

CASE STUDY:

Child-centred Educational Radio Project in Kailahun District, Sierra Leone



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By David Walker, Bella Tristram, Paola Perezniето and Tricia Young



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KEY FINDINGS:

- Child-friendly radio broadcasts deliver early years, hygiene, and life skills educational content in the remote and Ebola-affected Kailahun district in Sierra Leone.
- The programmes are gender-responsive and discuss the importance of girls' education and retention in school, behaviours leading to teenage pregnancy, and violence against girls. The programs reach girls, boys, their families, and the wider community.
- Gender equality messages are integrated throughout the radio programmes, reflecting how gender affects the way children look at themselves, communicate, make decisions, and relate to others.
- The project has also sought to ensure positive role-modelling for girls by recruiting high profile female role models to share their challenges and achievements through positive sound bites, interviews, and discussion groups. Female characters are featured in radio dramas to further engage girl listeners.
- Girls and boys interviewed demonstrated a good retention of information presented on key topics such as teenage pregnancy, child labour, and hand-washing.
- Interviews with key informants revealed persistent discriminatory views regarding girls' rights and opportunities, which limit their physical mobility, schooling, and their roles in the household and community.

Introduction

Child to Child (CtC) is an international child rights agency located at the Institute of Education. In 2011, CtC began working in partnership with the Sierra Leonean non-governmental organization (NGO) The Pikin-To-Pikin Movement (PtP) to implement a five-year, community-based early childhood development project in the remote Eastern district of Sierra Leone. The project ran successfully until the Ebola outbreak halted all activities in March 2014. Nationally all schools closed and public congregations were banned, except for church and mosque meetings. In August 2014, The Pikin-To-Pikin Movement reported that numerous people involved in the project had died of Ebola, including pre-school children, primary school children, parents, adult community volunteers, teachers, and one head teacher.

By eroding the social fabric and causing a collapse of government services, the crisis exacerbated gender inequalities and gender-based

violence, which were already entrenched in society. For example, many older children—almost exclusively girls—have taken on the parental role, which is likely to result in a drop in the number of girls completing education. Several recent studies have shown that women and girls are among the most vulnerable social groups in the Ebola outbreak. The reports indicate an increase in violence against girls, as well as noting that rates of teenage pregnancy have increased exponentially (Denney et al. 2015; Riso-Gill and Finnegan 2015). This is thought to be linked to transactional sex, as girls try to secure basic amenities such as food, and a direct result of being outside the protective environment provided by schools, making them more likely to become sexually involved with men and become pregnant (Riso-Gill and Finnegan 2015).

To respond to the Ebola crisis, CtC and PtP developed a new project called “Pikin to Pikin Tok” aimed at supporting children to continue learning by delivering early years, hygiene, and life skills educational content (co-created with children) through child-friendly radio broadcasts. The project also seeks to equip children to transmit education, health awareness, and life skills messages to their peers, families, and communities. The fundamental principle underpinning the redesigned

project was that marginalised children and young people in Kailahun District should be given a voice through the powerful and relatively low-cost medium of radio, which allows larger numbers of beneficiaries to be reached.

While the educational radio programme Pikin to Pikin Tok is not directly targeted to girls or aimed directly at promoting gender equality in education, it is gender-responsive as it draws on contextual evidence of girls’ increased vulnerabilities. It also includes educational content to inform girls, their families, and the community about the risks girls face, how to overcome them, and the importance of ensuring girls continue in school. This was achieved in part by the radio producers working closely with PtP and CtC to define messages and the best way to communicate them in order to educate and change perceptions about the role of girls in the family and the community, as well as how to mitigate the risks of early pregnancy and violence. The project tries to promote positive gender ideas and help community members increase their knowledge of and the value they place on girl’s safety.

This case study presents initial results of Pikin to Pikin Tok, which is set to continue until August 2016. Data was collected in December 2015, which means that it was early to document robust results but a good moment to explore how the project rapidly adjusted to the changing context and capture its results three months after inception.

