

SARA

A ROLE MODEL FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN AFRICA

**OVERVIEW, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS,
SUMMARY OF MID-TERM EVALUATION,
AND COMMERCIALIZATION**

**A review of the Sara Communication Initiative
for its introduction to Ghana**

UNICEF

and

**Johns Hopkins University
Center for Communication Programs**



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Note: This document is derived from an earlier compilation of the work achieved on the research and implementation of the Sara Communication Initiative (SCI) by Nuzhat Shahzadi, Regional Sara Coordinator, 1996-2001; Dr. Mira Aghi, Research Consultant, and Rachel Carnegie, Creative Consultant to the SCI, as well as Justus Olielo and Richard Mabala, Sara researchers and programmers. The final editing of this document was carried out by Rachel Carnegie with inputs by Caroline den Dulk, Programme Communication Officer, UNICEF-Accra and Neill McKee, Senior Technical Advisor, Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs.

PREFACE: SARA IN GHANA

The Sara Communication Initiative was developed in Eastern and Southern Africa in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, focusing on the adolescent female population. When UNICEF Ghana wanted to use this same entry point for programming in Ghana, a tri-partite relationship between UNICEF programmes for HIV/AIDS, Girl Child Education and Rights Protection became apparent. In addition, a partnership was formed with Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP) in Ghana, supported by USAID, for Sara utilization and dissemination within the *Love Life - Stop AIDS* program.

HIV/AIDS has become a major concern in Ghana today. Gender gaps, misconceptions and ignorance, lack of societal responsibility, and lack of proper life skills are exposing youth to risky behaviour, ultimately leading to its spread. In addition, growing disparity between girls and boys in educational attainment also poses a great barrier to the overall development and empowerment of girls and prevents them from developing appropriate Life Skills, such as negotiation, critical thinking, assertiveness, self esteem, and many more. Data suggests that women who have a primary school education delay marriage and childbearing by about one and a half years compared with those who have no schooling; those with a secondary education postpone these events even further. Staying in school has become a major concern for the survival, protection and development of girls in Ghana. Research has shown that out-of-school girls are at much greater risk with regard to HIV/AIDS and other health risks.

One of the principal reasons for increased vulnerability of adolescents to HIV infection is the lack of appropriate information to make correct decisions in risky situations. Patterns of marriage and sexual behaviour vary among cultural groups and the specific needs of young women vary as well. In Ghana, there are some ongoing practices that seriously threaten the development of girls and puts them in a vulnerable position. There is the phenomenon of child bondage and a special form of child slavery called *Trokosi*. There is also increasing concern over the growing migration of girls from the northern part of Ghana to the cities, where they are working as head porters and find themselves in a vulnerable position.

But whatever the cultural specific issues might be, the need for accurate information and education is universal. Experience so far has proven that information alone is not enough to ensure the development or change in behaviours necessary to stop the spread of the pandemic. Extra effort is now required to 'get ahead of the virus' by equipping people, especially adolescents, with Life Skills which they need to decide upon and maintain healthy and safe life styles and practice responsible behaviour. Adolescents also need a supportive environment that will protect and promote their health and development.

The apparent constraints or threats to the development of girls in Ghana can well be put together in a rights framework. These relate to a wide range of child rights that require special attention for the betterment of the lives of girls. Rights to education, non-discrimination, rights to protection from sexual exploitation, abduction, violence and harmful traditional practices, rights to health, to protection from harmful and exploitative labour, and rights to life and maximum survival and development. Promotion and protection of these rights will have great impact on the development opportunities for girls.

In order to be able to make a positive impact on all of the above rights issues and ultimately change the situation of the girl child in Ghana, there is the need for an integrated and innovative communication strategy. The underlying behaviours and social context have to be approached in a holistic strategy that is going to deal with the complexity of issues and actors involved. An important challenge is to transfer these abstract rights concepts into a language and daily reality that communicates with the girl and her family in Ghana. So far, in Ghana, there is a lack of approaches, methods and tools that will encourage the various types of two way communication that is so much needed: child-to-child, child-to-parent/teacher, youth-to-

youth and parent-to-youth. In addition, children in Ghana (and elsewhere in West Africa) often lack a supportive and encouraging role model to guide them, to motivate them and to be an outlet for their feelings and thoughts.

In considering the various communication strategies that could make an impact on the situation of girls, UNICEF Ghana thought it to be imperative to learn from other experiences and benefit from existing programmes, such as the Sara Communication Initiative. In order to be able to assess the value of the Sara Initiative to the development programmes in Ghana, there was a need to document the development process of the initiative and the experiences in implementing it as a national communication strategy in other countries in Africa.

UNICEF and JHU/CCP have taken up this challenge to document the development and implementation processes of the Sara Initiative so far. This document will not only help Ghana to plan and strategize more effectively for the implementation of the Sara Initiative, it may support many other countries in Africa as well. It may help potential users to understand the power of a multi-media initiative like the SCI. At this point in time there are three categories of uses of the Sara Initiative:

A communication strategy to enhance individual behaviours or social change in the community on issues directly related to HIV/AIDS, girl child education, child rights' protection, etc. Sara is a tool that can stimulate discussion between different groups in the community and bring out sensitive issues or even taboo topics. When the materials are used with good facilitation, a change process will be set in motion. The stories of Sara can reach beyond the girls and boys, involving parents, teachers and other influential figures in the community in a process of reflection, analysis and action on the issues raised.

A national role model for girls' development and other child rights issues. Because of the attractive format of cartoon characters, that can be adapted to many other forms of popular media, Sara has the potential to gain national popularity and fame, which will increase the impact at all other levels as well. Sara will become a communicator for various development issues, through a whole range of media. She will thereby become a role model for girls and an advocate for their rights.

A strategic framework to encourage integrated communication planning. Since the whole initiative is built on an integrated approach to communication and follows a carefully developed communication plan, Sara can serve as a framework for other initiatives to be linked to, stimulating wider partnership building.

It is crucial that the Sara Initiative is integrated into existing programmes as a supportive communication tool, and is not regarded as a stand-alone project. The materials need to be used in a well-designed facilitation process, making use of a range of participatory activities, to ensure that Sara achieves her potential impact. So far, too many interventions have been limited to dissemination of materials and "group discussions". Listeners and viewers need to be involved in the initiative as active communicators themselves.

In addition to the relevance of the Sara Initiative for a specific country like Ghana, there are also more regional issues to consider here. In the West and Central African Region, there are some regional themes that are related to the programme areas of HIV and AIDS, Girl Child Education and Child Rights Protection. There are issues that either carry a regional character or that even (negatively) reinforce each other. Problems like child migration and slavery, Female Genital Cutting and Early Marriage are not confined to any single country. These are the types of issues confronting the region that require integrated and regional programming and for which Sara could be a driving force.

1. BACKGROUND

In Sub-Saharan Africa, many of the rights of children are not recognized and protected by their families and communities. Many children are forced into labour and are pushed into adult responsibilities before they are ready. Their right to an education is often not recognized. Millions lack proper access to health care and protection from harmful traditional practices. They also lack protection from neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse and exploitation; problems that have been further exacerbated by many years of wars and ethnic conflicts. On top of all this, in the past decade, HIV/AIDS has become the greatest new threat to children's well being and survival. In sub-Saharan Africa by the end of 2001, there were an estimated 28.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS, including a growing number of young people - 5.7 million females and 2.8 million males between 15 and 24 years of age (UNAIDS, Dec. 2001). For this same age group in Eastern and Southern Africa, females are up to six times more likely to be infected than males (UNAIDS, June 2000).

One of the fundamental causes of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa is gender inequity (SIDA, Nov. 1998; Long and Ankrah, 1996). Not only is the female biologically more susceptible to acquiring HIV (Watstein and Laurich, 1991), women and girls are more vulnerable due to socio-cultural conditioning. In many parts of Africa, the manifestations of this inequity can be seen at an early age. The rights of the African girl child are less recognized and valued than those of the boy. She has fewer opportunities than boys in almost all areas of human endeavor. She is regarded as someone who is "just passing through the home" and consequently the family invests less in her care and development. Her primary role is that of child bearing and nurturing (Mbugua, 2000). At an early age, the girl learns to perform a subservient role and as she grows older she lacks basic psychosocial skills, such as the ability to communicate her wishes assertively, to think critically and creatively, to make decisions and negotiate, to solve problems in social relationships, to resist pressure, and to and cope with emotions and conflict (Carnegie and Birrell Weisen, 2000). There have been many interventions focused on adolescents, yet the gender-based socialization of boys and girls continues to create power dynamics in sexual relationships that put young women at a disadvantage (Blanc, A.K. 2001). This has grave implications for the girl, given the rapid spread of HIV.

In 1994, UNICEF in Eastern and Southern Africa decided that in order to bring about a transformation in the situation of the adolescent female, a dynamic, creative and far-reaching communication strategy was required. In January 1994, a presentation on the development and potential of the Meena Initiative for South Asia (Aghi, 1996; Carnegie, 1996) was given to a regional meeting of the African Women in Development Network. The participants, including the Ministers of Women's Affairs from Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, expressed a good deal of interest in a similar initiative for Africa. Beginning in October 1994, a large number of UNICEF country offices in Africa joined the project by acting as research bases and supplying researchers, writers and artistic talent for the regional design process, and by participating in planning and implementation of the project at national level.

