

Zambia: Media content and outreach that supports young people with decisions on sexual and reproductive health

BBC Media Action Zambia conducted research to understand the influence of multi-media content and outreach activities for the Tikambe project. The work looked to improve young people's knowledge and attitudes so that they could make better sexual and reproductive health (SRH) decisions. The survey showed that young people were more likely to use SRH services after listening to or watching the media content.

Context

Since 2014 BBC Media Action, in partnership with Restless Development, has been using mass media and interpersonal communication to reduce the vulnerability of young people to SRH risks in Zambia, through the Tikambe (Let's Talk!) project. This has been funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Following completion of the first and second phases of the project from 2014 – 2019, this third phase aims to support young people to make better informed decisions, voice their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and improve their uptake of SRH services.

The project

In this phase of the project radio, TV and social media content were produced to support the uptake of healthier SRH behaviours among young people across Central, Copperbelt, Lusaka and Northern provinces in Zambia. BBC

Media Action mentors worked with local media partners to make programming that provided accurate, practical and relevant information about SRH for its audiences and created space for family and community discussion. The programmes covered safe sex, contraceptive use, awareness and use of services, decision-making in relationships, among others. The ultimate goal was that young audiences would be better able to make confident sexual and reproductive decisions and actions.

Research methodology

In September/October 2023, BBC Media Action undertook a regionally representative endline survey of 1,752 young people aged between 14 and 24 in both rural and urban areas of Central, Copperbelt, Lusaka and Northern provinces in Zambia. The research aimed to understand levels of knowledge, behaviours and social norms around SRH amongst those who had been regularly exposed to media output compared to those who hadn't.

Regression analysis was used to establish the association between listenership and levels of knowledge of key SRH issues as well as attitude towards, and uptake and discussion of positive SRH behaviours. This enabled us to understand this relationship while controlling for social and demographic factors that might have influenced respondents such as gender, age, education, relationship status and province. The regression created separate models for exposure to media content only, and exposure to the combination of media and interpersonal communication (via Restless Development) - to explore the impact of multiple interventions on key health outcomes.

Key findings

Reach and engagement

35% of young people across the focal provinces were reached by Tikambe media (radio/TV/Facebook) within the last 12 months. 20% of young people who listened or watched Tikambe media programmes did so regularly while 27% were regularly exposed to the combination of media and interpersonal communication within the last 12 months. The **most recalled learnings** from Tikambe are around sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and safe sex – especially **condom use**. 66% of young audiences reached by Tikambe media have discussed the content with others; the most discussed items reported were learnings from the programmes, as above. 92% agreed that they will recommend the programme to others.

Knowledge

Over half (54%) of Tikambe media audiences affirmed that they learnt about the adoption of safe SRH behaviours and rights from the programme. Audiences regularly exposed to Tikambe (media and interpersonal communication) were more likely to demonstrate higher knowledge of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), how STIs can be avoided as well as the various contraceptive methods. However, this was not observed for those exposed to Tikambe media alone.

Take up of services

Regular audiences of Tikambe media and those exposed to the combination of Tikambe media and interpersonal communication were also more likely to be aware of, and use, different kinds of health clinic, including youth friendly health centres created by the Zambia government to encourage use by young people for their SRH needs or government clinics. Regression analysis showed that listening to Tikambe was **significantly associated** with uptake of SRH services and the confidence to take positive SRH actions.

Confidence to exhibit healthier behaviours

Regular audiences of Tikambe media (78%) and those exposed to the combination of Tikambe

media and interpersonal communication (69%) were more likely to feel very confident to go to a health centre to discuss contraception methods than those unexposed to either (60%) and to get tested for STIs (Tikambe media only: 84%, exposure to Tikambe media and interpersonal communication (88%) compared to those unexposed to either, (77%). After using regression analysis to control for key influencers, the results remained positive.

Those exposed to the combination of Tikambe media and interpersonal communication (54%) were significantly more likely to **feel ‘very comfortable’** discussing SRH issues with others than those unexposed (43%). This finding was also supported by the regression.

Key implications

At the start of the Tikambe project in 2014, research with young people in Zambia revealed low levels of confidence to discuss their SRH with those around them, including with health workers – or to seek SRH services and practice safer sexual behaviours - reinforcing the need for a media programme like Tikambe. The combination of media and outreach work delivered through the Tikambe project, with Restless Development, has been effective at improving knowledge among young people around topics on their SRH, improving attitudes, confidence, discussion and practices towards realising their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Those exposed to Tikambe media content and outreach activities demonstrated better levels of uptake across the key indicators of interest. The strongest results were observed among those exposed to both interventions i.e. regular exposure to Tikambe media and interpersonal communication - further reiterating the importance of multiple interventions in achieving desired outcomes.

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