Methodology

The case study results presented in this report come from two sources. The first is the project’s own monitoring data, collected by PtP staff from the outset of the project. The second is qualitative, participatory, and child-friendly data collected by a six-person research team. A purposive sample¹ and field plan were developed to collect relevant data from girls and boys in different age cohorts and those who listened to radio broadcasts under different project modalities. Key informant interviews with a wide range of subjects were conducted in order to gauge the broader contextual issues, enabling environment, and performance of the PtP activities. The research team, consisting of staff from The Pikin to Pikin Movement, was supported by a researcher from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and a member of CtC’s team. This provided a mix of skillsets and capabilities in data collection and analysis, including a thorough understanding of local dialects and traditional customs and practices.

1 A non-probability sampling method that is characterised by a deliberate effort to gain representative samples by including groups or typical areas in a sample.



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Pikin to Pikin Tok: A child-centred educational radio project in Kailahun

Pikin to Pikin Tok broadcasts and repeats two new child-centred radio programmes each week: *Story Time* aimed at younger listeners and aired for the first time on Monday and repeated twice during the week and *Under The Mango Tree* for older listeners, which is aired for the first time on Wednesday and repeated twice per week. Since the project advocates for school retention, it was decided in consultation with community members to schedule the broadcasts after school hours.

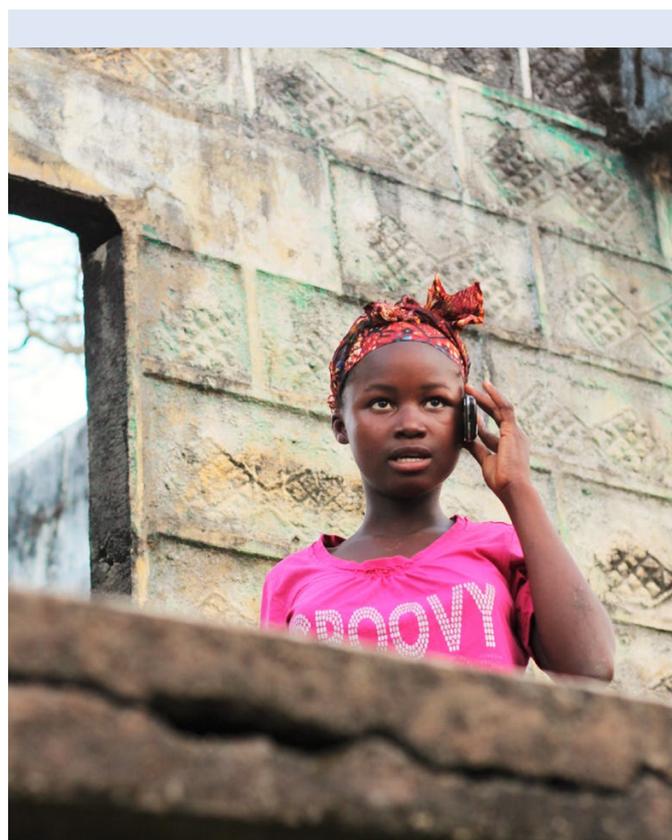
Themes presented and discussed during the programmes included the importance of hand washing and basic hygiene practices, letters of the alphabet to promote literacy, numbers to support basic numeracy, and safety in the community. The radio programmes respond to the multilingual context and enhance listeners' learning through narration in both English and Krio. In addition to these two languages, some of the participating children (both in the produced radio programmes and the post-programme call in session) speak in the local Kissi and Mende languages. The decision behind the multi-language approach was influenced by current thinking that dual language programmes support gains in early literacy skills and wider academic advances (Barnett et al. 2007). Moreover, research shows the importance of retaining a child's home language to enable the child to become proficient in either their home language or English (Castro et al. 2011).

A number of Pikin to Pikin Tok programmes talk about the importance of girls' education and retention in school, behaviours leading to teenage pregnancy, and positive messages about how girls can support their younger female peers. There is also a series of programmes that discuss violence against girls, which is an increasing problem across the country. A fundamental element in the design of the programme is that children often identify the theme to be explored in a programme. With CtC's expert input, the broadcasts equip children with the life skills required to make safe choices and lead healthy lifestyles. They also promote skills for coping with difficult circumstances related to care and support, including loss, which are important in a post-emergency context. The broadcasts feature a variety of participatory elements such as games, role play, debates, brainstorming, drama, story-telling, group learning, and case studies to ensure they are engaging and age-appropriate.

