

Phone conversation between Media Impact phone and GiveWell, July 28, 2011

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GiveWell: Can you tell me more about your activities, such as your process for getting radio shows on air?

Media Impact: We're a 26 year old organization. For the first 15-16 years, we used a model of pulling together the best writers, the best script-writers, and we did some very powerful work in China, India, Tanzania and Kenya, and had some very long-running programs. We realized about 7-8 years ago that the sustainability and long-term impact of this model might be deepened by re-envisioning the model through a capacity building lens. We piloted a community-based capacity building model of Entertainment-Education in Latin America. We spent 5 years investigating what new tools were needed, what new tools for distance mentoring, training, etc, to ensure that we design a program with a focus on embedding the capacities inside local partners to deliver Entertainment-Education programs. It's about building a set of champions world-wide that do this work.

Over the last 18 months, we've grown from 7 countries on two continents to 28 countries on four continents with this model.

Our model – called My Community – has a few steps. First, in the coalition stage, we bring together local NGOs who really know the context and the nuances of the culture with others such as health service providers, local government representatives, local HIV/AIDS commissions, radio and journalist partners. Our local partners bring knowledge of a lot of the subtleties about the culture to the table. We typically launch at a 1-week training course in which (especially for countries where we are working for the first time, I (the Impact Media Executive Director) and the Program Director go to run the training. We co-facilitate with the local partner to make sure they “own” the coalition and mentor them as they get the product on the air. We help them with job descriptions to hire local radio and production partners. The local partners do the outreach and negotiations; they identify the production team, the directors, the writers, and so on. The ideal is to do three seasons of capacity development while we phase out our involvement. In years 2 and 3 of the program, we continue to be involved in as much mentoring as we can. We have given them feedback and do things such as help in creating Facebook pages, help them with applying for further grant opportunities, etc.

Typically in the first year, we monitor and do 1-2 country visits over 6-10 months. We also help them develop monitoring and evaluation, which we think of as a learning strategy i.e, co-owned tool to help us learn as we go. We measure three C's: capacity (budget, training, more funding), community/constituency (number of partners and people getting behind the issue), and change (KAP – knowledge, attitudes and practices -- analysis). We do pre and post-surveys combined with focus groups; we look at changes in knowledge and especially on behaviors on the particular issue (such as wearing condom and how many clinics are reporting decrease in HIV and increase in HIV prevention). In 2012, we will probably have an independent evaluator do research on some randomly selected programs. We'll send you some of our research (2001 study from the Caribbean, a very rigorously evaluated 2002 study from India, etc).

GiveWell: How do you decide where to go (i.e., which countries)?

Media Impact: In some cases, the partners approach us. Generally we go where there is a “center of gravity” need, interest, the right partners and funding i.e., USAID funding or US Fish and Wildlife.

GiveWell: How do you decide what issues to focus on? Do you cover population issues?

Media Impact: We are thematically neutral: we will work on any issue, if we feel it’s important enough and a local partner wants to drive it. To name some examples, we cover tiger conservation in Lao, coastal zones in Ghana, gossip in NYC schools, pluralism and communication rights in Bolivia, and teenage pregnancy in Peru. In one place, when we held focus groups for an environment-focused program, everyone was talking about the need to address sexual health, and so we were able to work with partner and schools to build sexual health into the program.

GiveWell: Do programs continue after you cease funding the local partners that run them?

Media Impact: What we aspire to is capacities to do this work without us. In Guatemala, for 3 seasons, we worked with a small NGO to produce “The Intruder”; they produced over 50 episodes with our financial support, and they continued going after we left. They raised \$100K to continue the work themselves. It doesn’t have to be expensive, so they can do it without us. 40-50% of the local partners continue to do Entertainment-Education after we leave.

GiveWell: Who do you hire to write? Are they local writers? How do you find them?

Media Impact: We have local writers, from the country; we find that’s important because of dialect. In the Caribbean we have a team of writers, from more experienced writers to newer writers. Often time in smaller communities, someone will volunteer, from retired farmers to university students. We do training in the countries first, and then do close follow-up with our mentors and program staff to provide guidance and ensure no one is re-enforcing stereotypes (not punishing “bad” characters with AIDS, for example.)

A favorite story: we have a writer named Bosco who was a guard for our building in Bolivia. The first year, Bosco sat in on the training and said “let me try.” Turns out he writes extravagant over-the-top soap operas; three years later, he’s the official in-house writer. This is one of the stories that makes us feel we have the capacity-developing aspect we aspire to.

