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**Title: Addressing sexual and reproductive health related taboos in radio mass
Media communications: experience in Rwanda**

Issues: How to address culturally sensitive taboos in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) communications is one of the major challenges facing public health education programmes throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Such SRH taboos often include sexuality, condom use, and family planning. In Africa socio-cultural taboos such as these are often not adequately addressed resulting in additional barriers to measuring positive changes in SRH knowledge, attitude, beliefs and reported practice.

Description: Since 1998, Health Unlimited's Well Women Media Project has provided locally-produced SRH education in Rwanda using radio as a mass medium. This paper documents the approach taken through the radio soap opera *Urunana* ("hand-in-hand" in Kinyarwanda) to encourage discussions on SRH-related taboos in a society where talking openly about sex has been strongly discouraged. *Urunana* has been broadcast weekly on the BBC Great Lakes Service since 1999 and covers the entire Kinyarwanda-Kirundi speaking area of Africa Great Lakes region. Aimed at improving the SRH status of rural women of reproductive age and youth, this serial drama incorporates sexual and reproductive health messages through portrayal of real-life situations by local actors. The strength of this popular radio soap opera resides in the way it has openly addressed all topics related to sexual and reproductive health, hence encouraging discussions between peers and between generations: couples, friends, parents and their children. The Project uses an "edutainment" strategy where radio stories are written with a blend of humour and SRH education, choosing appropriate language in Kinyarwanda to refer to these culturally sensitive issues, which include youth sexuality, condom use and family planning. Three year (2003-5) Knowledge, Attitude and Practice survey results analysed in August 2005 indicated that 86.6 % of the listeners do not report being offended by the topics and the language used in *Urunana*, with only 6.2 % report being "offended" and 7.2% are "sometimes offended". These findings differ from listeners' complaints reported in 2000 expressing some discomfort over the SRH messages broadcast in *Urunana*, even though the public health topics are largely similar.

Lessons learned: Edutainment has been shown in Rwanda to be an important tool to address taboos surrounding SRH education. The combination of humour and education can be an effective communication strategy to address culturally sensitive issues considered as taboos in rural Sub-Saharan Africa.

Recommendation: Edutainment can be used as an effective communication strategy for radio broadcasts to audiences in rural Sub-Saharan Africa to address previously taboo, culturally sensitive SRH issues.