

# How the Radio Show *Agashi* Reached More Than Two Million Burundians

Increasing Knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health



Jeanne d'Arc Butoyi, a community organizer living in Muremera, Burundi, has struggled over the years to convey the importance of family planning, condom use, and regular health clinic visits to the women and adolescents in her community. She is not only up against years of deeply ingrained social norms, but also the widespread reliance on folklore and promises of witchcraft to address medical issues.

When she started listening to *Agashi* (“Hey! Look Again!”) in 2014, she immediately recognized the show’s potential as an educational resource to help teach the people in her community about the simple ways they can avoid disease and unwanted pregnancies, among other prevalent concerns.

“*Agashi* has become an educational tool for me,” Butoyi said. “I use it when coaching rural women in mother-child health. I bring them together during the listening portion of the episodes of *Agashi*, I invite them to listen, and at the end the debate comes alive in a group. There is always a commitment to adopt a new behavior thanks to the advice provided by *Agashi*.”

CONVEYING THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY PLANNING,  
CONDOM USE, AND REGULAR HEALTH CLINIC  
VISITS TO THE WOMEN OF BURUNDI.



## WHAT'S AT STAKE IN BURUNDI?

One of the reasons Butoyi is so passionate about these issues is because she knows firsthand the difficulties that come with having children at a young age and taking care of a large family.

“I have seven children,” she said.

“I invite women who don’t yet have seven children and tell them, ‘Come, listen to these messages on *Agashi*. Listen to the misfortune Tengenge has to go through—giving birth to so many children and not being able to feed them.’ When I used her case as an example, people really began to understand the problem.”

Burundi has the fourth highest fertility rate in the world at 5.5 births per woman, according to World Bank data from 2017. The country’s population is quickly outpacing available resources and undeveloped land, with less than 7% of forested land remaining. On top of the environmental threats, Burundians have been struggling off and on for years with [political instability](#) and the associated violence.

Educational entertainment (teaching via entertainment) certainly isn’t the answer to all of these issues, but it’s a good place to start. Population Media Center (PMC) has shown that effectively delivering vital information to people who need it can result in positive behavior changes that contribute to a more sustainable world. Read on to see exactly how PMC harnessed the power of storytelling to change behaviors in Burundi.





## WHAT WAS THE STRATEGY BEHIND AGASHI'S SUCCESS?

**When social norms are deeply entrenched, direct messaging, talking points, and “quick fix” interventions that are contrary to dominant customs are not going to cut it, and may even be counterproductive.**

High-quality entertainment, on the other hand, is in demand nearly everywhere on the planet. And because the vast majority of people on Earth have access to some form of broadcast media (whether radio, TV, internet, or other), entertainment via mass media outlets can reach large audiences cost-efficiently and reliably.

The first season of *Agashi* aired from January 2014-2016 and reached more than two million people for just \$0.74 US per loyal listener—a listener tuning in every week for a minimum of half of the show's episodes.

“The opportunity initially to fund a radio serial drama in Burundi was pretty obvious from the beginning for us,” said Andy Bryant, Executive Director of the Segal Family Foundation who helped fund the program. “We thought in a country where 90% of the population doesn't have access to television or even print media, that radio would be a good medium to reach Burundians with positive health-seeking behavior messaging.”

**The first season of *Agashi* aired**

**January 2014-2016**

**REACHING MORE THAN**



**— 2 MILLION PEOPLE —**



Aside from selecting the best medium for your message, here are two keys to creating effective educational entertainment capable of transcending societal norms:

## #1 Reflect the world of your audience

All high-quality entertainment needs to feature the hallmarks of great episodic storytelling, such as captivating characters, cliffhangers, interwoven storylines, and unexpected plot twists. Basically, world-class creatives need to produce powerful fiction that accurately reflects the existing reality of the audience.

A good way to ensure this success is by recruiting top local talent to manage the overall project, implement the production, and serve as script writers and actors. PMC hires in-country nationals to carry out projects and believes that the resulting local ownership is vital to creating effective programming and contributing to lasting change.



NGENDO'S BROTHER MANAGES TO CONVINCE HIM OF THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY PLANNING, AND AFTER ANOTHER SERIES OF DRAMATIC TWISTS AND TURNS, THE COUPLE DECIDES TO START USING BIRTH CONTROL.

The issues addressed in the shows should be recognizable to listeners, but will be amplified for dramatic effect. An example of a storyline from *Agashi* is the story of Ngendo, an impoverished farmer, and his wife Tengenge. The couple already has three children when they find out they have triplets on the way. Tengenge wants to start using family planning methods, but both Ngendo and his mother forbid it. In order to feed the rapidly growing family, Ngendo is forced to steal, but he gets caught and is seriously wounded during his capture. Ngendo's brother manages to convince him of the benefits of family planning, and after another series of dramatic twists and turns, the couple decides to start using birth control.

