

## Entertainment, Information, and Discussion:

Experimenting with media techniques for civic education and engagement in Southern Sudan

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*Note: I will launch this study in May 2009, thus I may be able to incorporate your feedback into the actual study. I am especially interested in feedback about my selection of survey items and my ideas for behavioral measurement, but all comments are welcome. Please do not circulate this memo or the survey instrument without checking with me first.*

Background to study

Understanding media impact is part of the broader project to understand governance and politics. Governments, organizations, and citizens use the mass media in attempts to influence a variety of political acts, including vote choice, protest, violence, and deliberation.

Field experiments have begun to uncover causal relationships between mass media programs and citizen perceptions and behaviors. Most field experimental designs ask *whether* the program caused an observed effect, and have been unable say which *part* of the media programming caused the change. Most media programs are compound—they include entertainment and information, and they provoke on-air or informal audience discussion.

This research study takes a first step toward asking which *types* of media programming—specifically, entertainment, information, and discussion—influence citizen perceptions and behaviors. For example, is entertainment media best suited for shifting social norms? Is informational news programming best equipped to promote learning? Can discussion programming promote civic engagement, or more “ideal” deliberation? What combinations of these media formats are particularly effective for reaching citizens’ “hearts and minds?”<sup>1</sup>

Measuring the causal effects of different types of media is critical to our basic understanding of media influence. In addition to asking whether media influences citizens, an experiment comparing different media formats can further our understanding of *how* media influence citizens. Moreover, this kind of study addresses a large policy gap, particularly in contexts where government is weakened or in transition. Can the media encourage or reinforce positive political behavior? In the absence of accumulated social scientific evidence, media funding and policy in these contexts is often guided by normative ideas. For example, organizations and international donors often fund media discussion shows based on the belief that discussion shows promote democratic deliberation and democratic culture—despite unanswered questions about whether provoking discussion is beneficial in many of the contexts where these programs are broadcast (e.g., post-conflict, highly politicized, and divided communities).

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<sup>1</sup> Besides comparing different types of media programming, we could compare types of media (i.e., radio, television, internet, and social networking technologies). This research focuses on the former rather than the latter.

## Research question

This experiment asks the question: *Which type of media programming or combination of programming is most effective for influencing citizens' knowledge, perceived norms, and behaviors?* The study tests this question using a radio program aimed at promoting civic education and engagement in Southern Sudan.

The radio program is an internationally funded (and locally produced) program aimed at civic education and civic engagement. It is broadcast by a private station, Sudan Radio Service, in all ten states of Southern Sudan. Titled *Let's Talk*, the program presents its topics (e.g., corruption, citizenship, democracy, voting, and rights) using the three media formats of interest—entertainment, information, and discussion. The experiment is designed to compare the impact of these three media formats on Southern Sudanese listeners' perceptions and behaviors regarding *Let's Talk's* topics.

The radio program opens with a soap opera segment, in which a fictional Southern Sudanese family confronts the challenges of life in their transitional society (e.g., whether to give or accept a bribe, how to understand new concepts like rights and democracy). A news segment follows, in which the ideas illustrated in the soap opera are presented formally by an announcer and a few Sudanese experts.<sup>2</sup> A formal discussion component is supplied through a program run by the National Democratic Institute (NDI),<sup>3</sup> the organization funding the radio show. The program sends Southern Sudanese discussion moderators into all ten states to gather small groups of citizens to listen and discuss the radio program.

The program is one of the best-funded media programs in Southern Sudan. It is in its second year of broadcast, and as of yet no numbers are available as to its listenership.<sup>4</sup> Sudan Radio Service scriptwriters and the National Democratic Institute jointly produce the content.

The rationale for civic education in Southern Sudan is straightforward. Southern Sudan has been at war with the northern Khartoum-based Government of Sudan almost continuously since Sudan's independence in 1956, until the 2005 North-South peace agreement. The new transitional government of Southern Sudan is democratic, but most citizens have never lived under a non-military regime or outside of a refugee camp. International donors are funding radio stations and programs with the goal of spreading information and new social and political norms regarding democracy, citizens' rights, civic participation, and elections.<sup>5</sup> Much of this activity is

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<sup>2</sup> The information presented in the soap opera and the news segment is identical, with some exceptions. The parallels as well as the dissimilarities present opportunities for comparing the influence of either media format.

