

**BROADCAST PROGRAM PLANNING FOR
ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN
RWANDA**

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Background

“We need no further statistics to remind us of the grim task we face. Statistics have said it all for long enough, and we have witnessed the devastating impact of this pandemic, day in and day out.” President Paul Kagame.¹

African young people ages 15 to 24 represent more than half of all new HIV infections on the continent (Hisel, 2000). Rwanda is not an exception, since Rwandan adolescents become sexually active at a young age, increasing the high risk of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV/AIDS. Young people and adolescents represent a particularly large group in Rwanda. Youths between 10 and 35 years old represent 49% of the population of 8,162,715 inhabitants, and adolescents between 10 and 24 years old, 35% (The General Population and Housing Census of Rwanda, 2002). Although studies on Rwandan adolescent reproductive health have to be strengthened, data provided by the Rwandan Ministry of Health’s National Reproductive Policy (2003) show that youths and adolescents are exposed to multiple reproductive health related problems. Twenty-five percent of adolescents are sexually active

¹ Remarks by the President of Rwanda at the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Aids Foundation on March 5, 2003 in Washington, D.C.

before the age of 18. The 2000 Demographic and Health Survey² revealed that 7% of adolescent girls between 15 and 19 years old were pregnant or already mothers. A study carried out in 1997 pointed out that HIV/AIDS prevalence rate was very high among Rwandan adolescents. Those between 15 and 18 years old had an HIV/AIDS prevalence of 6.5% and those between 20 and 25 years old, 13.6% (Rwandan Ministry of Health's National Reproductive Policy, 2003, p.12). Even though adolescents are among the most vulnerable groups in Rwanda, their sexual and reproductive health has rarely been effectively addressed. They lack information and a space to freely discuss and articulate their needs (Lust for Life, 2004).

Efforts have been made by the Rwandan government to address the Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH). The Gisenyi Roundtable on Reproductive Health, held in September 2000, identified ARH as one of the six priorities for the reproductive health in the country (Rwandan Ministry of Health's National Reproductive Policy, 2003, p.2). Also, since the Head of State made HIV/AIDS control a national priority, authorities have been multiplying their efforts to integrate the issue into the Rwandan Development 20/20 Vision. A State Ministry in charge of HIV/AIDS and a National Aids Commission exist and are willing to promote behavior change among adolescents. The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture established a National Youth Council which has offices through the country and has developed a plan for HIV/AIDS control among youth. Anti-AIDS clubs, managed by young people, exist in different schools around the country. Particularly, the Rwandan First Lady has been a "champion" in the fight

² As cited in the Rwandan Ministry of Health's National Reproductive Policy, 2003.

against HIV/AIDS by leading several initiatives targeting youths and adolescents. According to the Ministry of Health's National Reproductive Policy (2003), the weaknesses of ARH interventions in the country include insufficient specific data on ARH, lack of integration of ARH services within health facilities, and insufficient coordination of health communication activities related to ARH (p.13).

Rationale

“Fighting against AIDS requires empowering young people to be at the forefront of change (...) so they have the knowledge, confidence and means to protect themselves against the virus.” Koffi Annan³.

Until recently, Rwanda was still among the few African nations without any private broadcast station. For the ten years since the 1994 Rwandan genocide, only state radio, state television and foreign stations, such as the BBC, the Deutsche Welle and the Voice of America, have been allowed to broadcast in Rwanda. This can be mainly explained by the fact that media, and particularly the now famous “Radio Television Mille Collines”, played an important role in the incitation to the genocide. Thus, the government's policy towards them was extremely cautious. Private radios were seen as a possible threat to the reconciliation process in a country struggling to rebuild peace and social-economical stability. Since the end of January 2004, five private radio stations have been allowed to start broadcasting. This situation of a broadcasting

³ Address by the UN Secretary General to the African Union Assembly on July 12, 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique.

monopoly, for the last decade, prevented open and diverse programs aimed at serving the diverse range of population interests. The programs offered by Radio Rwanda and Rwandan television often lack creativity and a certain quality in production. The hope is that the now operating private radio stations will bring creativity, diversity and quality in a country strongly in need of media improvement. Any private television has been allowed to be on air.