After each live programme, a trained facilitator participates in a post-programme discussion featuring children who call into the station with comments and questions. Many of the live programmes feature an expert panellist (such as a psychiatric nurse or a member of a local women's empowerment organisation) who gives advice on referral pathways and support systems and provides encouragement. The rationale behind the call-in session is three fold:

1. Children will feel more personally engaged in the programmes;
2. Children will be able to have some of their questions answered and other listeners can then also learn from responses to questions asked during the broadcasts; and
3. It will help children to think through and make decisions carefully. Children, particularly girls, in risky situations need to learn how to make safe decisions, which is something they may not have had to do before.

To deliver the project, CtC trained 252 trusted adults on how to use the wind-up/solar radios for which each of them was responsible. Training included technical use of the radio, techniques on how to encourage young listeners to assemble during CtC programme airing, how to facilitate discussion among young listeners, and basic child protection training. The majority of the facilitators chosen are local teachers, who can amplify the messages in their classrooms.



There are two project modalities:

- **Formal listening groups:** Of the 252 adults recruited, 42 were recruited as formal “listening group facilitators.” They receive a stipend and are obliged to meet with a group of children (often between 10-25 children) 4 times a week at the times of the broadcast. Facilitators support these children to then take part in post-programme radio call-ins, group discussions, and follow-up community activities to heighten learning and encourage reflection on the topic. The ages of the children in the listening groups range from 4 to 18 years (with the majority between 7 and 12 years). The listening groups strive to have gender balance of listeners, which has largely been achieved. The 4-6 year olds attend 6 specific radio broadcasts each month that are more age appropriate and they are actively supported by older children. Children receive refreshments while attending the listening group. There are up to 630 children in formal listening groups.
- **Informal listening groups:** An additional 210 communities received a Prime Radio and have a trained facilitator. As “informal” facilitators, these adults do not receive a stipend nor do the children receive refreshments during their gatherings, so there is no external incentive for the listening groups to convene, only the interest of the facilitator and children in the community.

Given that schools had opened by the time the project began to be implemented, in addition to these listening groups, teacher coordinators in 21 schools that had previously worked with PtP received radios that they use to record the Tok broadcasts and play them to school children as educational resources.

An additional component of the project involves 36 children (15 boys and 21 girls) who volunteered to be trained as “young journalists.” These volunteers had prior experience working with PtP as facilitators and thus had training on communications skills and peer engagement. For Pikin to Pikin Tok, they were trained on basic journalism. Their on-going role in the project is to support the audio collection and ensure the programming is child-centred.

The project also has a “linking learning to life” component. During the formal facilitated sessions, children are encouraged to practice what they hear in between broadcasts. It aims to ensure that learning is taken beyond the learning place to real life situations where children can try out what they have learned.

Gender-responsiveness

Messages of gender equality are integrated throughout the radio programmes to reflect how gender affects the way children look at themselves, communicate, make decisions, and relate to others. For example:

- The programmes explore how girls are especially at risk and need to be empowered to make safe choices. Boys are taught about responsible behaviour and given a sense of non-violent male identity that does not include sexual risk-taking.
- Life skills educational activities focus on developing girls’ self-confidence and enabling them to making safer choices, particularly focusing on topics related to adolescent pregnancy, which are also discussed during call-ins.
- Episodes have also been made for parents and adults in the community that have focused on challenging the significant gender disparities and discrimination that remain in Sierra Leone, in particular gender inequality in schools and attitudes towards early marriage.

In addition, the project has sought to ensure positive role-modelling for girls through the following:

- One of the two radio presenters is female to promote the notion of equality.
- Many high profile international, national, and local female role models are recruited to share their challenges and achievements through positive sound bites, interviews, and discussion groups.
- Female fictional characters are created in radio dramas to promote girls’ participation in matters affecting them.
- Young Journalists groups have been set up, two of which are made up solely of girls, to allow a greater attention to the issues and realities girls face.