<sup>3</sup> An American non-governmental organization, which has one of the longest field presences in Southern Sudan of any organization working in community and political development.

<sup>4</sup> The Sudan Radio Service appears to be a popular radio station (Mytton, *ibid.*), but given the program is new, it is unlikely to be so well known that I will have difficulty finding study participants who will never have heard of the show (a desirable population because the participants should not have been influenced already, or have preconceptions about the radio show).

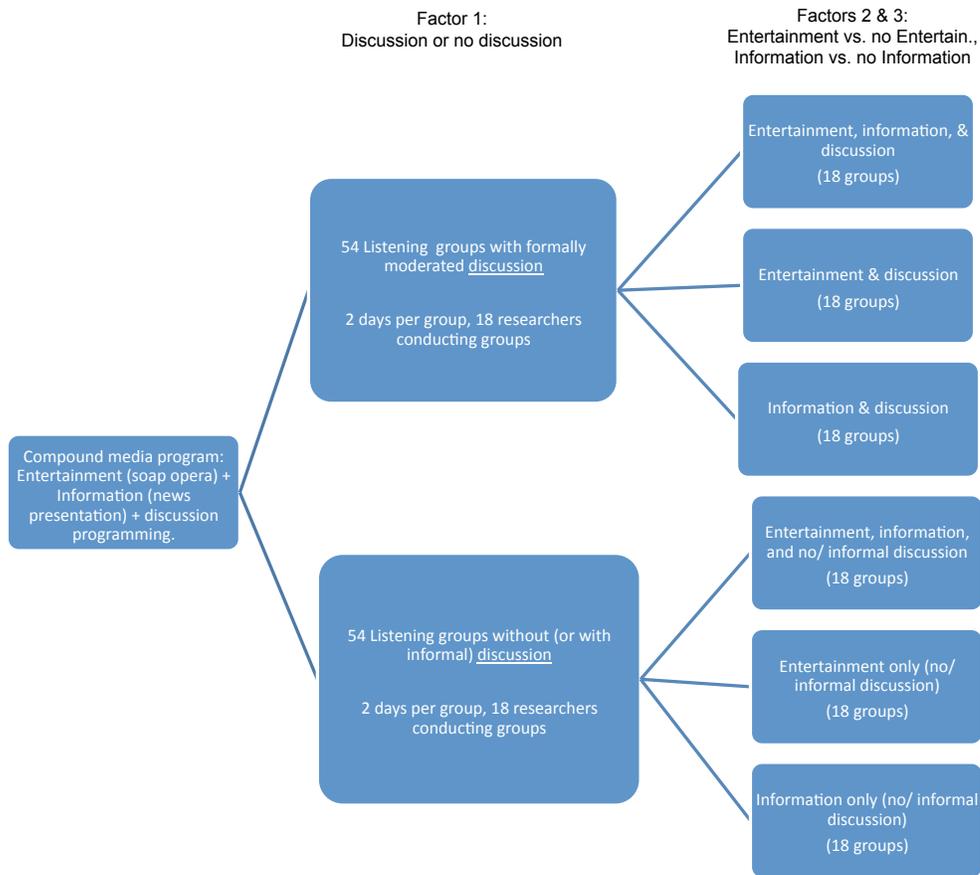
<sup>5</sup> In Southern Sudan, radio is the primary form of mass media: shortwave, AM, and FM. The two most popular frequencies along with state radio are the United Nations and Hirondelle—sponsored *Radio Miraya*, and the United

spurred by Southern Sudan’s first voter registration scheduled for July 2009, elections for national leaders in February 2010, and an election on unity or secession for the South in 2011.

**Experimental logic and design**

This study breaks down the Let’s Talk program into its three constituent parts—the entertainment soap opera segment, the informational news segment, and the discussion following the radio program—the moderated discussion program run by NDI and its alternative, informal audience interaction that may or may not include discussion about the program. After exposing participants to different combinations of these three program “factors,” we will compare listeners’ knowledge, perceived norms, attitudes, and behavior regarding *Let’s Talk’s* topics.