Rwandan television is particularly poor in terms of programs even though the number of people with television-sets is increasing in urban areas. Statistics show that radio is still the predominant media with 52% of the urban population having radio sets, while television sets in urban families are less than 1% (The General Population and Housing Census, 2002). The Rwandan television offers four television programs targeting young people⁴. Of the four programs, three of them are mainly focusing on music and popular foreign stars in cinema, music, and sport. The other one is a competition show between two schools covering a range of educational issues, such as geography, history, and politics. Typically, adolescents in urban areas, when possible, turn to pay-per-view channels for information and entertainment. Thus, it can be seen clearly that there is a need and space for television programs targeting Rwandan urban adolescents and young people for social change. Since television access is still extremely limited even in urban areas, the proposed television program would be strengthened by other media and entertainment tools, such as radio PSAs, an interactive website, billboards, messaging on cell phones, music concerts, and sport activities. The

⁴ The four Rwandan television programs targeting young people are: *Forum des Jeunes* (Young People Forum), *Télé-Détente* (Leisure TV), *Intashyo* (Greetings), and *Célébrités* (Celebrities).

project to be proposed targets mainly adolescents in urban areas since studies show that they tend to be sexually active earlier than those in rural areas, increasing the probabilities of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases (Gueye, Castle, & Konaté, 2001). Moreover, there is a tendency for young people in rural areas to imitate urban young people's behaviors, fashion styles, and language. The project to be proposed will experiment by targeting adolescents in urban areas, the urban adolescents can later act as role models for their counterparts in urban cities.

The creative media project emphasizes education and entertainment strategy to address the reproductive health needs of Rwandan urban adolescents, and particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The project mainly consists of the first locally made television show produced for, with, and by Rwandan young people to cover issues related to reproductive health in a lively and interactive way. This project aims at responding to three main Rwandan adolescent needs: entertainment, education, and empowerment. First of all, the television show proposes entertainment and particularly, locally made entertainment. Rwandan adolescents have very few opportunities to assist and participate in local performances on television. The show would also provide a medium to detect young talents and encourage creativity. Special attention would be put on cultural pieces using local traditions in a creative way in order to enhance adolescents' cultural heritage. Second, the television show seeks to inform and educate adolescents about reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS in particular. Studies indicate that adolescents are incredibly uninformed about

health issues (Hisel, 2000). The show should also serve as a forum of discussion among adolescents. Finally, the project, by involving adolescents in all stages of production, aims at empowering young people who, often, lack self-confidence and are devastated by unemployment.

Goals and objectives

The main goal of this project is to foster knowledge and practices regarding sexual and reproductive health among Rwandan adolescents using a television show and other entertainment education tools.

Specific objectives

- Improve Rwandan adolescents' knowledge on reproductive health and related issues, such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS.
- Offer a venue for discussion among Rwandan adolescents on issues related to ARH.
- Encourage the adoption of safe sexual behaviors to decrease STIs and HIV/AIDS infection.
- Propose peer-adolescent models who can serve as agents for behavior change.
- Encourage adolescents to visit reproductive health centers and other resources available.

- Provide locally-made entertainment by and for young people in order to enhance their cultural heritage.

Program Framework

The vast majority of Rwandan programs regarding health issues have a focus on moralizing as well as making people afraid of potential dangers. The project to be proposed is based upon the entertainment-education strategy. As Singhal and Rogers (2004) indicate, “entertainment-education is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior.” (p.5). In other words, the focus would be on educating without moralizing. This is particularly important with an adolescent audience since this age group consumes a lot of entertainment. Reproductive health messages should be integrated into interactive and popular activities that are meaningful to Rwandan adolescents, such as music, dance, and sports.

The design, implementation, and evaluation of the television show would also be based on Bandura’s social learning theory. The social learning theory argues that people learn not only through their own experiences, but also by observing the actions of others and the consequences of those actions (Bandura in Singhal and Rogers, 2004). This theory is particularly relevant with adolescents since they tend to observe and imitate their peers for behavior’s adoption. The television show would emphasize adolescents’ safe behavior

practices by providing positive images to the viewers and encouraging them to act similarly. Finally, all the stages aimed at the implementation of the creative multimedia project proposed would be essentially grounded on *the new P-Process Steps in Strategic Communication* developed by the Health Communication Partnership (2003). The P-Process framework is a guidelines designed for communication professionals to help them develop communication programs regarding a variety of health issues, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, maternal mortality reduction, the promotion of child survival, prevention of infectious diseases, and the promotion of environmental health. The P-Process is a reference document in communication for health and has been successfully used in health communication programs worldwide.