Emerging results

The preliminary results of the CtC and PtP intervention are presented across the three broad dimensions of activity: 1) enabling factors, 2) message uptake, and 3) linking messages to learning outcomes in terms of risk awareness, self-efficacy, and improved literacy and numeracy.

Enabling factors: A major enabling factor emerging across all listening groups and age cohorts is the desire to participate or be associated with live broadcasts. This is related to the activity of calling-in to the radio station and communicating the stories across the air in real-time. Chil-

dren as well as parents repeatedly highlighted this component as attractive and energising. Parental willingness, based on a greater familiarity with the learning benefits for children of participating in the listening groups, often developed over time as children reported back to parents what they had been learning.

“ After hearing the broadcast, I sat with my children and told them about the dangers of teenage pregnancy, such as having problems delivering and stopping school, and how contraceptives can be obtained from Marie Stopes. ”

Father of advanced group formal participant

Short distances to facilitation groups overcomes both safety concerns and suspicions that children might be side-tracked into other recreational activities. The proximity to local friendship networks also increases the likelihood of sustained participation, as well as a more conducive learning environment given that children are learning with their friends.

With regard to differences in the participation of children in formal and informal listening groups, evidence from interviews and observations indicates that the formal group members showed more commitment to participating. Parents of children in formal groups began to see the benefits of engagement, particularly the activity of participating in live broadcasts, while the active engagement of local group facilitators enabled close follow-up for children who dropped out of the broadcasts.

Message uptake: One of the major benefits seen by respondents was the increase in self-efficacy, or one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task, evidenced by testimonies from children and verified by peers, parents, and key informants. Other benefits include an increase in dual language abilities. This was also seen to as a driver toward improved academic performance:

Younger cohorts (ages 4-6 and 7-12) were better able to recall details of story narratives and associated lessons, compared to older groups (adults and ages 13-18) who demonstrated a marginally greater recall for *Under the Mango Tree* themes, such as teenage pregnancy, child labour, and hand-washing. Themes such as teenage pregnancy and hand-washing were particularly well retained,

even amongst the 4-6 and 7-12 age groups. A group facilitator noted, “I am witnessing children assembling in small groups to share stories. Girls’ support networks are expanding because the PtP Tok programme is encouraging girls to talk to each other.”

“ The children were really unhappy when they were prevented from going to school. Also, they could hardly speak Kreo— mostly Kissi. The radio programme enables them to recall what they were doing in school: “Tok radio is with us, unlike the government which is not coming directly. Now we are under the mango tree, and it is like you are actually coming to see us.” ”

Key informant: service provider

Linking learning to life: Older cohorts of children ages 7-12 and 13-18 were able to provide examples of practicing their newly acquired knowledge from the radio broadcasts. The 7-12 year olds tended to relay examples of implementing the morals and advice from the *Story Time* programmes whereas the older bracket of listeners gave more examples from the *Under the Mango Tree* programmes. In practice, the process of obtaining details relating to the concept of “linking learning to life” during the evaluation process was challenging, even amongst 13-18 year olds. The strongest evidence of linking learning to life was achieved during the in-depth interviews with individuals. These quotes provide some examples:

“ A man came to my house to stay the night. I learned from the radio that it was not safe to have strange men in the house. I told my mother and he left. The next day we found out that he was indeed a thief. ”

Adolescent girl, age 13, in-depth interview

“ PtP has been talking many times about the bad things that happen when you dropout. So I told my neighbour many times until she actually listened and she has now moved away from that bad situation. ”

Adolescent girl, age 15, in-depth interview

The 4-6 year olds were also able to identify danger factors in their communities and recognized the need to walk in close proximity to their siblings and friends. This younger group also declared that they had been washing their hands as a result of listening to the stories about Ebola. Groups that participated in the broadcasts more frequently showed a better retention of messages and were better able to provide concrete examples of retelling messages to a wider variety of social contacts. The mother of a formal group participant stated, “My child practices to become a teacher when she comes from the PtP Tok radio group. She teaches my other children what she has learned.”

