinic. *Famili Blong Sarah (Sarah's Family)* is a weekly radio drama series aiming to increase knowledge of, and promote positive attitudes about, reproductive health issues. The soap opera also served as a teaching tool for nurses, teachers, and aid post workers. The first 20 episodes were dedicated to character development in the hope that the audience would bond with the radio characters before sensitive sexual health issues were introduced. Over 180 episodes have been produced to date. On their Web site, Wan Smol Bag notes “live performance and face-to-face training sessions are preferred, but radio drama can reach islanders nationwide on a consistent basis.”

LEPROSY EDUCATION USING LIVE RADIO BROADCASTS

An example of health education using a live radio broadcast performance at Alto Molocue, a town in the poorer part of the Zambezia province, Mozambique, took place at the beginning of 2003. A Danish NGO had funded a new FM community radio station in the town to broadcast items of interest and of educational and social value to the people of the area. Alto Molocue has the misfortune of having a high incidence of Leprosy, and it was one of the few places where the Portuguese colonizers had built a treatment center. Although since Mozambique gained Independence, the center has had little maintenance. For 50 years, medical authorities have been doing their best to contain and cure the disease and have had some successes and some failures. Leprosy tends to be a “cunning” disease. Many young people who catch Leprosy do nothing about seeking medical help until the disease makes its first serious attack on their nervous system. A child will get a white mark on their skin. It does not itch or form an uncomfortable rash and often nothing is done. It is only when the disease has shown more serious manifestations that people will seek help and by that time it is too late to reverse the damage. Yet, leprosy can be cured if it is caught in its early stages.

In January 2003, a medical specialist in charge of Leprosy care in Alto Molocue obtained funds for the promotion of a small project “to celebrate fifty years of Leprosy care and treatment in this district.” He began preparing printed resource materials, coached a small

theatre group to perform a play using traditional characters and showing how to detect the disease and to seek treatment, using methods and messages understood and familiar to the local people. He made contact with a radio drama coordinator who was producing a regular weekly radio drama series for rural people. Within a short time, the decision had been made to pool resources from the two projects. Thus, the small project began to expand into a larger multimedia educational event aimed at educating the people on early detection and treatment of leprosy, and making it possible to treat the disease before serious damage to the body occurred.

Using radio drama, entertainment, pre-recorded interviews, structured information and resource support from the radio education project, the local radio station manager suggested that the event take place over a whole weekend. Two experienced local radio announcers from Radio Mozambique (a six-hour drive away), who spoke the local Elomwe language had visited the area to collect a number of interviews from Leprosy patients and medical staff. One producer made a point of collecting information from the local community. He said that “It was important to hear first men and then women make the same point. This way villagers and local people believe it. Always in our culture, you need different people repeating ideas—both sexes and people with respect in their lives, that is, the leaders” (Monteiro, 2003). Radio public service spots were prepared and the radio drama producer trained the theatre group to perform for a live audience and a simultaneous live radio broadcast. The Leprosy doctor talked with a local priest and organized the first ever live radio outdoor church service. The service was dedicated to the medical care of Leprosy. Extra copies of the printed resource material were prepared and printed.

To ensure non-stop live broadcasting, the professional Radio Mozambique broadcasters worked long hours over the weekend with the local radio staff who were inexperienced volunteers. People crowded into different venues in town to see the theatre group act, and they visited the radio station in large numbers. Competitions were held. Many adults and children won prizes. Around fifteen hundred people attended the special live broadcast of the church service. In terms of numbers and the apparent show of interest, the weekend was deemed a success.

While there was no formal research into the program impact, there was evidence that a large number of people had physically attended all the different events. Besides the live broadcasting, there were repeats of the pre-recorded interviews. After the event, the Radio Station Manager was approached and asked by various local groups to prepare and broadcast more radio programs on Leprosy and general health matters. She gave commu-

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