Description of the project

The current description of the project is a preliminary proposition and would have to be challenged by the participation in the design and implementation of the program by the target audience, the community and all the partners to be involved. It is crucial to note that this project emphasizes a participatory approach and the following description should only serve as a starting point and a flexible base for discussion during the formative and participatory research.

The project will consist of a one-hour show, broadcast once a week on the local television, Rwanda Television. Each show will focus on a specific theme related to reproductive health issues of particular concern to youth, such as

friendship and dating, contraceptive methods, unwanted pregnancy, STIs, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, prostitution, and parent-child communications. Recognizing that knowledge is not enough to propel action, the show will also aim at helping adolescents take control over their destiny. Themes such as self-esteem, skills to be able to make decisions, life objectives, tolerance, and respect will also be developed. The format will be flexible and will include reports on ARH issues, short sketches, surveys, celebrity interviews, songs, weekly conversation with a young doctor, and call-in interventions. One of the main components of the show would be to stimulate discussions among adolescents of ARH subjects, which are little discussed in Rwandan culture, resulting in widespread ignorance. The discussion should be incorporated into youth activities, such as cultural and sport events, to create a safe and comfortable environment where youth feel empowered to discuss sensitive issues affecting their lives.

The show would be broadcast from Rwanda Television's studios and on several occasions, from different schools, stadiums, neighborhoods or special events. The television show will be strengthened by an extensive use of other entertainment and educational tools, such as an interactive website, PSAs on radio and television, music concerts, sports activities, messaging on cell phones, quizzes, and contests to reach youths in the main cities around the country.

Intervention and control sites

In its first stage, the creative media project should target adolescent males and females in two urban cities: Kigali and Butare. These two cities would serve

as intervention sites where the viewing of the television show would be strongly encouraged and where all other entertainment-education tools would be extensively used to reach, inform, educate, and interact with the target audience. Kigali seems an obvious choice since it is the capital of the country and has the largest urban population (The General Census of Population and Housing of Rwanda, 2002). Butare, situated in the southern part of the country, is the second city in importance and it is known for its strength in academics. Butare has several high schools and the National University of Rwanda, the largest higher institution in the country with its 7,000 students. Since television is still limited in both intervention cities, the project to be proposed will encourage the viewing of the program in schools and neighborhood cinemas. Ruhengeri, in the North, could serve as a control site, where any direct intervention would be provided. Ruhengeri has been chosen because it represents the most populated rural city. Control sites are often used in communication programs to assess the knowledge of people on a specific issue where any intervention has been conducted comparatively to the target audience in intervention sites which have been exposed to social change messages over a certain period.

The team production

Selected young people will be hired to work on the show as reporters, hosts, and discussion moderators. They will have one-month workshop training on basic television reporting and effective reproductive health communication. They will be chosen based on the following criteria: 1) willingness and motivation

to contribute to the project; 2) availability to carry out project activities; and 3) ability to communicate well with peers. These young journalists should also serve on several occasions as peer-educators, by informally visiting young people, to facilitate small group discussions in and out of schools. This will help the young journalists get to know their audiences and ensure that the television show's messages and activities resonate with Rwandan adolescents.

The technical part would be carried out by the current staff of the local television with permission from the Rwanda Television's board. The producer of the television show should have a vast experience in television production and in communication for social change. The television show might also sometimes request the participation of "champions" of the fight against HIV/AIDS, such as the First Lady, in order to encourage adolescents in their efforts.

