



Echoes of Change

HOW A RADIO DRAMA IN NORTHERN UGANDA
IS ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATORY NORMS

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Introduction

In the first half of 2024, CARE Uganda launched a social behavior change campaign (SBCC) targeting discriminatory gender norms that limit women’s and girls’ access to and use of technology, particularly smartphones. Media-based messaging is a widely-adopted approach for shaping community behaviors and attitudes and promoting public and financial health practices in front of a broad audience. CARE Uganda used this strategy to encourage communities to reflect on their beliefs regarding technology, especially those that restrict who can use and benefit from mobile technology.

This campaign builds on decades of media-based messaging strategies addressing public health concerns, such as HIV/AIDS practices,¹ vaccine uptake,² and intimate partner violence.^{3,4} More recently, “edutainment”—a blend of entertainment and education—has been used to reach general audiences on topics such as financial health⁵ and children’s emotional growth.⁶ By utilizing media platforms such as radio dramas, telenovelas, billboards, and community dramas, social behavior change campaigns have successfully altered attitudes and behaviors in communities worldwide.

¹ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10461-016-1402-1>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7546625/>

³ Cari Jo Clark et al. 2017. “Evaluating a multicomponent social behavior change communication strategy to reduce intimate partner violence among married couples: study protocol for a cluster randomized trial in Nepal.” *BMC Public Health Journal*.

⁴ <https://www.alignplatform.org/case-studies-series-norms-and-broadcast-media>

⁵ <https://www.womensworldbanking.org/insights/popular-tv-show-shifted-social-norms-around-womens-banking-habits-kenya/>

⁶ <https://www.findevgateway.org/blog/2017/08/sesame-street-muppets-take-financial-empowerment>

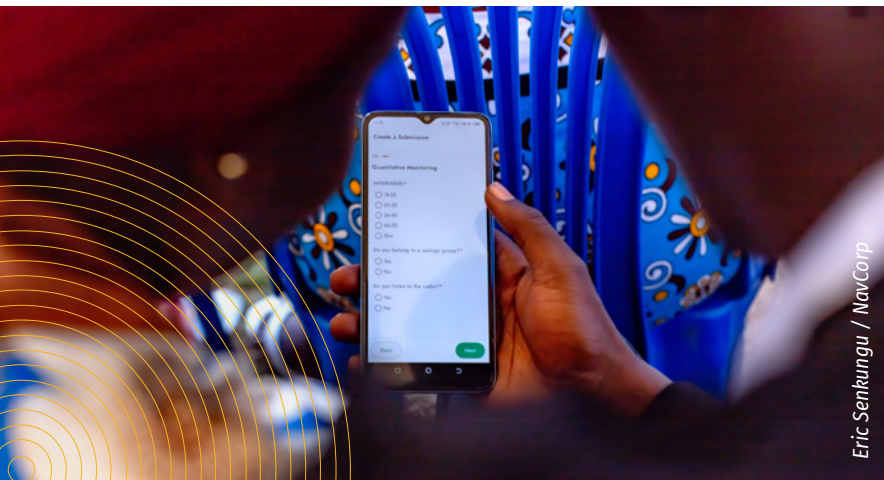
CARE's Approach

CARE began introducing digital skills and products to VSLA groups in 2021, starting with skills training and access to smartphone-enabled tools. Although enthusiasm for learning new digital skills has been consistently high amongst VSLA members, this has been curbed by persistent attitudes and beliefs limiting women's use of mobile technology.

A CARE study in northern Ugandan cities of Arua, Terego, and Gulu identified several of these beliefs, notably men's suspicions that women's use of social media, like Facebook, would lead to infidelity or interactions with strange men. Other concerns included women getting addicted to or becoming distracted by smartphones, which could cause them to neglect their care roles, as well as specific concerns around women burning dinner because they were on their phones.

Challenging these specific beliefs means challenging existing social and gender norms, which can lead to potentially dangerous consequences.

When surveyed, over 60 percent of respondents on a CARE study reported hearing of gender-based violence against women due to phone usage.



Eric Senkungu / NavCorp

The goal of the SBCC was to offer an alternative narrative to the existing, restrictive one that saw technology as a threat to household power dynamics. Instead, CARE sought to encourage couples and households to co-create their own rules and norms around the possibilities of technology.

More recent data suggest that discriminatory norms begin at a young age, as young girls are less likely to have access to technology than boys. Unmarried girls report instances of punishment for unsupervised technology usage.