Overall, girls of all ages were able to participate and communicate on an equal footing with boys and they sometimes outperformed boys in their levels of confidence and in providing examples of applying knowledge. This contrast to the general positioning of girls in the community can be attributed to the enabling environment in which the Pikin to Pikin Tok radio broadcasts take place, particularly the improved engagement skills of group facilitators.

Challenges

Access: The biggest access concern for younger age groups was safety, particularly given that the radio broadcasts finish at sunset. This challenge was addressed by families sending older siblings to accompany younger children to and from the radio broadcasts during early evening. The perceptions of some parents were also a significant barrier across the age cohorts. When interviewed, some parents did not acknowledge potential benefits of the broadcasts— they considered the radio groups to be “play” groups and could not thereby approve their children’s participation on a purely recreational basis.

Project design: Informal groups show markedly lower results with regard to “linking learning to life” compared to formal groups. This can be attributed to the ongoing monitoring of attendance by facilitators in the formal groups, as well as to the relatively consistent and stable listening environment in the formal groups. Advantages of the formal groups include facilitated learning, encouragement from parents, and, critically, a greater degree of on-air, live interaction.

The multi-lingual nature of the PtP radio broadcasts is a significant initial barrier to all groups, but more so the informal and non-facilitated groups since they have no support to help them understand and internalize the messages from the broadcasts. Working with community volunteers



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is a continuing challenge for several reasons. Stipends are usually barely adequate and budgetary constraints limit provision of learning materials to listening groups, which would enhance learning. The majority of community volunteers are also farmers, which puts considerable pressure on them during key sowing and harvest seasons.

Gender-specific challenges: The gender-specific challenges faced by the project are linked to the structural nature of gender inequality in the country and are exacerbated in Kailahun because it is a remote rural area affected by Ebola. Women and girls’ development is negatively impacted by discriminatory social norms, which also create challenges for project implementation (Denney et al. 2015; Riso-Gill and Finnegan 2015).

Challenges faced by girls and boys to attend the listening sessions were largely a result of practical demands generated by the household economy and logistics. These demands, such as fetching water, sweeping, gathering firewood, or making dinner, primarily affect girls. A female participant in an emerging formal group for 7-12 year-olds explained, “When I am cooking, or my mother has left me another job to do, it stops me from going [to the listening group].”

The most significant gender barriers for girls concerned the control over their mobility. There were strong concerns amongst parents about allowing adolescent girls to roam freely around the community at sunset on the basis they might be

exposed to violence or be in contact with boys. There were also concerns about allowing girls to have access to mobile phones for calling in to the radio broadcasts on the basis that mobile phones could facilitate early relationships and sexual activity. "My mother thinks I am going to look for a boyfriend [at the listening group]," said a girl who participated in an emerging formal group for children aged 7-12.

Interviews with some "gatekeeper" key informants revealed continuing discriminatory views regarding girls' rights and opportunities, including their physical mobility and access to mobile phones. This is a broader issue that PtP cannot address alone, although PtP does aim to address social norms and behaviour change by influencing attitudes towards girls' education, reducing stigma associated with adolescent pregnancy, sharing information about gender-based violence, and by promoting girls' rights and entitlements. Broadcasts also provide girls and their families with strategies to help girls stay safe.

While CtC had hoped to have a gender balance among the 252 adult volunteers, it was not possible, resulting in a low number of women as listener group facilitators. The causes include discriminatory social norms leading to lower schooling and early marriage for girls, which has resulted in fewer women teachers. Most of the teachers in the three Kissi chiefdoms are men and most listening group facilitators are teachers. Further, as previously noted, women were disproportionately affected by the Ebola outbreak and bear the burden of many more domestic and income-generating responsibilities, so they declined to participate. Additionally, a high number of women in Kailahun are illiterate and cannot be facilitators.

Girls remain one of the most difficult to reach groups in terms of targeting radio messages, particularly girls who move from the rural areas to attend secondary school in towns. These girls are a very well-identified but particularly vulnerable demographic and require isolated measures and resources if they are to access the radio broadcasts. This demographic was not specifically targeted in the programme and further interventions or research could illuminate the situation of girls on the move, particularly for post-Ebola response and ongoing coping mechanisms.