Specific cultural expressions

In order to have a certain impact on the target audience, the project should also emphasize cultural expressions that are meaningful to Rwandan adolescents. Among these cultural expressions, the language is a key element. The show will be broadcast in Kinyarwanda, the national language, but the Kinyarwanda that mirrors adolescents' culture and language. In a country, where Kinyarwanda is spoken in schools with French and English, young people in urban cities have created a new language, their own "dialect" mixing sometimes the three languages. Another important young cultural expression is clothes. For the message to be effective, adolescents have to recognize themselves in the

language used, but also in the way reporters and characters are dressed. Characters on the show should dress informally, but clean. It is also important to note that the show will emphasize African clothes, such as African shirts for young men, known as “Mandela’s shirts”, and dresses made in African material for girls. These clothes not only strengthen the African identity, but are most of the time, less expensive than western clothes sold in the market. Finally, in terms of cultural expression, the show will promote an environment without alcohol and smoking.

Program Planning based on the new P-Process framework

- **Formative and Participatory Research:** To gain insight on the factors that might influence behavior the most, programs should explore the perceptions and needs of target audiences before designing messages and activities. Thus, a questionnaire survey would be designed and focus group interviewing would be conducted with adolescents, in and out of schools, as well as parents and teachers. The surveys and focus group interviewing will help reveal to what extent Rwandan adolescents are informed about ARH and what they want and should learn more about. It would be also a relevant way to get a sense of the number of adolescents who have access to television in urban areas as well as where, and with whom they watch television. This first phase should be an important step to begin involving adolescents by asking them to name the show, what kind of reporters and characters they would like to see, and which

musicians should be featured in the show. The implementation phase will also help to create samples of television shows that would be used as pre-tests.

This first stage is also crucial in identifying the partners with whom the production team should work with, such as the Ministry of Health, the National Aids Commission, the National Youth Council, Anti-Aids clubs, associations of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWH), and others. Concerning the media partners, the formative research will help to assess the capacity of the Rwandan television to provide the program with equipment, technicians' skills, and costs. During the first stage, it would be important to identify other local media partners for the design of the interactive website, the billboards, and other entertainment-education tools.

- **Strategic Design, Development and Testing:** Based on data collected in the formative and participatory research, the following phases include the design of the program, one-month training, and the testing of sample programs. As indicated in the new P-Process, the program to be designed should be “SMART: Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Realistic, and Time-bound” (p.6). The program’s design should also include specific measures to assess its outcomes and impact. The design of the television program would be conducted concurrently with the one-month training of the future reporters, hosts, and discussion moderators of the television show since interesting inputs can be found during that workshop. The

training would also be in a timely manner in order to create a manual, which will serve as guidelines to refer to during the production of the show. Finally, the outcome of the one-month training program should be the production of two to three television show samples to be shown to adolescents at intervention sites, teachers, parents, and partners of the project.

- **Implementation and Monitoring:** Again, it is important to note that this media project involves participation and through the implementation of the program, participation of the hosts, as well as the audience, should be encouraged in order for the program to be a successful and learning experience. The participation of the partners will not be neglected and a list server to share information on the program and its evolution would be created. Finally, chosen persons among the partners would be selected to monitor the program to assess its outputs and the audience's reception. The data from the on-going monitoring would help to bring continuous adjustments to the television program and other related entertainment-education tools.
- **Evaluation and Replanning:** After six months of broadcasting, a survey and in depth interviewing would be conducted to assess to what extent adolescents watch the show and what they have learned from its programs. The survey and in depth interviewing would be conducted both

in intervention areas and in the control area where adolescents would have had limited access to the project's messages. This will permit comparisons between the responses of adolescents who were exposed and those who were not regularly exposed to the program's messages and all other entertainment education tools used to strengthen the show's impact. The evaluation would be an important step to get to know what worked and what did not work and how the project could be better conducted. More importantly, it will show if the intended messages have been received by the target audience or not.

Conclusion

The television program to be proposed should be the first locally made television show produced for, with, and by Rwandan young people to cover issues related to reproductive health in a lively and interactive way. Since television access is still limited in Rwanda, the television show should be strengthened by other entertainment-education tools such as radio PSAs, an interactive website, billboards, music concerts, and sport activities. The program would be proposed to the Ministry of Health as the main patron of the project, in collaboration with other local and international partners. The hope is that the program would bring creativity in the Rwandan media environment as well as fostering knowledge and practices regarding sexual and reproductive health among Rwandan adolescents.

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