Tengenge's story is an exaggerated version of the dilemma many Burundian women find themselves in, and hearing about her struggles and the different options she discovers may cast a new light on the listeners' own life choices. Tengenge models various behavioral options for the audience, and her character provides templates that listeners might use in their own lives for having difficult discussions with friends and family members. She provides a proxy experience for positive but potentially intimidating activities, such as going to a health clinic. This vicarious learning opportunity helps remove stigma and fear of the unknown.



## #2 Focus on character transformation

Every PMC show features transitional characters who are being pulled in separate directions by positive and negative influences. The positive and negative characters represent the extremes of behavior on one or more issues as practiced in the audience's own community, while also serving as positive and negative role models for the transitional characters. As episodes unfold, the transitional character will likely have to deal with the consequences of following in the footsteps of negative characters before recognizing the benefits of adopting positive behaviors.

Although the characters in *Agashi* are fictional, they serve as role models for the listening audience. As we know from our own lives and from famous psychologist Albert Bandura's [Social Learning and Social Cognitive Theories](#), much of human behavior is learned through observation of role models, whether in person or through the media.

---

**“It’s through the daily life and the behavior of the characters that the listeners *project themselves onto the characters and evolve* with them throughout the episodes,”** said Dede Keita, a PMC trainer.



## HOW HAS AGASHI IMPACTED BURUNDIANS?

*Agashi* became a huge hit across the country, demonstrating once again PMC's commitment to creating hit entertainment rather than boring stories laden with messaging. *Agashi* is currently airing its third season. Surveys have shown that listeners are not only enjoying the show but also absorbing many of the lessons that are being explored by the transitional characters. For example, 20% of patients surveyed in the second round of clinic monitoring reported that *Agashi* motivated them to seek health services.

The show's effectiveness comes from its ability to get people talking about uncomfortable issues that would otherwise be ignored or dealt with in unproductive ways.

"There are things that I don't feel comfortable talking about," said one [Burundian father](#).  
"The serial drama helps me educate my children. That way they can adopt better behaviors."

Since the show went on the air, there have been a number of measurable changes in the behavior of Burundians with regard to family planning and sexual and reproductive health. Here are a few highlights:



### IMPACT ON FAMILY PLANNING

**2x MORE**

Listeners were 2 times more likely than non-listeners to say they know a place to obtain a method of family planning.

**1.8x MORE**

Listeners were 1.8 times more likely than non-listeners to say that they generally approve of family planning for limiting the number of children.

**2.3x MORE**

Listeners were 2.3 times more likely than non-listeners to report that their partner/spouse is open to the discussion of the problems of family planning.





## IMPACT ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



**1.7x MORE**

Listeners were 1.7 times more likely than non-listeners to confirm that they were willing to negotiate condom use with a sexual partner.



**4.3x MORE**

Listeners were 4.3 times more likely than non-listeners to suggest limiting the number of sexual partners as a way to avoid or reduce risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.



**1.7x MORE**

Listeners were 1.7 times more likely than non-listeners to say they have been tested for AIDS in the past 24 months.

The show has no doubt also impacted Burundians in immeasurable ways by encouraging women to advocate for themselves when it comes to their sexual and reproductive health. The long-term effects of these positive behavior changes on Burundi and the planet as a whole remain to be seen, but if these numbers are any indication, there's reason for hope.

ALTHOUGH THE CHARACTERS IN  
AGASHI ARE FICTIONAL, THEY  
SERVE AS ROLE MODELS FOR THE  
LISTENING AUDIENCE.



## WHAT IS THE COST OF CHANGE?

*Agashi* has shown that widespread change can be created for a relatively modest price. As we mentioned earlier, it cost a mere \$0.74 US to reach each loyal listener. When we focus on the level of change brought about by the show, we can calculate the cost of individual changes attributable to *Agashi*.

To get more specific, the estimated number of listeners with improved knowledge of family planning methods was 248,000. Accounting for the costs to produce the show, the Cost per Attributable Knowledge Change comes to approximately \$6.70 US.

The estimated number of listeners who were voluntarily tested for the AIDS virus within 24 months of the survey was 293,091. That amounted to a Cost per Attributable Behavior Change of \$5.67 US.

And the estimated number of listeners with increased agency to negotiate condom use during sexual intercourse was 270,546, which amounts to a Cost per Attributable Change in Agency of approximately \$6.14 US.

Of course, when you combine the numerous issues that were impacted by one show, the cost per overall change is dramatically lower.

## HOW YOU CAN BE PART OF THE SOLUTION.

*Agashi* is a good example of how storytelling can be harnessed to spark widespread behavior change across a nation. Measurable change can be created for very little cost, and the benefits will likely compound for years to come. If you would like to help support the creation of effective entertainment for social change, even small contributions can have a huge impact.



**POPULATION**  
MEDIA CENTER  
*Acting for Change*