The Sara Communication Initiative (SCI) (McKee, 1996) is a complementary regional project designed to support and reinforce on-going and future program activities supported by UNICEF,

its partners and any organization with similar goals. It addresses many of the key articles outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UNICEF, 1990) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979). The focus of Sara remains the survival, protection, development and participation rights of the child (see Box 1). However, instead of addressing child rights in an abstract way, Sara articulates these rights in a way that is directly relevant to African communities, using formative research to formulate these in their own terms and language and from their own perspectives.

Box 1: Rights of the Child Represented in Sara Stories

- *Definition of a child (Art. 1)*
- *Right to non-discrimination (Art. 2)*
- *Right to life, survival and development (Art. 6)*
- *Respect the views of the child (Art. 12)*
- *Freedom of expression (Art. 13)*
- *Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art. 14)*
- *Access to appropriate information (Art. 17)*
- *Protection from all forms of violence (Art. 19)*
- *Protection of refugee children (Art. 22)*
- *Rights to health and nutrition, and access to health services (Art. 24)*
- *Protection from harmful, traditional practices (Art. 24)*
- *Right to education which will develop full potential (Art. 28 & 29)*
- *Right to leisure, recreation and culture (Art. 31)*
- *Protection from child labour (Art. 32)*
- *Protection from drug abuse (Art. 33)*
- *Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (Art. 34)*
- *Protection from torture, degrading treatment and deprivation of liberty (Art. 37)*
- *Protection from armed conflict (Art. 38 & 39)*
- *Proper administration of juvenile justice (Art. 40)*

Source: UNICEF, 1990

The overall goal and general objectives of the SCI are as follows:

Overall goal statement:

To promote the Rights of the Child and support their implementation and realization, with special focus on adolescent female children in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR), and in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa where the materials are found to be acceptable and appropriate.

General objectives:

To research, produce and disseminate a regional communication package on the Rights of the Child in order to:

1. Create awareness and advocate for the reduction of existing disparities in the status and treatment of girls.
2. Support social mobilization processes designed to realize the potential of female children and to foster their participation in development.
3. Produce a dynamic role model for girls that will assist in their acquisition of psychosocial life skills essential for empowerment.
4. Provide a model for improved gender relationships, beginning at an early age.
5. Communicate information regarding the survival, protection and development of children, including specific messages on education, health, nutrition and freedom from exploitation and abuse.
6. Build the capacity of African writers, researchers and artists through the development of the Sara communication packages.

Sara experienced rapid growth through core countries in ESAR and spread to West and Central Africa as well (see Box 2).

Box 2: Participating Countries	
<u>Eastern and Southern Africa</u>	<u>Western and Central Africa</u>
Eritrea*	Nigeria
Ethiopia*	Ghana (new partner '01)
Kenya*	Ivory Coast
Uganda*	Guinea Bissau
Tanzania*	DR Congo
Malawi*	Cameroon
Mozambique*	
Namibia*	
South Africa*	
Zambia*	
Zimbabwe*	
Rwanda	
Angola	
Botswana	
Mauritius	
Madagascar	
Comoros	
* <i>Formative research countries</i>	
Main source: UNICEF, Sept. 1999	

Sara is an example of an “entertainment education” strategy (JHU/CCP, 1989), which seeks to harness the drawing power of popular entertainment to convey educational messages. The SCI illustrates how creative and exciting story lines can be used to promote social issues in an appealing

and provocative way. The SCI chose the animated film in video format as the “flagship” medium through which a set of characters and core set of stories would “come to life”. However, in much of Africa, access to broadcast TV remains relatively low, with the possible exception of South Africa. There are an estimated 134 TV receivers per 1000 population in South Africa, compared to an estimated 20 in Botswana, 64 in Cote d’Ivoire, 5.5 in Ethiopia, 93 in Ghana, 26 in Kenya, 66 in Nigeria, 3.3 in Tanzania, and 33 in Zimbabwe (Fillip, 2000). However, there is a tendency to treat TV more as a communal resource, with much sharing and group viewing occurring (DFID, 2002). Recent estimates for radio ownership per 1000 inhabitants are: 355 in South Africa as compared to 154 in Botswana, 161 in Cote d’Ivoire, 202 in Ethiopia, 236 in Ghana, 108 in Kenya, 226 in Nigeria, 280 in Tanzania, and 102 in Zimbabwe (Fillip, 2000).

However, broadcast statistics do not account for the growing informal channels of audio and video distribution in the region. There are numerous informal networks for the distribution of audio tapes and CDs and videos through NGOs, churches, commercial outlets and other channels. Audio tapes, mainly music, and videos are shown through informal transport channels, restaurants and bars. “Video theaters” are quickly growing in small communities. For instance, in Kenya, Sara was disseminated through *Regional Reach*, a commercial video network with over 300 video players in public places in smaller towns. In addition, there are still film theatres reaching the young, urban, “up-market” sector and mobile video or film circuits owned by private firms, NGOs and governments, which reach the rural, “down-market” sector with entertaining and educational films, as well as advertising (Steadman, 1998).

Broadcast is important in developing awareness and knowledge as a first step. However, it was decided that in most instances for behavior development and behavior change to take place, the use of Sara video, audio and print materials in formal and non-formal educational settings was probably more important than either TV or radio broadcast. Sara learning modules were developed for facilitated discussion groups and training. These include interactive methods that are normally required to develop psychosocial life skills for appropriate behavioral responses to risk situations (Carnegie and Birrell Weisen, 2000). The project team recognized that the behaviors which are responsible for rapid HIV/AIDS transmission in Africa are complex, and that positive and sustained social change and individual behaviour change would be a challenge to achieve (KIT, 1998).

It was decided that the complexity of factors required for successful behavior change and positive behavior development required a multi-media, entertainment education approach that would capture the imagination and attention of adolescents and be acceptable to their parents. The Sara stories, it was concluded, must be informative, must motivate people to change and must address the ability or life skills to act in a given situation. The stories also were designed to illustrate the various environmental factors that facilitate or impede positive change, either at the individual or community level. At the same time as Sara was being developed, UNICEF supported the development of a new model to guide work in the area of HIV/AIDS, girls’ and women’s empowerment and any program with a strong behavior change or behavior development component (McKee et al, 2000). Sara was grounded in this model as illustrated in Box 3, below.

Box 3: Behaviour Change and Behaviour Development



Source: McKee et al (2000), *Involving People, Evolving Behaviour*

As mentioned above, the visual components of the project involved the comic book and animated film formats. In viewing live action films or photographs of reality, people in multi-ethnic environments respond to cultural and social cues such as dress, facial features, language and accents, housing and vegetation that may alienate and distract them. They may be fascinated by what they see but may miss the main message and conclude that the situations posed are “someone else’s problem”. However, with proper formative research, a set of characters, backgrounds and story lines can be designed in animated film and comic book formats which “strike a common chord” across a diverse region. (McBean and McKee, 1996)

The other value of animated film and comic books is that very difficult social issues can be portrayed in sensitive, non-threatening ways, without losing message impact. Careful formative research into such issues was central to the formulation of the Sara concept. In 12 countries over a three-year period, over 8000 people were involved in interviews and focus group discussions to evolve the concepts, characters, names, themes, story lines and visual images for Sara. Research was carried out with groups of girls, boys, men and women in separate or combined groups, depending on the issue. The stories that have evolved come from people in rural areas and in peri-urban slums (UNICEF, Sept.1999). Through this process, the SCI stories were constructed to highlight the real problems facing young people in the region and also to offer solutions, as articulated by these young people and their families and communities.

2. SARA THEMES AND EPISODES

The themes that underpin all of the core stories of the Sara series are the *Rights of the Child*. However, child rights expressed in the language of “obligations” often do not translate properly in African cultures. The extensive research undertaken for the development of Sara has unearthed a means of communicating such rights in a relevant and appropriate way to ensure greater acceptance by audiences. The rights to information, freedom of thought and expression, respect for views, and participation of the child in decisions which affect his or her own future, are fundamental in the process of development of the child/adolescent into a healthy adult. By exercising these rights, adolescents develop psychosocial skills, such as communication and assertiveness skills, that are often denied girls through their social and cultural conditioning.

However, both rights and life skills concepts do not provide drama by themselves and they often are communicated in an academic or abstract way. SCI sought to contextualise these in the concrete problems listed below (see Box 4), which were identified as the basic themes for the core stories of the SCI. These problems provide the substance of real-life drama facing adolescent girls in Africa today.

Box 4: Main Problems Faced by the Adolescent Girl in Sub-Saharan Africa	
<p>Core Problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV/AIDS and STIs • Unwanted pregnancy • Early marriage • Workload/child labour • Sexual abuse and exploitation • Push out from school • Female genital cutting • Sexual initiation rites <p>McKee, 1996</p>	<p>Related Problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor family life education • Poor psychosocial life skills • Lack of career options • Lack of inheritance status • Limited societal expectations • Exploitation in employment • Violence and abuse, especially in armed conflict • Lack of economic opportunities • Low access to health care and other social services

Sara is a multi-media project with seven comic books and five animated films, to date. The flagship animated films have elements of realism and drama, blended with serious messages. This combination results in a unique fusion of fun and adventure and an entertaining method of imparting educational content. The Sara character was designed to capture the concept of a “positive deviant” (Blanc, A.K. 2001) as a promising behaviour model for young girls in Africa. Sara, the charismatic heroine of the series, is an adolescent girl living in peri-urban Africa. Like many girls of her age, Sara faces nearly insurmountable socio-cultural as well as economic obstacles in her desire to reach her goals in life. But her aspirations to improve herself and her community, and her quest for alternative solutions to problems, is an inspiration to anyone who encounters her. Sara’s ability to negotiate and persuade and her determination never to give up - even in desperate situations - makes her a dynamic role model for girls; she inspires self-esteem

and models the life skills essential for empowerment. Rather than being presented as a victim, evoking pity and sympathy, Sara emphasizes girls' potential. The stories expose the issues that hinder their development and illustrate the supportive environment which they need to flourish.

