

Good Practice

Promoting Behavior Change through the Healthy Choices Radio Programme



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Context

Uganda has one of the highest growth rates in the world. The total fertility rate is 6.2 children per woman according to the 2011 Uganda Demographic Health Survey. In addition the maternal mortality ratio is 310 deaths per 100,000 live births). The contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods is low at 26 per cent and the proportion of births delivered by a skilled provider is 59 percent (UDHS 2011). The 7th Government of Uganda/UNFPA Country programme (2010-2014) targets eight core districts, including Kanungu District. Kanungu, like the other eight districts, has high disparities between awareness and actual usage of family planning according to baseline survey findings presented by the Communication for Development Foundation Uganda (CDFU).

Objectives

The *Healthy Choices* Radio Programme is a 3-year project (2011–2013) funded by the UNFPA and implemented by CDFU. The Radio Programme focuses on three strategic areas of the 7th Government of Uganda/UNFPA Country Programme, namely Population and Development, Reproductive Health and Gender. The purpose of the project is to ensure community mobilization for individual and social change. The target audience consists of men and women in the reproductive age group as well as youth. The project is implemented in eight districts of Kanungu, Mubende, Katakwi, Moroto, Kotido, Kaabong, Oyam and Yumbe.

Strategy and Implementation

By the end of 2011, the programme was launched in each of the eight implementing districts. District specific baseline studies were disseminated to inform the respective *Healthy Choices* programmes on specific knowledge, attitude and behavior related to sexual reproductive health and rights and gender in their district. Based on the popularity of the radio stations, six radio stations were selected that cover all eight districts. In total 24 radio presenters and producers have been trained on the production of the *Healthy Choices* programme and recording of the drama shows and “community voices”. In addition CDFU together with district trainers organized trainings for the Village Health Team (VHT) members; community members who volunteer to promote health within their communities. By the end of April 2012, 4,850 VHT members had been trained on the *Healthy Choices* radio programme and 4,593 radios were distributed to the VHTs. The radios have four different power sources: solar, dynamo, batteries and electric plugin power. In addition to the radio set, the VHTs were also each given a guide to help them facilitate listening group discussions, a bag for the radio, a counter book to help monitoring the listening group (attendance and questions asked) and a user guide for the radio.



Healthy Choices listeners group in Kanungu District

Case study Kanungu

The radio presenter and producer of the Kanungu Broadcasting Service radio station (KBS) were provided with weekly scripts for the dramas that were translated in the local language (*Runyankole/Rukiga*). After recording the drama shows in the studio, the radio presenter would go to the remote communities to present the recorded drama and to collect feedback; referred to as *Community Voices*. On Wednesday evening, the show would go live on the air and the programme typically consisted of the following components: signature tune and introduction for the *Healthy Choices* programme followed by ten minutes for the pre-recorded drama and fifteen minutes for the pre-recorded *Community Voices*, followed by questions from the listeners and answers by the expert

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Brian Atwongyeire, KBS radio presenter

guest panel in the studio. Topics discussed included: benefits of family planning, long and short term methods of family planning, early pregnancy and men as advocates of family planning. Guests on the show included: midwives, health educators, medical doctors and senior nursing officers.

VHTs mobilized members in their community into listener groups. After each show, the listener groups and VHTs would hold discussions and Question & Answer sessions about the topic of that week’s show. In total 12 different radio programmes were broadcasted each Wednesday with repeat episodes on Sunday. CDFU provided continuous support to the radio station, including IT support. In addition, the District Health Educator (DHE) of Kanungu identified district monitors to report on the quality of the radio programme and whether it aired or not.

Key challenges

Many VHTs reported that the radios that were provided were very weak and already half of the radios that were provided in Kanungu District have broken down during the last six months. Furthermore, the solar and dynamo functions of the radios are weak. Since electricity is not available in most villages and the radio doesn’t have a charging function, the radios relied on expensive batteries to function. Luckily many community members have their own radio sets and the listening groups were able to continue. Some VHTs reported that they successfully increased the demand for family planning in their communities, but a number of people were disappointed because of stock outs of some of the contraceptives. In addition, some community members perceived the VHTs as paid health professionals, whereas the VHTs are volunteers and can only provide information not contraceptives to people; for that they have to refer people to the nearby health facilities. One of the challenges within the programme relates to the use of contraceptives, as explained by one of the VHT members: *“People complain about the side effects of using contraceptives. However, one of the problems is that people tend to get the same contraceptives as their neighbors, thinking the same will work for them which is not necessarily the case. They need to seek professional medical advice and not buy contraceptives from street shops.”* The KBS radio presenter was faced with transport challenges during the recordings in the remote and hard to reach areas of Kanungu. Finally, the timeliness of the provision of drama scripts by CDFU to the radio station could have been improved to allow more preparation time.