GiveWell: Do you rely on the originals or on translation to give feedback?

Media Impact: Many of our staff are fluent in Spanish, so they can give feedback on the scripts written in Spanish. Some programs are in English. Also, local NGO staff speak the language and can give feedback.

GiveWell: Do you pay the radio stations to air programs? Do you pay the writers?

Media Impact: We bring in media partners, so we tend to get free broadcasts. For example, of the 15 countries in the Caribbean, not one of the radio partners asked for funding. We sometimes do have to

pay, but only one in ten programs do we end up paying for production. It's so rare to have material in the local vernacular that people tend to love it. Often because of the relationship between the NGOs and radio stations, they can also negotiate.

Paying the writers also depends on the context. In the Caribbean, they receive a stipend because they are producing many episodes and it's more of a full-time commitment. In community productions, we usually have volunteers.

GiveWell: Are some shows radio and others TV? What's the ratio?

Media Impact: Currently, all 28 programs are radio. In the 15 countries where we are in the Caribbean, we are working on embedding messages into TV shows and movies. We always start with what media the target audience uses. Radio is much more ubiquitous in many places. One youth group in Colombia is producing a comic book, and we are incorporating some mobile phone work into our programs in the Caribbean.

GiveWell: Can you tell me more about the radio stations? Are they mostly very small stations which have local programming that they run for free?

Media Impact: It's variable. In the Caribbean, we want the best national coverage in all 15 countries because our target audience is very broad. So there we have the best radio station and biggest audience share. In Ghana, we have been working with 3 separate radio stations (same product on 3 stations). This is because we have a distinct target audience: small, coastal communities.

GiveWell: How do you estimate numbers of listeners (mentioned on the website)?

Media Impact: It depends. We have independent evaluators in some cases. What we'll often do is that the radio stations know their percent of audience share and know the population in their broadcast area, and we use those numbers.

GiveWell: What is the range of peoples' choice when they turn on the radio in these places? What are small community radio stations like?

Media Impact: There are about 800 radio stations in Bolivia and about half of these are community radio stations. We worked in the first round with 36 community radio stations. These are very small local stations with local programming. We try and give them the understanding that they're in a unique position to facilitate a dialogue with their community at scale in a way that no one else can do. After the first round, we re-broadcast and made available that program to another 36 stations (we don't tend to count re-broadcast rates in our numbers). We have had some cases where the program first broadcast locally is then broadcast nationally.

GiveWell: What would you do with \$500K in more funding? \$1 million in more funding? \$5 million? Are there things you've wanted to fund but haven't been able to?

Media Impact: I think the first place is that we're in a wonderful period of growth, from 7 to 28 countries. We've moved from relying on board funding to a model where we're funded by partners and fundraising. The first \$500,000, I'd designate to building a world-class program team to ensure that we

have the team we need to provide the program development services. We want to be able to give local partners the support they deserve.

Second, there are certain areas where there's a need such as Southern and East Africa where there's an HIV/AIDS epidemic with anywhere from 20-38% rates of infection in this region. Clearly we believe these programs we have could make a huge difference on this type of issue. Also, globally, we're interested in women's empowerment; if you invest in women, you invest in the community.

Third, we're seeing a resurgence of mobile in many parts of the world. In Africa, we would move straight to mobile; this involves using mobile phones, having soap opera on the phone. Perhaps also a video game online that promotes women.

GiveWell: Would it be possible to send a list of things that you'd fund with further donations, prioritized by level of interest you have?

Impact Media: Yes, we can do this.

GiveWell: Going back to evaluation: when you think about the information you get from pre and post surveys, maybe involving listeners versus non-listeners, do you wonder about the extent to which we can attribute any changes to the program rather than other possible causes? Do you try to rule out the likelihood that other causes were the cause in some way?

Media Impact: There are a couple of ways that we can look at causality. First, where people are going to health clinics to use a service, we have the clinic staff ask, "Where did you hear about this service?" We are always taking into account that there are other programs going on. We also use focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Another thing we do is to cut through the noise of causality is to check how many people know a particular name mentioned in a drama. For example, in the Caribbean, we mention the "catapult condom" in the program. This was a condom developed as part of the community mobilization for the story. From our surveys, we found that the percentage of people who had heard of Catapult condoms was higher than the percentage of people who had heard of the show. This shows people are talking about the issues, about condoms, not just about the show itself. Further, we look at behavior change like rate of women going in to get contraceptives from health clinics, and condom sales by providers.