As mentioned above, from the beginning it was decided that Sara would be, fundamentally, a project that addresses HIV/AIDS: one of the major threats faced by the adolescent girl in Africa since the mid-1980s. Although most efforts in HIV/AIDS prevention in the early 1990s were focussed on older age groups, the Sara team believed that it was necessary to start at as young an age as possible and that girls, in particular, had to be empowered, recognizing their unequal start in life and earlier sexual activity. However, the series was also designed to be inclusive of boys' needs and interests, and includes male role models. During its development, the first Sara story, "The Special Gift", was seen essentially as a communication tool for HIV/AIDS prevention - that is, educating girls and keeping them in safe school environments as long as possible gives them protection from HIV (UNAIDS, June 2000).

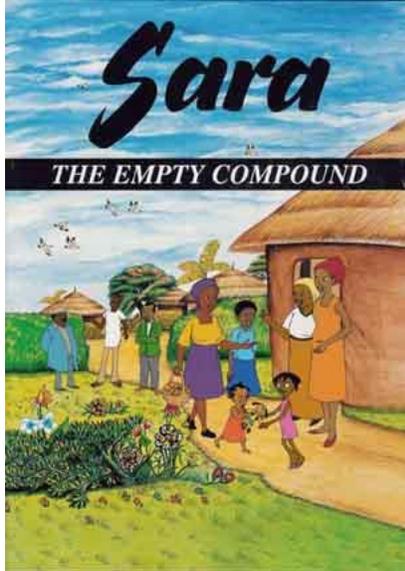


Sara talking with her mother and grandmother

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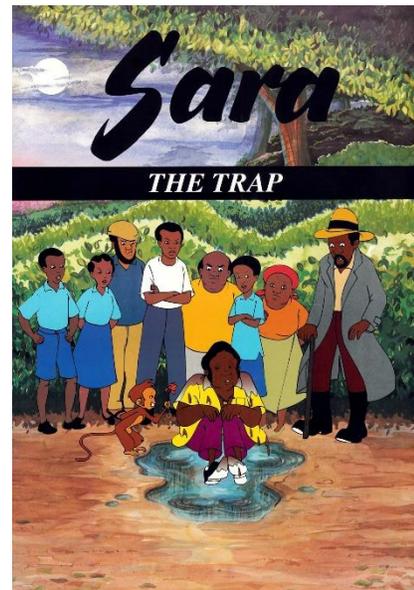
All of the subsequent stories were built around themes which had a direct relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its impact on the adolescent girl, although AIDS messages do not dominate Sara stories. It was decided that such an approach would lead to audience fatigue and be counterproductive. Young audiences, in particular, are suspicious of single focused messages which preach to them on issues that are largely defined by adults. Through the regional formative research process (see section 4), Sara stories were defined by young people themselves.

The reality of HIV/AIDS in Africa is woven integrally and/or subtly through the following Sara stories (adapted from MML, 2001):

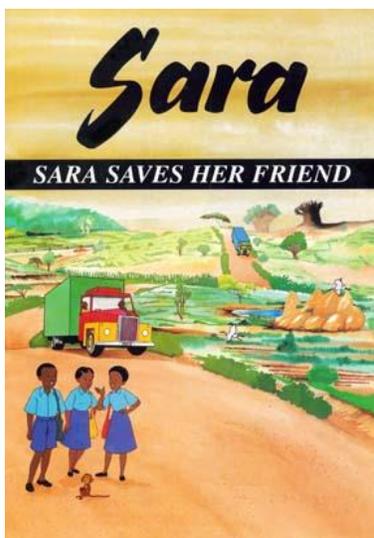


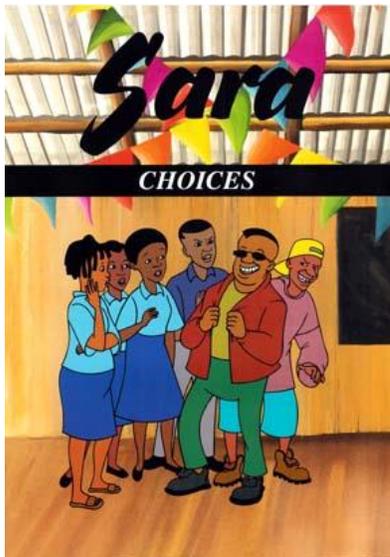
The Empty Compound: Sara's cousin has died, leaving his young wife, Sofia, and their baby son. Although Uncle says his son died of cancer, everyone knows he died of AIDS. Then Uncle starts blaming Sofia for his son's death and banishes her from his compound. Sara is pleased when Sofia comes to stay with her family but whenever Sara and Sofia go out together people whisper and point at them. Some even call Sofia a witch. Sara and her family show how and why it is necessary to confront prejudice and acknowledge the reality of Aids.

The Trap: Mr. Mbuta, the shopkeeper and local sugar daddy, tries to trick Sara into becoming yet another of his 'girlfriends'. Sara's mother is away and so Sara cannot turn to her for help. Then her grandmother tells a story about men who turn into monsters. Sara realizes she has to take decisive action against Mr. Mbuta and the potential diseases that he is spreading. With some quick thinking and help from her friends, Sara turns Mr. Mbuta's trick around....



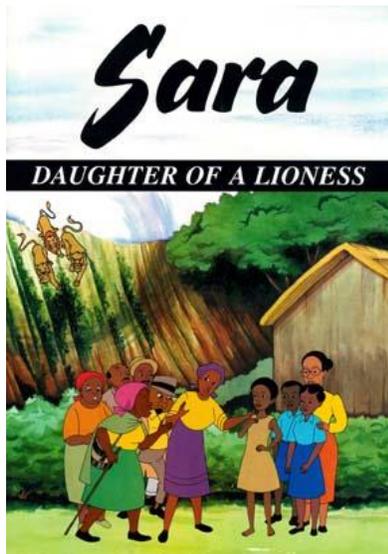
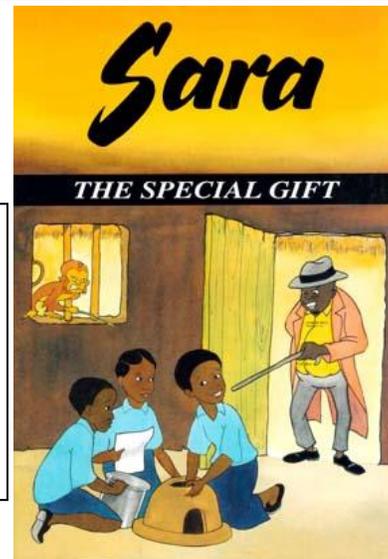
Sara Saves Her Friend: Sara is very worried about her friend Amina. Since Amina's parents died, there has been no money, and she will have to leave school even though she is top of her class at maths. She plans to find a job, perhaps in the city or at the bar where her sister, Grace, works. But the customers are men who sleep around and spread diseases like HIV/AIDS. Amina finds herself in a dangerous situation when she goes to visit Grace at the bar, and it is up to Sara and her resourceful pet monkey, Zingo, to rescue her from two truck-drivers.





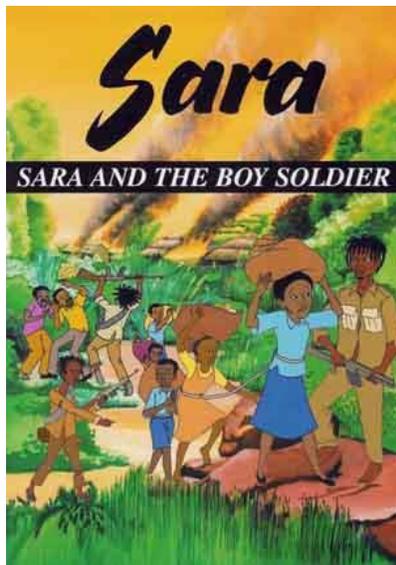
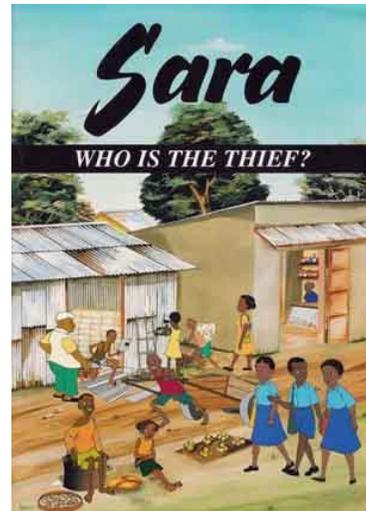
Choices: Sara really likes Musa and Musa is more than a little attracted to her. But it seems that most boys are only interested in having sex with girls; being friends is not enough. And the more girls they sleep with, the more boys feel they can prove that they are “men”. Sara wants to wait. As her teacher says, why throw away your education and your future just to please a boy? Then Sara’s friend Tamala falls pregnant, and the boy responsible is somebody Sara may know...