**Figure 1. Full factorial model of the experimental design**



This study takes place in a field setting: together with a group of people in their neighborhood, participants will listen to the show on a portable radio/CD player (neighborhood

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States Agency for International Development’s *Sudan Radio Service* (Mytton, G. October 2007. *Media Access and Use in Southern Sudan*. Report filed for USAID.)

listening is common in Southern Sudan, where radios are scarce). However, the study could be characterized as a laboratory experiment, due to the artificial timeline of the experiment: we will present multiple episodes and discussion sessions to these radio listening groups over the course of two days. Specifically, researchers will use random selection to assemble 108 radio listening groups in fifteen different neighborhoods in Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan. (There will be four participants per group for 540 participants total). Researchers will conduct a short pretest with each individual when they agree to participate. Each group will be randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions (see Figure 1). On the first day of the study, groups will listen to a CD recording of four episodes of *Let's Talk* (edited according to the groups' experimental assignment on Factors 2 and 3, i.e. entertainment and information). The groups will have a formally moderated discussion or not, according to their assignment on Factor 1 (formal discussion vs. informal interaction). On the second day, groups will listen to another two episodes of *Let's Talk* and then take a post-test questionnaire. This two-day procedure will be repeated six times by 18 pairs of researchers until 108 groups have been conducted.

## Hypotheses

Influence of entertainment: Based on previous work, my hypothesis is that the entertainment segment is critical to listeners' interest in the program and their perceptions of social norms (regarding typical and desirable behaviors) portrayed by the characters in the fictional drama (entertainment) program. Thus,

*H<sub>1</sub>: The entertainment segment will boost interest in the program and affect perceptions of social norms (i.e. perceptions that other Southern Sudanese believe in the program's messages or think they are desirable).*

*H<sub>2</sub>: The entertainment segment will not boost learning about Let's Talk topics*

Influence of information: There is relatively little data behind the conventional belief that informational or news media promotes learning, but I adopt this hypothesis for the purpose of testing it. Moreover, the context of this study might increase the probability that listeners will learn from the informational segment, because of low levels of preexisting knowledge about the program's topics. In addition, because the informational segment presents "experts" and "leaders" (e.g., the head of Southern Sudanese court system) to promote the new Southern Sudanese laws and constitution, the information media format may also increase the perceived legitimacy of the Southern Sudanese laws and constitution.

*H<sub>3</sub>: The informational segment may increase knowledge about topics presented in the episodes, and also the perceived legitimacy of the Southern Sudanese constitution and laws.*

Influence of discussion: My own previous research suggests that the discussion segment could amplify the perception that the topics in the radio program are endorsed by other Southern Sudanese (due to the experience of face to face discussion with other citizens). However, un-moderated discussion may also polarize opinion and create confusions. Thus, more discussion of any kind is not necessarily better:

*H<sub>4</sub>: The moderated discussions (led by NDI staff) should affect social norms (i.e. perceptions other Southern Sudanese believe in the program's messages or think they are desirable)*

*H<sub>4a</sub>: The moderated discussion may also boost knowledge (because facts from the information segment will be repeated in discussion, and the discussion moderator will be able to correct false statements.)*

*H<sub>5</sub>: The un-moderated free interaction among listeners may affect perceptions of social norms, but will not promote learning of the information in the program.*

Finally, combining these different factors may result in greater and lesser influence (I won't go into those hypotheses here).