CARE partners aimed to train groups on women's economic activities and social and gender norms, particularly around the importance of shared household decision-making and gender-based violence. Individual and group training on social and gender norms is undeniably important, but it is also typically time intensive, and change is slow—one person or household at a time. Given that beliefs and attitudes toward women's and girls' access to and usage of technology are held—and enforced—at a community level, CARE sought to spread its message more broadly.

CARE designed a media-based intervention to tackle these norms at the community level. The messaging leveraged lessons learned and personas developed from these communities to inform the messaging across platforms.



Josh Estey / CARE

Three-Pronged Approach:

1 MASS MEDIA

The primary vehicle of the campaign is a **12-part radio drama** called **“The Echoes of Change,”** which tells the story of a village girl who is introduced to a smartphone through her VSLA. In short, 3-5 minute episodes aired weekly over a 12-week period, the story follows her as she navigates learning a new technology while pushing her community to rethink their beliefs about what is appropriate for women. Characters included community members who celebrated the new technology (digital champions) and those who were skeptical or outright against technology in women’s hands (gatekeepers). The drama, translated into local languages and recorded by local DJs, received high community engagement. One listener remarked that the story felt like it was speaking directly to them. The radio drama first aired in April 2024 and will re-air in summer 2024.

2 COMMUNITY-BASED EVENTS

To ensure broad engagement with the radio drama message, CARE’s Ugandan-based media partner, NavCorp, and other local partners hosted community-based events. In all three locations, CARE utilized pre-existing market day and health day events that ensured community members would already be present. A coalition of community leaders, local government officials, police representatives, and other stakeholders were engaged to support the events and the message. Market day events in all three locations culminated in a concert headlined by popular Ugandan artist, Navio and featuring other local artists. Local radio station DJs hosted half-day events, championing the message of gender equity in access to technology. Community turnout was strong, particularly among young men who were drawn to the free concert headlined by a notable Ugandan star.

3 VSLA ENGAGEMENT

To ensure the message reached VSLA members who were not tuning in via radio and women who did not have access to radio, **CARE partners and community-based trainers (CBTs) played the episodes during VSLA meetings** and led discussions around the topic. Research shows that small group engagement creates space for members to discuss and challenge their beliefs.⁷ The episodes were so popular that CARE brought speakers into villages to replay them. Group members formed WhatsApp groups for discussion, and listeners called the radio station to give feedback. A male listener thanked the station for enlightening him, a sentiment echoed by others to CBTs. Even husbands joined VSLA meetings to hear what all the fuss was about.

⁷ <https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/edutainment-shift-gender-norms-bbc-media-action>




Clinton Mutabazi / NavCorp

“Enable” by Navio

The theme song for this campaign was written by Ugandan artist Navio and featured local artists from the Arua and Gulu communities. The song lyrics encouraged community members to support each other:


**“When I shine, my wife shines,
when she shines, my life shines”**



ECHOES OF CHANGE
An Edu-Tainment drama

Every Tuesday
1:30pm

Sponsored by:





Community turnout was strong, particularly among young men who were drawn to the free concert headlined by a notable Ugandan star.



Insights from the Campaign

Though the SBCC will continue reaching communities through Fall 2024, CARE has already identified important insights from this campaign.

- **Community engagement** with the SBCC has been high due to engaging with existing crowds at the market day and health day events, fielding questions and feedback from listeners to the radio drama who are calling into the station, and opening up lines of direct feedback from VSLA members to CBTs and CARE partners.
- **Women are expressing changing attitudes** around their own use of technology. Previously, some women were told that smartphones were only for men, and they weren't aware that they could use them for staying in contact with family members and for business purposes. Even if they observed other women using smartphones in the community, they assumed technology was more important for men. However, after being introduced

to other women who use WhatsApp to sell their crafts, these women plan on working hard to save for a phone. Another woman, who had bought a phone but never used it, brought it to a group meeting to learn how to turn it on. CBTs and more tech-savvy VSLA members have been acting as digital champions, working one-on-one to teach digital skills.

- **Men's attitudes show signs of shifting** as well. CARE partners report that men are sharing that they see the practical uses of phones for women, such as learning through YouTube or using WhatsApp for their businesses. In fact, women are using the radio drama to start conversations with their husbands about smartphone use.
- **Young men**, who are not typically reached at the VSLA level but are a key demographic for the SBCC, **are hearing the message** at concerts. This is especially important because we know that newlywed women are the least likely to have access to technology.



Eric Senkungu / NavCorp

Local partners are invigorated by the campaign and are considering ways to continue or build on the SBCC, either with additional story-telling campaigns or new ways of teaching groups about smartphones. Additionally, communities outside the currently-served areas are calling into the radio station, prompting plans on how to engage these new audiences.



Flemming Pless / CARE