The Special Gift: There is no money to send Sara to secondary school, even though she loves school and is doing well. To make it worse, most of her family thinks that girls should stay at home to cook and clean. But with the help of her school friends and some inspiration from a book, Sara manages to change all this...



Daughter of a Lioness: Sara learns that her grandmother and uncle intend to get her circumcised. Sara is determined to refuse, but her grandmother is equally determined that Sara will not be a ‘whole woman’ without circumcision. Sara is aware that female genital cutting (FGC) can lead to many health problems, including an increased risk of HIV infection later in life. An adventure unfolds, taking Sara through many nightmares and conflicts with those who would uphold this harmful traditional practice. Sara uses her critical and creative thinking skills, and her recollection of a science experiment to save herself from this predicament and make the community reconsider the age-old custom. While some people are shocked by Sara's behaviour, her mother has come round to support Sara’s position and defends her daughter's decision. “Our customs should bring life, not death,” she says.

Who's Afraid of the Thief? Sara is delighted when her sophisticated aunt invites her to come and live with her and attend a good school in the city. It's the chance of a lifetime to get a good education! However when she gets there she finds that instead of going to school she is expected to wash and cook. She also has to contend with the advances of an uncle. It seems that she is destined to be a child slave like other children she meets in the city. Then some money goes missing and Sara is accused of being the thief. Sara contacts her parents. Her determination and resourcefulness prevent her from becoming one more victim.



Sara and the Boy Soldier: Sara and her friends Juma and Maya are abducted when rebel soldiers attack their village. Later, in the confusion of another fight the children are able to escape, but Maya's leg is badly wounded by a landmine. Sara manages to be reunited with her family in a camp for displaced people, although she faces sexual harassment from a camp official. Sara needs help to overcome the trauma of her abduction, and she also learns to help Maya to come to terms with her injury. In the end, the boy soldier who first helped abduct Sara and her friends, is returned to the community. Following counselling and a traditional cleansing ceremony, he is helped to reintegrate at school. (This episode has been produced only in comic book format.)

In retrospect, the approach taken by the Sara team to HIV/AIDS prevention seems to have proven useful. It appears that in Uganda, with the accumulated work of many community-based, NGO, faith-based and media-based initiatives, there has been success in reducing new infection rates, largely through the primary behavior change of young people, especially girls. There is strong evidence in Uganda that traditional approaches to condom promotion had little effect on HIV prevalence, except in very "high-risk" sexual activity. Instead, the increase in age of sexual debut and reduction of numbers of sexual partners have had the most impact overall (see Box 5, below). Although there is no scientific way of measuring the comparative effect of all of these interventions *post facto*, it appears that in Uganda, programs aimed at young people, and particularly young girls, are having the desired impact of building their skills to resist unwanted sex through both individual behavior formation, as well as group and community norm setting.

From the beginning, Sara was envisaged as a set of tools, not a separate programme with its own geographic implementation areas and groups. It was thought that a set of entertaining stories delivered through high quality products could be taken up by many organizations who lack the resources to create such research-based materials. It was hoped that many organizations would take up the “Sara banner” and use her to the fullest extent in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa. It is evident from Box 6 (below), and from the evidence outlined and analyzed in the following sections, that this has started to happen. However, it is also evident that Sara has only reached a small portion of her possible audiences through past and present efforts. Much more emphasis on implementation and the development of new products, as well as new ways of using old products, is required for Sara to reach her full potential.



The final version of Sara's Family

Box 5: Main Factors in the Decline of HIV in Uganda

Uganda is the country that has had the most dramatic decline in HIV infection rates. HIV prevalence declined from 21.1% to 6.1% among pregnant women between 1991 and 2000. Beginning in 1992, there was a downward trend in both STI and HIV infection rates in Uganda. Decline in infection rates was greatest among the 15-19 age group, and a UNAIDS analysis shows that this was mostly due to the rise in the median age of first intercourse by 2 years, increasing from age 15 to 17. Rise in age of sexual debut among females is particularly important because of the increased biological vulnerability of young females to HIV infection.



There were numerous studies after 1993 that documented behavioural change in Uganda (UNAIDS, 1997) where there has been an “A-B-C approach” (**A**bstain, **B**e faithful, use **C**ondoms if A&B fail). Most studies show that reduction in the number of sexual partners (which may be causally related to the “fidelity” strategies), and delay of sexual debut among youth (which seems to be related to the abstinence strategy), are the major forms of behavioural change that have occurred in Uganda. Condoms remain important for those engaged in commercial sex or casual sex. But condom use is more passive than **A-B** and arguably involves less of a personal commitment. However, it is clear that the vast majority of prevention resources have gone to condom promotion, and more recently, to the treatment of the treatable STDs, because public health experts do not believe that change will come about through promoting abstinence, fidelity or monogamy, or even reduction in number of sexual partners. However, the Uganda data appears to refute this.

It is noteworthy that male condom user levels were only 3-5% in Uganda before 1992. And this refers to the proportion of men who reported “ever” using a condom, not those who claimed regular use. It therefore seems unlikely that condom use significantly contributed to the onset of decline in STI and HIV infection rates, even if increased condom use in subsequent years helped this process. Condoms were not widely available in Uganda until after 1993, and then mostly in urban areas. By 1998, 20% of Ugandans reported *ever* having used a condom (average national male rate, rural and urban). Some reports continue to claim that the world’s great success story in AIDS prevention, Uganda, owes its achievement to condoms, but this is does not appear to be a true representation of the Uganda story.

Adapted from: Green, E. C. (2001)

Box 6: Sara in *Young Talk*, Uganda

In Uganda, the *Straight Talk Foundation* has been carrying out media and school based programs aimed at primary behavior development and behavior change among adolescents through newspaper magazines, other print materials, radio programs and school-based initiatives. Their newspaper magazine, called *Young Talk*, has incorporated Sara since the mid-1990s. It has a monthly print run of 280,000 copies of which 16 copies are distributed in English to each of 12,000 primary schools in Uganda, where the main language of instruction remains English. In a survey of 1,380 children in upper primary children in 2000 it was found that 83% had read *Young Talk* and that approximately 23% of respondents spontaneously represented Sara in their drawing of things they recalled from the magazine. The magazine contains a problem page, letters for young adolescents, personal stories, etc. but Sara represents 12 to 25% of total space. The spontaneous representations of Sara in 2000 represented a two-fold increase over 1999 findings, indicating that Sara was growing in popularity and teachers were starting to use Sara in more interactive, skills-building ways, as is evident below.

“...we let them know that the purpose of this paper is to do things like this, so now we are going to do a role play, playing a man who is drunk, trying to befriend a child.”

Steven Kawumba, Class 5 Teacher, Buwagi Primary School, Kamuli

*“... For example, when we are counseling girls, like in the case of Amina (Sara’s friend) which appeared in *Young Talk*, we always refer to it saying, ‘What happened to her?’--- ”*

Goretti, Teacher, Afere Primary School, Nebbi

One teacher highlighted the important association between support of teacher/adults and children’s enthusiasm for Sara in these words:

“...for example, about Sara and Zingo, children like the story and it is educative. It conveys a message to them because in our locality, this kind of business is common where grown men take these young girls from bars and the girls get problems from there.”

Jane Ntawuluhanga, Teacher, Mubunga Primary School, Kisoro.

It is interesting that schools in the lower socio-economic category contributed to almost 60% of the “Sara” representations in 2000, whereas middle class schools made up 14% and higher class schools made up 29%. This is a particular encouraging finding since it indicates that children from disadvantaged areas can participate positively and fully in the learning process through the use of *Young Talk* and Sara.

Conclusions:

- Sara continues to be a very popular children’s educational comic strip, especially for young adolescents. It was spontaneously identified by at least 1 out of 4 of the young adolescents surveyed.
- Children and adults can both appreciate the educational qualities of the cartoon and can successfully use it in different socio-economic learning settings.
- Sara cartoons are an effective communication tool even with children who have low English proficiency.
- Sara is used in a variety of ways to guide children through interactive learning methods including discussions and role plays.
- Teachers and children both find the Sara comic strip characters are like themselves. For this reason, the comic strip speaks to children directly as a guide about many central themes.

Adapted from: Straight Talk Foundation (Nov. 2000)

3. FORMATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

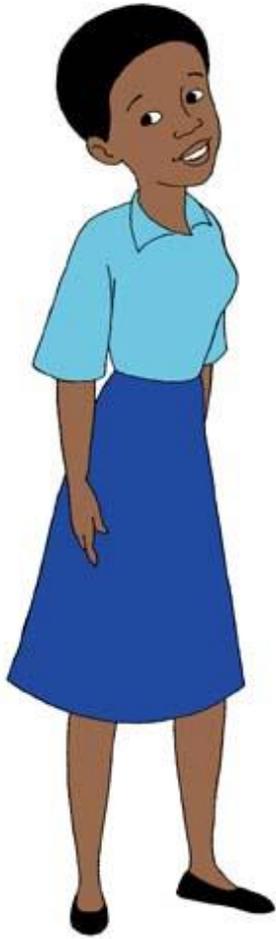
Introduction

The formative research process is the cornerstone of the Sara Communication Initiative. It was probably one of the most extensive, bottom-up research process of its kind in the history of development communication. (See Appendix 1 for full details.) The whole process began in October 1994 through a participatory consultation with over 60 researchers, writers and gender specialists from 10 African countries who gathered at Machakos Kenya to develop the possible themes, story lines, characters and names of the SCI and carry out some initial research with adolescents in nearby schools. At that time, the names for what would become *Sara* and her choice of pet animal (see Box 7, below) were brainstormed and voted upon by what would become the Sara regional team. At this meeting, there was a great deal of debate on the appropriateness and kind of pet that Sara should have, if any. However, the team was strongly in favour of keeping animals in the story and voted to try out both a monkey and a lizard, as well as other animals, all of which would have to stand up to rigorous formative research.

