

Thanks for the contributions made to this forum by participants today. One person raised the topic of the expected relative impacts of radio programs on women and men. This person wondered why the PMC program in Ethiopia had a greater impact on men than women when it came to testing for one's HIV status, particularly when, as the participant put it, women are stereotypically thought to be more 'emotional' and therefore more influenced by drama. My answer is that men, on average, probably make behavioural decisions in the area of sexual and reproductive behaviour on the basis of emotion to the same degree as women. Second, the storyline of the program dealt with a male character who became HIV positive. To the extent that male listeners were identifying with him, the motivation to determine their own HIV status may have been very strong. Third, we know that men listen to radio more frequently than women in Ethiopia, often because men own or control the family radio set. Our evaluation survey data showed that we had a slightly larger male audience than female, with 47 percent of men listening on a regular basis vs. 45 percent of women. The program was broadcast during a prime evening listening time and was designed to appeal to a broad range of ages and to both genders through the various characters.

Another participant talked about the importance of the entertainment element in entertainment-education. Indeed, we believe that, to be successful in attracting and holding an audience, the entertainment element should be greater than the educational content. We put a lot of emphasis in our writings and training workshops on the process of incorporating education and behavioural motivation into the programs, but, without a very strong element of drama and suspense, we would fail at attracting an audience. Have the perfect message go out to an audience of zero is a far greater failure than having some information conveyed to a huge audience.

A third participant raised the ethical repercussions of behaviour change programs. I would like to focus today's discussion on responding to that question. One of the ethical issues related to social change communications is deciding who determines the content of the message. In his early work, Miguel Sabido asked the question, "What gives me the right to determine what is positive and what is negative, just because I am a producer of television shows?" His answer was to seek official guidance as to the policies of the country, so that he was promoting agreed-upon values, rather than just his own point of view. How should this principle translate into action in social change communications projects around the world?

The approach PMC uses is to begin in any country by looking at the constitution, laws and policy statements of the country with regard to the issues to be addressed in the program. These policies, of course, include the United Nations agreements to which the country is a signatory, such as the ICPD Programme of Action, the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference Plan of Action, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Taken together, these agreements offer a code of human conduct that is accepted by most governments of the world. As part of the formative research in any country, we develop a policy framework, listing all of the relevant policies regarding the issues to be addressed. We then ask an

advisory committee representative of stakeholder agencies to review the policy framework to ensure that it is accurate and complete.

Based on the policy framework, we then develop value statements with regard to each issue to be addressed, so that all values promoted in the program are based on the official policies and not on the views that happen to be held by the producer or writers of the program. Characters are then created for the serial drama that either hold these values or that disagree with these values – just as one finds in any society. These positive and negative characters then battle it out over the course of many episodes, creating a lot of conflict – and creating interest in the program by audience members. We develop a third type of character that is neither positive nor negative. Instead they are representative of the current social norm in that society. Over time, influenced by the positive or negative characters, these ambivalent characters begin to evolve in their thinking and behavior, and they realize the benefits of their new positive behaviors – or the negative consequences of their negative behavior. The audience thus learns the realistic consequences of these behaviors and how one can overcome the obstacles to change, while, at the same time, being entertained by the drama.

The ICPD Programme of Action states, “Decisions must be made freely, responsibly and in an informed manner... Such communication should be free from coercion.” The strategy of showing a range of behaviors and their consequences, rather than telling people what to do, allows the audience to choose for themselves how to apply what they learn from the program in their own lives. This strategy helps such programs avoid being manipulative.

The ICPD Programme of Action also states, “The participation of the intended audiences in the design, implementation and monitoring of information, education and communication activities should be ensured so as to enhance the relevance and impact of those activities.” This is accomplished in three ways. The formative research seeks potential audience members’ input into defining the issues of concern to them, so that the program can address those issues. Second, monitoring research carried on while a program is on the air seeks feedback from the audience regarding the program, so that the creative team can make adjustments as needed. Third, the creative team is composed of people from that society, including young writers and youth advisors, which helps to ensure that the program is relevant to the culture and age group of the intended audience.

1. In your opinion, who should determine what behaviors should be considered positive and what behaviors should be considered negative?
2. The mass media are clearly powerful. Who should determine how this power should be used with regard to setting sexual and reproductive health norms?