### **Example study procedure for one listening group (a two-day cycle):**

#### Day 1

1. One team of two researchers is assigned to a neighborhood in Juba. *Note: there are no good census data yet on Juba's neighborhoods, so we've conducted small surveys in the various neighborhoods in order to take a best guess when stratifying random assignment across different neighborhoods that represent different economic strata and ethnic composition.*
2. Researchers randomly select four people from the designated neighborhood, by walking a preselected route and using a random number list to identify the household and person in household. *Note: to capture working people who are only home on weekends and men who are less likely to be at home, we will work on weekends and oversample some neighborhoods.*
3. Researchers screen out potential participants who listen regularly to *Let's Talk*, who have obligations on that day and/or the following day, and who otherwise do not want to participate.
4. Researchers conduct informed consent and a pretest with each participant.
5. Researchers find a place nearby to conduct the listening group (family compound, shaded private area).
6. Researchers explain to participants that NDI is the organization funding this study, because they want to learn more about Southern Sudanese opinions regarding media programming on Sudan Radio Service.
7. Researchers open the sealed envelope they were given at the start of the day, containing their group's assignment to one of the six experimental conditions, with appropriately-edited *Let's Talk* CD's.
8. Participants listen to the first four episodes of *Let's Talk*, with lunch break. *We give money to a trusted third party (family member of one participant) to buy street food and bring it back for the group.)*
9. IF this group has been assigned to formal discussion, one researcher moderates a 20-minute discussion after each episode (this researcher is a staff member for NDI who regularly moderates these discussions outside of the study).
  - a. The accompanying researcher observes, filling out a standardized form tracking comments, questions, and reactions of each participant during the discussion.
10. IF this group has been assigned to NO formal discussion, the participants are given a 20-minute break after each episode. Group members may choose to discuss among themselves about the program or about anything else they choose. They are required, however, to stay on site.

- a. The accompanying researcher observes, filling out a standardized form tracking comments, questions, and reactions of each participant during the 25-minute break.
11. Participants and researchers break for the day with the understanding they will return the following morning. *Note: payment is withheld until the end of the study, which should minimize attrition.*

### Day 2

1. Team of two researchers and 4 participants reconvene
2. Participants listen to final 2 episodes of Let's Talk, following same procedure as day before.
3. Participants remain to be interviewed individually by the two researchers.
  - a. Interview includes behavioral measure and information collection for longitudinal follow up.
4. Participants paid by researchers at completion.

### Long-term follow up:

Depending on behavioral measure chosen, the timing could be one month or three months after the initial study. Will hopefully include voter registration, which is two months later.

### **Details of experimental manipulation**

The six episodes (and main topics) of Let's Talk for the study:

1. Corruption	<i>Teaches "what is corruption," why it is undesirable and how citizens can report it.</i>
2. Citizenship	<i>Emphasizes citizen participation through civic groups; youth involvement</i>
3. Principles of democracy	<i>What is democracy, why it emphasizes seeking all peoples' opinions, and why it's desirable</i>
4. Free and fair elections	<i>What is a free and fair election, why Sudanese need and want one, who is eligible to vote</i>
5. Women as voters and candidates	<i>Women's right to vote, to a secret ballot, and examples of female political leaders</i>
6. Women's rights	<i>Women's rights more generally, including education, having a say in marriage</i>

### Formal discussion guidelines

To lead a discussion among the participants, researchers will follow NDI's standard discussion moderation guidelines. These guidelines (reprinted in Appendix) show that the moderators do not contribute new information (but will correct false information), and attempt to invite and to balance group members' contributions to the discussion and to keep the discussion on task.

### Expected outcomes

I am measuring several types of outcomes, some of which are measured in the pre- and post-test, and others measured only in the post-test. The survey instrument is attached in the Appendix, as well as the brainstorming sheet for behavioral measures. I list the general topics below:

- Socio-economic questions (pre-test), Social network / involvement (pre-test; asks whether participants are already involved with their communities, in order to test whether this conditions their reactions to the civic engagement messages.)
- Media discussion habits, political interest: (pre-test and post-test) Asks about trust in and use of media, motivations for learning about politics and hearing others' opinions.
- Knowledge about themes in Let's Talk. (Some in pre-test, most in post-test). I wrote these items myself, based on the "lessons" communicated in Let's Talk episodes. Most of the information is featured in both the entertainment and information segments, but a few items are only broadcast in one or the other, which means I will have a "pure" control group that has not been exposed to the message when I compare experimental groups. I'm also thinking of using a "definition of democracy" question from the AfroBarometer.
- Perceived social norms from Let's Talk. (Some in pre-test, most in post-test). Social norms, i.e., what listeners believe that other Southern Sudanese *do*, or *should* do. In other words, perceptions of what is typical and desirable. As with "knowledge" items, I derived these items from the portrayal of typical or desirable behavior in the entertainment and information segments (e.g., "we *should* report corruption!" stated by a character).
- Legitimacy of constitution, laws in Southern Sudan: (Some in pre-test, most in post-test). Does learning about the constitution and laws of Southern Sudan affect perceptions of the legitimacy of these things? These are standard legitimacy items from other surveys.
- Behavior: (post-test only). Ideas for measuring behavior within and after the interview are below. Feedback is welcome.
- How listeners experience the program (post-test only). Here I am interested in process variables—listeners' identification with characters, their experience with discussion partners, etc. This information can be combined and compared with the data from the observation sheets filled out during the actual media discussions, to have a better understanding of the process of listening and discussion.