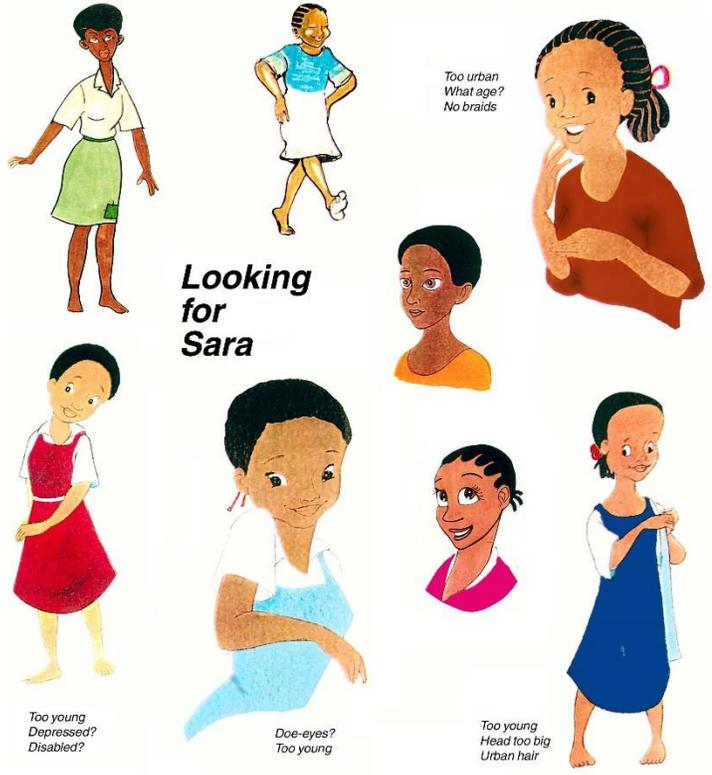
The stories and designs were evolved and refined out of an extensive qualitative research process. For the pilot phase in 1995, 572 focus group discussions were conducted with over 5000 respondents in 10 countries. Two more countries and another 3000 people were involved in subsequent research up to the end of 1998 (see Box 8, below).

The formative research was conducted by the country research teams in three phases: first, preliminary concept testing to explore the problems and possible solutions as articulated by girls and their communities. Second, research was carried out on draft story lines covering specific topics in order to gauge the respondents' reactions through a set of criteria, including the stories' relevance, credibility, cultural acceptability, and potential to stimulate discussion. Finally, research was undertaken to pretest the revised versions of the stories, along with colour illustrations to check visual representation and to fine-tune the stories.

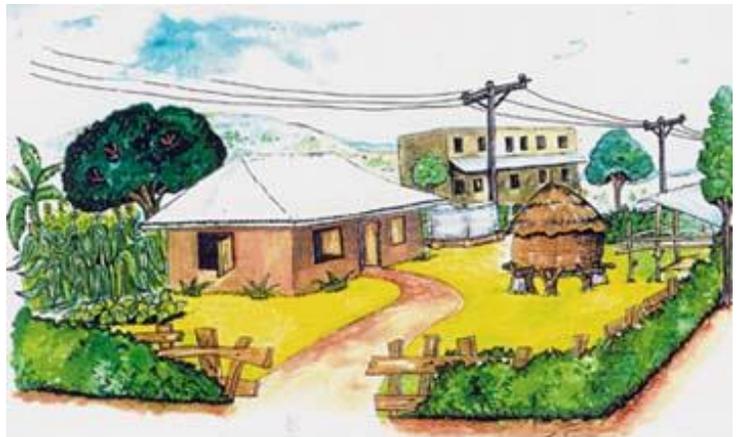
The first cycle of research also included specific work to establish the names, attributes and appearance of a cast of characters. Writers had created a number of stories involving different characters, with different names. Artists from across the region had also produced many different designs for the girl heroine and her family and community setting. Research in 10 countries identified which character and background designs were most acceptable and which names were recognizable across the region. Through this process, *Sara* and her family and friends were born (see next page).



The final Sara character



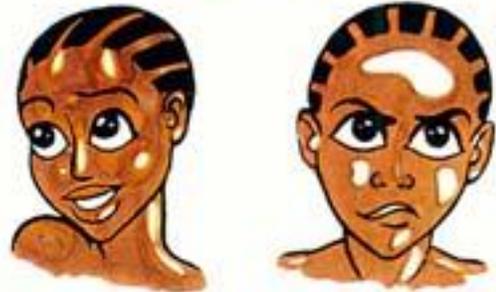
Many versions of Sara were tested



Various background scenes were tested to arrive at Sara's village

The research also illustrated issues of visual literacy - e.g. an artist's use of light reflections on the face was perceived as leprosy spots to some of the target audience. Such wealth of detail, drawn together from research groups from the different countries, provided the insights to enable the writers and artists to tease out the common issues and produce materials to which people can relate across Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, Sept. 1999).

Each cycle of research concluded with a regional workshop in which the researchers, writers and artists met to discuss, analyze and synthesize the research findings for the region and thereby revise and refine the stories and designs. The national research teams produced their own detailed reports at each stage. Fascinating details emerged through the research process. It uncovered the wide range of reactions to a particular issue - e.g. pregnancy of unmarried teenagers, which is considered unacceptable to some communities and welcome proof of fertility to others. It highlighted matters of cultural sensitivity - e.g. the female circumciser portrayed in "Daughter of a Lioness" should be portrayed as a familiar 'aunt' figure from the village, not as a kind of terrifying witch as the artists originally drew her.



Artists' original concept of circumciser

Final version – lady with the basket



Box 7: Finding a Name for Sara

A shortlist of names was drawn up at the original regional workshop in October 1994. These names were pre-tested along with the story line. Although no final consensus was achieved in the first round of research, the list of names was narrowed down and again researched.

After a year the girl heroine was finally provided with an identity, “**Sara**”. This is a name that was acceptable in both Christian and Muslim communities in the nine countries where it was tested across Africa. The other names in the short list were given to Sara’s family and friends.

The list below shows the revised list of names and the number of countries in which they were fully acceptable. Over 100 names had been suggested in the process. All the names in the final list could be used in the series.

		<i>No of countries where name fully acceptable</i>
Girl:	Sara	9
	Amina	8
	Frika	5
	Maria	4
	Rehema	3
Boy:	Themba	4
	Juma	4
	Abraham	3
	Bahati	3
	Tsumi	3
Pet monkey:	Zingo	9
	Paka	5

Source: UNICEF, Sept. 1999

Box 8: Sara Formative Research Schedule

Oct 1994:	Launching workshop in Kenya including orientation of researchers
Jan-Feb 1995:	Sub-regional training workshops in Uganda and Malawi * 23 researchers trained and country research plans prepared
Apr-June 1995:	Story research in 10 countries on: * 4 stories * designs and names for characters and backgrounds
June 1995:	Regional research synthesis workshop in Kenya * list of 100 names reduced but not finalized * character and background designs agreed * 4 stories fully revised
Aug 1995:	Radio writers’ workshop with BBC World Service in Zimbabwe
Aug-Oct 1995:	Storyboard research on Episodes 1-3 in 10 countries

Nov 1995:	Regional synthesis workshop in Zimbabwe * script and storyboard for Episode 1 finalized * scripts and designs for Episode 2-3 refined * animation and radio writers' workshop * radio series scripts finalized with BBC/African writing team
Sept 1996:	Regional review workshop * training for field testing of completed pilot episode 1 * design of research plan for countries (now in clusters)
Nov '96-Mar '97:	Evaluation for acceptance of Pilot Episode in 8 countries: <i>Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe</i>
June 1997	Formative research on 5 draft stories for Ep. 4-7 Regional writers/researchers' workshop * Reviewed draft stories for Ep. 4-7
Dec '97-Feb '98:	Formative research on Ep. 4-7 in 3 countries (story concept testing)
Feb 1998:	Regional synthesis workshop * Revised draft stories for Ep. 4-7 * Designed research plan for Ep. 4-7 in 10 countries
Apr-May 1998	Story research with illustrations on Ep 4-7 in 10 countries
June 1998	Regional synthesis workshop * Refine scripts and plan storyboards for Ep. 4-5
Aug-Sept 1999	Final research for Episodes 6-7

Source: UNICEF, Sept. 1999

The pilot package for Episode 1, “The Special Gift” - video, comic book, poster, radio and users’ guide - was evaluated in eight countries across the region (and subsequently in 4 countries in West and Central Africa) to ensure that the final product was acceptable and effective. A key aim was to evaluate how successful Sara is as a role model, whether adolescent girls are motivated and encouraged by her experiences, whether they identify with her and whether their communities accept her and the issues she stands for.