Progress and Results

According to CDFU, the *Healthy Choices* radio programme has been well received and has taught couples about family planning and how to communicate with each other. In addition, the VHTs have been able to better facilitate discussions on family planning with community members because of the *Healthy Choices* radio programme: *“The programme has made their work easier by helping to answer community members’ questions on family planning. Education by the experts as well as messages in the drama shows have motivated the listeners to use family planning. This reinforced the work of VHTs”*.

According to Brian Atwongyeire, KBS radio presenter, the response has been very positive and many people have called in to the station with questions related to family planning and reproductive health. *“The difference with regular radio shows is that there is much more interaction between the presenter, guests and the community in the Healthy Choices programme. When we would leave a village after recording the Community Voices people expressed their gratitude for acquiring new knowledge”*. Listeners were also referred to the CDFU free hotline when they didn't

have a chance to have their questions answered during the one hour radio show. A total of 147 calls were received from Kanungu between March and May 2012. Listeners of the *Healthy Choices* programme stated that they learned a lot from the radio programme, including: the benefits of family planning, demystification on contraceptives, hygiene, how to communicate as a couple about family planning and how husbands can support their wives when they are pregnant. According to VHTs in Kanungu district, the programme has also improved male involvement in family planning. As explained by a VHT member: *“The advantage of a radio show is that men don't have to come to the health centre for information, but they can just listen to the radio from their homes together with their wives”*. After the radio show, many couples would go and seek family planning services and decide jointly on which method to use.

“I learned from the Healthy Choices radio programme that when you produce few children the family progresses and you can provide education for all children”

Healthy Choices male listener in Kanungu

“Since the radio programme and discussions in the listeners group women don't hide it anymore when they go for family planning services, because couples listen and discuss this matter together”

VHT member of Kanungu District

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The Kanungu *Healthy Choices* radio programme experience is a good example of how an educational radio programme reinforced by the work of VHTs can be a catalyst to promote family planning. The radio programme has improved the knowledge, attitudes and practices in favour of family planning and also created dialogue about the issue within the community. One of the lessons learned is the importance of political will and commitment to family planning and the need to ensure there are no stock outs. In addition, religious and political leaders are important stakeholders who need to be sensitised on family planning and its benefits. According to CDFU, these leaders are very influential within the communities and some religious leaders at present oppose the use of family planning. Furthermore, men are seen as the key in family planning usage and uptake. As such, male involvement in the community listeners groups and VHTs is essential. For the next round of radio shows, CDFU plans to also involve satisfied users in the show to help demystify some of the myths surrounding family planning methods. Finally, the creation of district monitors for the radio programme has been important, as described by the KBS

radio presenter: *“If there is no leadership the programme won’t continue. The reason for the programme being a success is because there are people who monitor the performance of the radio to ensure that everything is going well”.*

Recommendations and Next Steps

Listener groups, VHTs and the radio station all expressed the need for continuity of the programme. 12 shows have aired on a weekly basis, after which the programme stopped abruptly according to some of the listeners *“Before there were shows every week, now the last one was one month ago. It has been demotivating somewhat, since we were used to meeting every Wednesday and now when we meet there is no Healthy Choices programme on the radio”.* CDFU is in the process of creating new drama scripts and the show is planned to resume before the end of June 2012. For the future, the programmes will be continuous. VHTs in Kanungu have suggested organizing exchange visits with the other districts that implement the *Healthy Choices* programme. Furthermore they’d like to have t-shirts or uniforms that clearly identify them as voluntary village health team members. Listeners of the programme have proposed the following topics to be covered in future radio episodes: HIV prevention (the prevalence in Kanungu is high at 8.1%), sex education for adults, safe water, sanitation and health and the environment. In addition all respondents expressed the need for more airtime of the radio show. The *Healthy Choices* programme is only one hour and there is currently insufficient time to answer all questions from listeners and to go deeper into the topic. Finally VHTs suggested developing posters and using mobile video vans to further promote family planning in Kanungu district.



Village Health Team (VHT) members in Kanungu District

Sources and Contact Persons

Primary sources

- Good practice documented by CDFU April 2012
- Focus Group Discussion with 14 *Healthy Choices* listeners in Kanungu June 6th 2012
- Focus Group Discussion with 13 VHTs in Kanungu on June 6th 2012
- Interview with Brian Atwongyeire, KBS Radio presenter, Kanungu June 7th 2012

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