## APPENDIX

Behavioral measurement ideas

- CIVIC PARTICIPATION: WILLINGNESS AND ACTUAL PARTICIPATION. At end of the interview, we ask participants if they would like to sign up to do something with others (e.g., to help a community based organization clean a borehole, or to join a meeting of citizens hoping to educate people about voting registration). This is a measure of willingness. We can test *actual* participation by following up to see if they really do it.
  - This measure requires us to identify a civic engagement project run by NDI or another NGO (who is willing to provide us with names of those who showed up) near the participant's neighborhood, not long after the study. We measure whether or not each participant shows up, compare rates of volunteerism / participation among experimental conditions.
- VOTING REGISTRATION: Check registration lists two months later
- INTEREST IN VOTING: Signing a paper / agreeing to receive more information about voting / about registration to vote. Could we set up a place in each neighborhood in the future to talk about registration and see if they come? How many activities of NDI's in the future can we build around this? Is another group doing something like this, and we could find out whether any of our participants show up?
- PROMOTION OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF OTHERS—PARTICULARLY WOMEN: Ask the participant if they know of anyone else who could use information about future elections. (The yes/no response is one measure). If yes, NDI may have illustrated information cards about upcoming voter registration. We can ask for the names, ages, and sex of each person they would like to provide with one of the three cards we offer to them (we measure how many women they nominate).
- VOTING / GENDER EQUALITY: We could present them with headshots of two men and one woman (all Southern Sudanese) and tell the participant that these are the three candidates running for a position at the radio organization that produces *Let's Talk*. We are giving listeners a chance to vote for who should be the head of the radio office, and who should be the assistant head of the office. We describe their accomplishments in a simple way [e.g., x years of experience, x years of education] and record which candidate they endorse for the head and assistant position. [To make their decision realistic, and to test whether they are really trying to promote gender equality, we could have one man be the clear choice as the most experienced and educated, and have the woman and the second man essentially tied. If they choose the woman as the leader they will clearly be choosing her for her gender rather than her qualifications. If they choose her as the assistant, they are weighing both qualifications and gender.]

**Episode descriptions** *(these are cryptic notes I took while doing a content analysis of each episode, but they can give you a sense of what is in the radio program)*

### Corruption

In the drama segment, Musa tries to bribe Taban for to ensure a favorable reaction from the police (on behalf of a friend), and the school structure falls down due to people skimming off some of the allocated funds for its construction. Taban tells Musa that abuse of power is corruption but has to think about whether to use money, Salama says no. Salama and Taban point out, after school collapse, that it is due to corruption and that what Musa did was also corruption, and that is very bad and destructive

In education segment, Corruption is defined as act of giving money or anything of value to police/authority, and also any dishonest or biased behavior from a gov official or employee. (reference musa and taban). Can be misuse of public office for private gain, petty corruption, political corruption, even lying. Many people face corruption every day, people should refuse to take part and demand that their officials aren't corrupt, citizens should "unite" against corruption, and demand to know how taxes are spent.

### Citizenship

Drama focuses on what people in an association and as a group can do (advocate to the gov't regarding security and property, follow up on how their taxes are used) and some roles in an association like chairperson, secretary and treasurer. Storyline is Musa campaigning to be chairman of the group.

Education segment focuses on how citizens can work together and be more effective as a group. Participation as a citizen duty, ability to lobby government and follow use of tax money, participate in elections, running for a post and electing association members to posts, explanation of posts in an association, many types of associations.