Sara was found to be fully acceptable. People said she could be their sister, their daughter or the girl-next-door. The materials were also found to be entertaining, while also stimulating debate on the issue of girls being “pushed-out” of school.

The results of the pilot testing (see Section 5) also provided a good number of useful details that were fed into the development of subsequent materials. Each of the seven episodes in the series went through this same research process to ensure that the quality and relevance of the story and materials is maintained. The central purpose of formative research in the SCI is to work with communities to find out how they perceive these issues, what experiences they have had to share and what solutions they believe are credible and achievable. What distinguishes this approach to formative research is that it is not regarded merely as a tool for pre-testing existing materials with a ‘target audience’. Rather, through the research process, the respondents themselves become partners in the creation of the stories (Aghi, 1996).

The respondents' insights and experiences gained through the initial concept testing were used as inspirational material in the first phase of script writing. These scripts were returned repeatedly to the target groups to check the impact of their stories, their authenticity and their entertainment value. Above all, the materials had to reflect the reality of gender discrimination, but also to show plausible transformations of that reality into a world of equality and opportunity for girls. This process represented a union of professionals' technical inputs and people's practical knowledge and aspirations. The researchers were, therefore, key members of the creative team, representing the respondents' voices in content design and script writing workshops.

In qualitative research, the concern is with the depth of the discussion, rather than the number of respondents involved. However, given the size of the region and diversity of cultures, it was necessary to work with a large number of different groups in the countries involved. Learning from experience, it became possible to cluster the countries into cultural groupings where very similar research findings were emerging. This meant that two or three countries could divide up the work so that the full range of respondents were covered, but more cost-effectively.

The research participants were drawn widely, involving groups of girls, their mothers, fathers and brothers, as well as interviews with key members of the community. This was done to gain as wide a range of insights as possible, to create a holistic vision of the various pressures upon the girl, resulting from the attitudes and behaviour of different family and community members. This broad involvement also reflected the research philosophy that the respondents must be active partners in the creative process.

4. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

PHASE 1 (September 1994 - August 1996)

During the first phase, the following project activities were achieved by UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO):

- A regional workshop involving African researcher, writers and artists to launch the project.
- Development of character and background designs by African artists.
- Writing of 40 draft stories by African writers.
- Research training for 30 African researchers in 2 workshops.
- Research in 10 countries during 1995: 1) story line research on four chosen stories, names, character and background designs, and 2) story illustration research with revised story lines, final character design and name research, and research on the pilot radio programme.
- Two regional consultations were held with researchers following the research phases mentioned above.
- The development of a Sara radio series with the BBC Education Department in collaboration with Sara research director and African writers.
- The development of the visual components of the project - story illustration and pre-production activities for episode 1 of the animated film - by African and Indian artists, the latter specialized in animated film.
- The production of English, French, Portuguese, Swahili and Hausa voices for the animated film and radio series using African talent in Nairobi, Abidjan, Maputo, Dar-es-Salaam and Kaduna, respectively.
- Capacity building: Phase 1 included a great deal of capacity building throughout the region. A group of 22 artists from the region were initially involved and the best 10 have remained involved throughout the process. Also, 23 principal researchers and 97 research assistants were trained in focus group methodology. In addition, a large number of African writers were involved in Phase 1. However, later a core group of 5 African writers with the best skills in writing for the visual media was formed.
- Official launch: The SCI was launched on Sept. 13 1996 in Uganda at an OAU Conference on "the Empowerment of Women through Functional Literacy and the Education of the Girl Child". The English and French versions of episode 1 on staying in school, entitled, "The Special Gift", were prepared in time for this event. The materials were well received and the launch ended the Conference on a concrete and positive note.

PHASE 2 (September 1996 to 2001, and some recent updates)

In Phase 2, episodes 2 through 7 were completed with the further involvement of artists, writers and communication researchers from the region. At the same time, all participating countries were facilitated to develop and implement action plans for dissemination of the materials through broadcast, government, NGO and commercial channels.

Regional activities

- Production of animated films for episode 2 was completed in Cape Town and episodes 3 to 5 in Bombay, with input from the core team of African artists who were identified and trained during phase 1. Due to fund constraints, the animated video of episode 6 was delayed for the time being. Funds were raised for the production of the episode 7 animated video, which is due for completion at the end of 2002. The print packages of episode 6 and 7 are completed. Another sub-regional print package on the theme of children in armed conflict situations was also completed with support from UNICEF-Uganda. Some funds were contributed by the Emergency Section, ESARO for the printing of a flip chart based on the same story.
- A Sara life skills manual was developed as a resource for in-school and out-of-school programmes in the region, to be published in 2003.
- A trainers' resource manual for prevention of female genital cutting was completed, also for publication in 2003.
- A guidebook for artists was finalized, ready for printing.
- Episode 2 was shown at the OAU Summit meeting in Burkina Faso in June 1998 and packages of materials were given to each delegation. Episode 2 was also formally launched in Ivory Coast and Nairobi on the *Day of the African Child*, June 16, 1998. Episode 3 was launched in Uganda by the president. There were other launches and festivals held in various countries to popularize Sara.
- UNAIDS sponsored the development of the French version of episode 2, "Sara Saves her Friend".
- The core regional writing team met in mid-1997, and again with researchers in early 1998 and mid 1999, to finalize the draft stories and research and development processes for Episodes 2-7.
- Research on stories for Episodes 4-7 was carried out in 9 core countries in April and May 1998, and the results were synthesized in a regional meeting in June 1998, hosted by UNICEF Tanzania. Two stories were produced as the outcome of this research. These were: "The Trap" on sugar daddies and HIV/AIDS (Rights to be protected from sexual exploitation and abuse from within the community) and "Choices" on teenage pregnancy and continuing education.
- In June 1998, the regional team and the focal points from all participating countries also exchanged experiences and plans on the acceptance and utilization of Sara materials in their countries. They were updated on recent developments and demonstrated some nationally-produced Sara materials. They also assisted in the establishment of guidelines for the use of the Sara image and characters. At this meeting, the idea of a Phase 3 project was presented and soundly endorsed.
- In October 1999, the regional team and the focal points met again at a workshop to share the utilization experiences and discuss the future of the project. Some countries expressed their desire and need to produce packages in addition to the core package, with their own funds. The themes they selected were on conflict situations (Uganda; already published), Malaria and initiation rites (Malawi).
- A video was produced on the "making of Sara" and was used widely for briefing people on the project. Sara videos were also used in materials for the International Day of Children's Broadcasting in 1998.

- In 1999, the Sara project was presented in a master course programme for journalists and media personnel in Holland organized by Radio Netherlands.
- Sara promotional and advocacy materials have been developed by UNICEF-ESARO, Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, Malawi, Rwanda and Ethiopia. The regional office also provides support to country offices on planning for implementation.
- Mid-term evaluation: A quantitative evaluation was undertaken in Tanzania and qualitative studies were undertaken in Kenya and Uganda. This was summarised in a single report.
- Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) included SCI materials in their communication resource kit for use by FAWE's national chapters in 21 countries.

Implementation activities in various countries

National level activities in the various participating countries in East, Southern and West Africa can be summarized as follows:

- national training workshops on the use of Sara materials;
- formation of core Sara groups from government, NGO and media partners for dissemination and utilization;
- wide use of Sara materials by government partners and NGOs;
- training of facilitators for effective utilization;
- establishment of Sara clubs and/or peer educators;
- distribution of Sara materials to schools;
- broadcast of Sara videos on national television networks;
- rebroadcast of the Sara BBC radio series;
- local language translations of materials;
- screening of Sara videos to its audiences in rural market outlets;
- training of local artists and writers;
- development of local Sara materials, as well as songs and dramas based on Sara stories/themes;
- Sara advocacy festivals.

Some country-based activities are described below, in more detail.

Eastern and Southern Africa

Ethiopia

- A training-of-trainers workshop on the "effective utilisation of Sara materials" was conducted at national level for government and NGO partners. This was supported by ESARO. The main objectives of the workshop were to integrate SCI into existing programmes and to develop dissemination plans for Sara in Ethiopia.
- A Sara Core Group was established, comprised of the 22 organisations that participated in the TOT workshop. A 5-member Steering Committee was established as well. Terms of reference were developed in subsequent meetings.
- SCI was featured in the monthly newsletter published by Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), an umbrella NGO co-ordinating most national NGOs. This helped to

familiarise many NGOs with SCI.

- Sara packages for episode 1 to 3 were widely distributed to government and NGO partners.
- BBC radio series translated and broadcast in three Ethiopian languages.
- SCI materials were distributed to government and NGO counterparts on request.
- Episodes 1 to 3 aired on Ethiopia TV for 8 consecutive weekends in 1998, followed by impact evaluation on audience perception and retention of messages.
- 44,000 exercise books featuring Sara's symbol and messages distributed to students through Addis Ababa Administration Education Bureau.