Lessons learned

Under ideal conditions, where children, parents, and group facilitators interact to improve access and retention in listening groups and promote linkages from learning to life for children, the PtP radio broadcasts can enable a new collective understanding of social norms and associated standards of acceptability. This provides a unified ground through which parents and children can negotiate and promote positive norms and question discriminatory norms. This is one of the core benefits of utilising a progressive social norms approach in programming.

In practice, "re-setting" the context for children to learn in close proximity to home and with friends had a positive impact. This issue was not explicit in PtP's theory of change, but nonetheless emerged after the fact during the research process. However, spaces were selected to be (i) in a relatively public location for child protection reasons, (ii) to be an enabling environment where the children felt relaxed, and (iii) close to the children's homes so a long walk home was avoided.



One of the critical success factors in terms of process is the excitement generated during the second-half of radio broadcasts, when children participate in “grounding” the stories to their own lives. The ability to participate and amplify their voices over the radio is recognised as a major draw across age cohorts, including amongst parents.

The lack of funding for additional learning aids, such as charts and stationery, to facilitate heightened learning for the 42 target groups is a challenge. However, group facilitators are trained and encouraged to find creative methods to work around this challenge, either through drama

“ Before engaging the radio programme I was very shy and unable to speak in class. When I started with PtP Tok, my life started changing. I was surrounded by friends and by my home. It was easier for me to participate, and now I participate freely in class and am very outspoken. I also share more freely than before. ”

Adolescent girl, age 13, in-depth interview

or other child-friendly learning techniques. The facilitators, being local and respected members of the community, are also vital in developing and maintaining both the attendance and learning of child participants. Consequently, facilitator selection, training, and associated ongoing

management support is crucial for maintaining everyday progress at grassroots level.

One of the major opportunities to apply lessons from the PtP intervention is provided by the fact that storytelling is currently part of the national educational curriculum. Several key informants² noted that radio broadcasts were replayed in schools, often the next day, to both child participants and non-participants alike. The informants also noted that teachers took on the role of the group facilitator in order to contextualise lessons and to link learning to life.

The use of pre-existing structures is crucial for ensuring longer-term sustainability of access and uptake of broadcast messages. For instance, social welfare committees, school management committees, and school clubs could all be prioritised as access points for radio facilitation groups. Similarly, the local broadcast station Radio Moa has its own cadre of trained journalists situated at the community level that exist in parallel to PtP “young journalists.” These volunteers could be paired-up (if in the same community) to assist in promoting access and use of PtP radio broadcasts. Additionally, several organizations provide radios and radio services alongside PtP in the Kailahun district, including UNICEF, Save the Children, and the International Rescue Committee. A coordinated communications platform could be more cost-efficient by pooling resources and skills.

2 School management committee, parent-teacher association, school headmaster, facilitator groups



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Gender-specific lessons learned

A comprehensive gender assessment is crucial to understanding the discriminatory norms that affect girls' access to radio services, including the degree to which they share in the family work burden and caring for siblings. The time of radio broadcasts is generally more of a critical issue for girls than for boys. If incorrectly applied, media messaging can increase the work burden for girls or isolate them from the radio completely.

A large proportion of key informants and focus group discussion participants, including youth themselves, considered several of the challenges that girls faced to be their own fault. For instance, some respondents considered pregnant girls to be “wayward” and unwilling to return to school or otherwise undisciplined. The PtP radio

programme focused on positive reinforcement, advocating for children, parents, and the wider radio listening community to support young mothers. These included radio programmes on how to support girls to attend school, call-in programmes featuring examples of how peers, siblings, and parents have encouraged girls to attend school, and radio programmes sharing testimonies of young mothers who have overcome obstacles in returning to school.

The PtP radio messages were often taken up positively by men as well as women because the material was not considered to be strictly targeted to women and girls. The radio broadcasts' messaging across a number of issues of relevance, including specific gender-sensitive components, as well as its comprehensive targeting allowed it to have further outreach and mobilise uptake of messages in boys and men as much as girls and women. ■



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