### Principles of democracy

Story is about children in Bakhita's class deciding how to solve a collective problem (cleaning the market), and then Bakhita and Salama explain to Musa the meaning of democracy using this example. Focus is on voting, but focuses more on "consensus" and seeking the opinions of others, in politics but in every aspect of life (simultaneously embracing "equality"), government run by the people, "common people" as being part of the democracy, and voting as an expression of this.

Principles education segment focuses on the definition of democracy ("government and the rule of the people" and everyone participating in decisions), decision making by majority, definition of majority, definition of voting as central and important for all; representative democracy, accountability of representatives\*\* who "fail to represent well," importance of practicing democracy even in families and informal settings, the importance of voting and equal right to vote with age specification (18).

### Free and fair elections

Story is about people in Musa's association wanting to hold new elections, which he opposes since they do not like him as a leader. Salama, Bakhita and Taban convince Musa to hold the elections because that is the democratic way. Messages are that Sudan and the business

association is a democracy; in a democracy you should want elections, and periodically, and are inclusive, and leaders should know that they need to hold elections and to fulfill people's needs. Musa is convinced, though he is reluctant at first. Free and fair focuses more exclusively on elections than principles (above).

Election definition (An election is when citizens exercise their democratic right to select the leaders of their choice), provided for by CPA (in July 09, false), regular schedule when free and fair, can replace leaders and prevent violence, leaders motivated\*\* to do well because of elections, elections are free and fair when they are episodic, respected by everyone, inclusive, fairly competitive including different candidates, and vote is secret.

### Women as voters and candidates

Women as voters and candidates drama focuses on reserving places for women to promote their participation (even at local level), women as good leaders, women's right to vote and right to secret\*\* ballot. Musa plays the role of the resister and doubter of these messages (following his own election), but he comes to accept the messages.

Education section for women as voters and candidates brings up many issues: the right of women to vote (and difficulty presented by ID); women leaders in other countries (but recognizing resistance to women as leaders, and obstacles like illiteracy—but pointing out other men leaders are illiterate); expert saying that women are better at handling money and need more education; the 25% rule in ALL areas of SS life, as dictated by interim constitution; finally the expert recognizes cultural resistance and says that the change is inevitable, the culture is due to habits, and people should take control.

### Women's rights

Women's rights drama focuses on women's right to choose who to marry, to participate in public life equally, to not be subject to "undignified" customs that undermine their status (totally vague—but forced marriage given as example), and to have 25% representation (briefly mentioned—it almost solely focuses on marriage). Musa is again the reluctant convert to these beliefs.

Education section for women's rights. The expert comments on the facts of SS life: women are not heard, men take their good points and make them to be their own, women are suffering, beforehand in the legal system two women made one man, that S Sudan is a "male dominated society." She describes the 25% rule as a privilege that women should take advantage of. As for positive injunctions, the voiceover tells people that the bill of rights gives women rights that should be upheld, that very few women have freedom to make decisions and they should, that forced marriages are bad, that women's rights are human rights, that education is key, and that women should be represented at all levels of society.

### **Discussion moderation guidelines (Taken from NDI guidebook):**

- *Check to be sure that everyone understands key words and information given in the program*
- *Everyone participates equally and no one dominates the discussion – No speeches!*
- *One person talks at a time*
- *Comments and discussion stay on the topic. If the topic starts to lose direction, say "What you are saying is very important, but the focus for our discussion is [topic]. Let's return to that and talk about this other topic in the future"*
- *Avoid having the same idea repeated constantly*
- *Comments should be to the whole group – no side discussions*
- *Write down unanswered questions*

- *Respect time limits*
- *Avoid divisive or confrontational language or tone*
- *Remember that you are the facilitator—it is your role to encourage participants to share their views*
- *Remember, as the listening group leader your role is to be neutral. It is your role to help steer the discussion if there is confusion by referring to particular documents, but not to give your own opinion.*

**Other Appendix attachments (separate documents):**

- 1. Observation sheet to use during discussions / informal interaction time following the episode**
- 2. Survey instrument (does not separate out pre-test and post-test measures)**