Kenya

- A workshop on using SCI as a tool for life skills education was organised by the UNICEF Regional Office, involving 29 programmers and adolescents.
- Sara comic books were used in Kenyan schools, supported by the UNICEF Country Office.
- All the videos were repeatedly broadcast on KBC, KTN and Nation TV stations.
- KBC radio service re-broadcast BBC Sara radio series in English and Swahili.
- Regional Reach, a private media company with 320 outlets in rural market areas, screened episode 1, reaching an estimated audience of 2,000,000
- A TOT was held for 20 artists and writers supported by UNICEF ESARO.
- SCI launched by Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education in 1997.
- SCI Core Group formed from government ministries, NGOs/CBOs and private sector.
- Core Group members trained on SCI issues and developed plans for integration in different programme areas.
- SCI integrated into Primary School Management Programme (PRISM) supported by DFID, targeting over 15,000 head teachers on gender issues.
- Sara video used to celebrate Day of African Child 1998. 2nd episode launched by Foreign Minister. 3000 children attended national occasion. Provincial activities also held to reach rural communities.
- SCI materials used in 10 pilot districts under World Bank funded STI Project, providing major funding to produce and disseminate materials and train health personnel. Two regional training programmes held to target all Medical Officers, District AIDS Coordinators and District Intersectoral AIDS Committees, to introduce concepts of SCI and life skills and develop facilitation skills using Sara materials.
- Sara materials used by Kenyatta, Nairobi and Egerton Universities for health education and gender sensitization.
- Materials used by World Food Programme in training activities in their School Feeding Programme to sensitize and analyze situation of girls in education (e.g. taking girls out of class to prepare food in school).
- Used by Goal Street Children Programme for life skills education and counselling on substance abuse and STIs, including HIV/AIDS.
- Used by CARE International for promotion of girls' education in Kadem communities on border with Tanzania where there is low female enrollment and a high rate of forced, early marriage.
- Used by Kenya Association of Professional Counselors (KAPC) working with youth in Nairobi on prevention of substance abuse and STIs.

- KAPC serialized Sara stories in “Straight Talk”, a participatory youth magazine. Sara materials also were distributed through Straight Talk Clubs set up in schools in Nairobi and parts of Nyanza Province.
- Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) introduced SCI materials to communities in four workshops in different districts.
- Used by Kenya Scouts Association for Reproductive Health Education at 3rd Kenya Scouts Jamboree in 1998. SCI materials now integrated into Scouts IEC training package.
- Sara Core Group conducted workshop with Guides at World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts World Congress in Nairobi, in 1998, and used SCI materials to discuss peace education.
- SCI used as core campaign materials by Youth Agenda, a national youth initiative working with over 250 youth groups in Kenya.
- September-November 1999, impact evaluation conducted by national research agency.

Malawi

- In 1997, formation of Sara multi-sectoral task force. FAWEMA (Forum for African Women Educationalists in Malawi) identified as key dissemination agency.
- FAWEMA use Sara in a few school clubs.
- Episode 1 comic book translated into 2 local languages.
- Sara plays and poems broadcast on radio for 1997 International Children’s Day of Broadcasting (ICDB). Radio play developed from episode 1 for broadcast. Regular Sara jingles on radio.
- Workshop for journalists on SCI.
- Sara videos distributed to major video rental outlets.
- SCI workshop for radio producers in mid 1998.
- TOT conducted by ESARO followed by training for facilitators in SCI partner organizations.
- National launch on International Children’s Day of Broadcasting, 1998.
- Promotion Dialogue on the girl child using Sara in April 2001 at the Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre. The same approach through theatre has been used in rural and urban areas.
- Radio Malawi is in the process of contracting to broadcast the Sara radio series.
- The new comic books for episodes 6 and 7 will shortly be distributed to primary schools once they arrive from the publishers in South Africa.

Mozambique

SCI used as a tool to promote girls' education and to generate debate at the family and community level on gender discrimination, girls' psychosocial development and on issues around HIV/AIDS.

- Episode 1 translated into Portuguese in comic book and video formats.
- Episode 1 comic book produced in two local languages.
- BBC Sara radio series, originally broadcast in Portuguese, was translated for broadcast in three local languages.
- Mass media: Mozambique TV and the Institute for Social Communication screen Sara videos.
- In schools: Sara materials were used as supplementary reading materials for students in UNICEF-supported districts. Teachers were trained in the SCI concept and utilisation and now promote extra-curricular activities using SCI materials.

- In gender sensitisation: SCI materials were used as a tool for gender relations analysis and gender sensitisation training by the Women's Forum and the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Education.
- NGOs: UNICEF provides technical and financial support to NGOs based on joint agreements. 25 NGOs trained in utilization of SCI materials. These NGOs use SCI to focus on life skills development to form "community HIV/AIDS activists", both adults and school going and out-of-school youth. SCI materials were used by NGOs as a tool for youth to identify and practise life skills.
- Advocacy with main partners in government and NGOs.
- Workshop for writers and illustrators conducted by regional creative team members. Strong emphasis given to developing stories for national priorities.
- National coordinator for SCI recruited by UNICEF in late 1999 to promote implementation plans, with major focus on HIV/AIDS issue.

Namibia

Initial implementation activities only:

- Media coverage of SCI.
- 50,000 comic books of Episode 1 printed. Distribution of episode 1 and 2 print package to schools.
- Translation of BBC radio series into local language - Oshikwanyama. Broadcast of this and English version.
- Sara stories serialized in "Straight Talk", a youth magazine, as well as other magazines.

Rwanda

- Episodes 1, 2 and 4 were translated into Kinyarwanda language.
- SCI launched in mid-1998 through a workshop with partners in government, NGOs, Women Parliamentarians Forum, directors of schools, youth associations and media.
- A local partner, Women's Network Association, has set up Sara Clubs in primary and vocational schools in various parts of the country, run on a voluntary basis, often by teachers or social workers.
- Sara Clubs established in 15 schools of 7 regions with 3 out-of-school groups. Emphasis on youth leadership and participation. Main focus on HIV/AIDS.
- A Sara Clubs Festival was held in December 1999 on the theme of youth participation in HIV/AIDS prevention. 15 Sara Clubs from all over the country took part in the one-day festival, presenting short plays, poems, songs and dances, inspired by the Sara stories.
- A training-of-trainers on utilizing SCI, supported by ESARO, was held in March 2000 for partners in the Sara Clubs, reproductive health youth centres, street children centres, guides and scout groups and some journalists from Rwandan TV and Radio.
- In April 2000, Rwandan TV started broadcasting Sara films on their own initiative. This led to increased demand from partner agencies for SCI materials.
- A Sara Core Group was established. They identified the needs for SCI materials and training.
- Steering committee established which has developed action plans for implementation. Coordinated by FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) under Ministry of Education.

- SCI used as a communication tool for promoting child/youth participation, especially in programmes on HIV/AIDS.
- Rwanda Women's Network for Rural Development has organized a series of meetings on Sara at community level with school children and adolescents, parents and caregivers, to sensitize on girl child issues, especially girls' education. Communities propose action they can take.
- Women's Week, in March 1999, focused on girls' education. SCI materials used to highlight rights of both girls and boys.
- National and Regional Commissioners of Scouts Association trained on Child Rights Convention and Child Participation approach with Sara materials, with focus on gender equality, right to education, and HIV/AIDS prevention. Children given floor in Parliament in December 1998 to discuss their views. Recent law revision has recognized rights of girls and women.
- Overall, activities have led to adults recognizing that youth can contribute to community development. Girls, in particular, are becoming more confident and proactive. Strong demand from schools not yet reached to be included in activities.

Swaziland

- Bulk copies of Sara comic books distributed to girls participating in annual Reed Dance, as part of HIV prevention programme.

Tanzania

Sara communication initiative was introduced in Tanzania in 1996 as a communication intervention for improving the status of the girl child. This was through formulation and research of Sara stories. The implementation in the following two years was done through the dissemination of Sara and training of District Management Teams, the establishment and training of a national Sara task force. The Task Force draws members from NGOs and key ministries like Health, Youth and Labor, Women and Children and also from the national and private media stations.

- The 'Behaviour Change' initiative for out-of-school adolescents in 7 districts adopted Sara materials.
- UNICEF's HIV/AIDS unit integrated the SCI into their programme activities.
- A series of trainings for Tanzanian artists were held. One artist from this group received advanced training from the regional artists group in Kenya.
- The Tanzania group developed advocacy materials: T-shirt, badges, scarves and stickers.
- A TOT in effective utilization of Sara materials took place, supported by ESARO.
- The task force members trained the district management teams on the SCI concept, its utilization and further dissemination of the concept to the community level. The district management team composed of the district Cultural, Education, Planning, and Youth officers.
- The utilization of SCI has been at three main levels: - 1.National Level Support, 2.District Level Dissemination, 3.Production of local IEC materials

National Level Support:

Key Ministries:

- Support to Ministry of Education and Culture's National Book Week where SCI materials are used to promote a reading culture among children and impart life skill and child rights'

knowledge.

- Episode 1, “The Special Gift” ordered for distribution to Complementary Basic Education (COBET) centres as material for life skills education.
- Ministry of Youth in their annual sports activities, race for the ‘Uhuru Torch’ where the freedom torch is carried nationwide with messages for youth on HIV/AIDS. Sara materials are disseminated and used in discussions with the youth and community.
- Ministries of Health’s Health Education Unit used Sara in their annual Trade Fair stall for 11 days every June-July, where thousands of adults and children in Dar es Salaam and from upcountry turn up for the trade fair. Sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS were discussed.
- Ministry of Women and Children - SCI is incorporated in annual events where there is advocacy for the rights of the girl child.

NGOs:

Different NGOs that were interested in the dissemination of the SARA were supported by UNICEF.

- NGO-Watota Salama Trust was facilitated in the formation of 20 Sara Clubs in primary schools in rural and semi-rural areas in Bunju, Dar es Salaam.
- NGO-Temeke Sara Club - conducts youth peer education activities on life skills and HIV/AIDS using Sara materials. They have facilitated the opening of 30 Sara Clubs in primary schools. They also conducted an SCI workshop for youth. The objective was to enable them understand life skills, adolescent reproductive health and child rights.
- Tanzania Gender Network Programme hold Annual Gender Workshop. Sara materials are used as advocacy in the gender awareness campaign. Hundreds of participants come to Dar es Salaam for this annual event.
- Combined Obtrusive Media for Children (COMFOCHIN) use Sara materials in the youth sports events. The main focus is life skills knowledge, gender issues and HIV/AIDS. Currently they are covering several schools in Masasi, which is a UNICEF CSPD district.
- Simba Theatre utilizes Sara as an entry point to provoke discussions on various sensitive issues. It uses community theatre for dialogue, problem identification and solving.
- The Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) is one of the biggest cultural events in East Africa. Since 1998, Sara workshops have featured prominently in the Festival. The number of children participating in the workshops, where episodes are viewed, stories read and written, and issues captured in drawings, has steadily increased over the years to almost 9000 children. Teachers from Zanzibar primary schools and Sara Task Force members facilitate this two-week activity.
- Student’ Partnership Worldwide (SPW) is an international group of volunteers who have a program for training trainers in peer education. They operate in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania and their project is aimed at secondary schools. SPW also organize sports bonanzas where Sara episodes are widely disseminated and utilized.
- Sara clubs have been formed in primary and secondary schools, and out-of-school. The clubs have proven to function more effectively in the school because of the school structure that supports and facilitates. The clubs have a structure in which the children themselves are leaders. In the surrounding community the materials enhance dialogue on the different issues such as the importance of education, health and sanitation, HIV/AIDS prevention, overall child

rights, and other specific problems to a community e.g. alcoholism. To strengthen the clubs acceptability in the community the children select 'Friends of Sara'. The 'Friends of Sara' are influential people in the community trusted by the children. This greatly assists awareness and mobilization activities.

- Some Sara clubs have initiated a fund that serves to assist children from poor families who cannot afford daily bus fares and sometimes school stationery. Children donate 100 Tsh. every week towards the fund. Moreover in certain areas of the Bunju community people have begun to value girls education following a Sara Club workshop on child rights. Where there are Sara Clubs, school heads talk of improved girls' participation in education and school activities.
- A quantitative study of SCI coverage in Tanzania was undertaken in 2000 as part of the regional evaluation process.

District level Dissemination:

- SCI dissemination in the 54 CSPD Districts has involved the training of District Management Teams, which include the District Education, Planning, Cultural and Youth Officers. These teams incorporate SCI into their on-going programmes, e.g. Safe Motherhood, Early Childhood Development, etc.
- Cultural groups have been trained in community level gender sensitization.
- Ward and Extension Officers training has taken place on HIV/AIDS and life skills. In Singida (one of the CSPD districts), a Sara community drama group is strong and does a lot of awareness activities on HIV/AIDS, health, sanitation and nutrition. The drama or cultural groups are usually under the district officer. This makes networking easier and in this way the group are well utilized during special days or events.
- Out-of-school youth projects in Kisarawe and Musoma districts use Sara materials in youth centres.
- In Musoma district, where FGC is practiced, "Daughter of a Lioness" has been disseminated and the out-of-school youth group carries out activities.

Local Materials Production:

- Tanzania has a national artists' team that has participated in the developing of posters, T-shirts, caps and scarves, which advocate for girls' education. The messages are linked to Complementary Basic Education programme for the out-of-school and over-age children. The second T-shirt firmly says "no" to "sugar daddy" advances on young girls. When tested in the school community in Morogoro the words 'Sishawishiki', meaning "I am not easily persuaded", became a slogan for the girls.
- Artwork for posters against rape, FGC prevention, and avoiding sugar daddies have been completed. Children from various schools and the out-of-school chose the messages too. They constructed messages they thought expressed their feelings well and would be effective.
- The artists who were trained by a Sara core artist meet every year during ZIFF where training of children takes place in SCI characterization. The children then draw pictures depicting issues they think are crucial. The aim is also to have good artists among the children so they can do the characters when developing their own Sara stories for production.
- A national Sara directory is planned to show who is doing what and where. This is expected to create a network of Sara Clubs where they can work, support each other and create the necessary market for Sara materials.

Uganda

- Original Sara launch for the region by Vice President of Uganda at an OAU Conference on girls and women's education and empowerment in 1996.
- Episode 1 comic book and video produced in 4 local languages: Luo, Luganda, Ateso and Runyakitali. Translation of episodes 2, 4 and 5 also completed. The dubbing for the video films was carried out in Kampala and mixed in Bombay.
- Sara stories and characters integrated into life skills manuals and readers for primary and secondary schools.
- In 1997, an advisory committee from government ministries, NGOs and the media was formed, led by the Ministry of Gender and Community Development. This group is responsible for planning the promotion and implementation of Sara.
- SCI launched for Uganda through a 5-day festival promoting girls' education. Vice President gave SCI high level support. The festival included a drama adaptation of episode 1, an art exhibition, cultural groups, school plays and radio broadcasts. It gained good media coverage and strengthened the popularization of Sara's image.
- SCI activities have followed government policy of decentralization by training district officers. Ministry of Gender has trained social service providers and drama groups in 10 districts that, in turn, have developed district level action plans.
- Sara stories are serialized in the newspapers - New Vision, The Monitor – they have featured Sara on their children's page.
- Stories serialized in "Young Talk", a monthly magazine for young adolescents. 230,000 copies distributed through primary schools, teachers' colleges and NGOs. 40,000 inserted into New Vision. Training also provided to schools in use of Young Talk, including Sara stories.
- Sara featured in radio shows on private FM stations.
- Episode 3 on FGC used as major communication tool in UNFPA's REACH project in Kapchorwa, Eastern Uganda. Episode 3 launched on Kapchorwa's Cultural Day in 1998, attended by President Museveni.
- Sara festival in 1999 including radio talk shows, television phone-in and documentary, newspaper articles, dramatized version of episode 2, testimonials by real-life role models, Sara exhibition, songs and dances.
- District festivals, modeled on national festival, held in 4 districts in 1999.
- Sara materials used by a range of NGOs working on prevention of STIs and substance abuse and on promotion of girls' education.
- June 1999 review meeting of advisory committee concluded that the advocacy campaign for Sara had created a supportive environment that will now assist in wide-scale implementation.
- September 1999 workshop for NGOs working on SCI, life skills education and adolescent friendly health services. Integrated Sara as communication tool in other initiatives and developed planning and evaluation framework.
- FAWE (Uganda), with UNICEF support, oriented 165 teachers from 6 districts on integrating SCI into their school programmes, including establishing life skills clubs. So far, clubs have been established in 45 schools, run by the students themselves.
- In line with the national decentralization policy, government officials and NGO programme staff in 16 districts were oriented to SCI. The District Development Programmes are using SCI

materials and stories for community mobilization through drama.

- 5 artists and 15 writers were trained in SCI approaches to expand the pool of creative talent in developing national Sara materials. This also involved writers and artists working for the media.
- In Western and Eastern regions of Uganda, 30 NGOs were oriented in the utilization of Sara materials. Local FM radio stations were also involved, since they are becoming an increasingly powerful channel to reach young audiences.
- In early 2000, the Euro-Africa Film Festival group traveled through 15 districts across Uganda showing Sara episodes as interludes to the main feature films. This reached an estimated audience of 20,000 in each of 20 rural towns.
- The Uganda SCI team has worked on two country-specific packages, with support from ESARO: a package on children in armed conflict and a package on early childhood care and development. The armed conflict story, produced as a comic book, is now being taken up by other countries in the region. The ECCD story is awaiting production.
- Training for the peer educators from the Adolescent Friendly Health Services initiative began in August 2000 in one district. Peer educators discussed how to integrate SCI materials into their education activities. Life skills manuals for out-of-school and in-school, were developed.
- A large SCI review workshop took place in September 2000, alongside a peer education workshops for children from the life skills clubs and Straight Talk Clubs. This provided a forum for the children/adolescents to share experiences on what they are learning through their club activities.
- Qualitative studies on implementation of SCI at community level were undertaken in Uganda in 2000 as part of the regional evaluation exercise.

Zambia

Initial implementation activities only:

- Sara Core Group formed in 1997.
- SCI workshop for partners in government, NGO and media.
- Training for artists and writers. 2 Sara stories written for future national production.
- Episode 1 translated in local language.
- Sara is used by NGOs, including Anti-AIDS clubs, in self-initiated activities.
- In 2002, UNICEF made a bulk order of Sara materials from regional publisher, Maskew Miller Longman, for implementation.

Zimbabwe

- The HIV/AIDS NGO group continues to use SCI materials. UNICEF Regional Office provided them with 5,000 additional copies for dissemination.

West and Central Africa:

Angola

- In 2002, UNICEF made a bulk order of Sara materials from regional publisher, Maskew Miller Longman, for implementation.

Cameroon

- UNICEF purchased bulk orders of Sara materials.
- A training of trainers in effective planning and utilization took place in October 2000, with facilitation support from the SCI regional team.
- Further bulk order purchased from regional publisher in 2002.

Ghana

SCI was introduced to Ghana in 2001. It is aimed to develop Sara as a national role model for girls, as a communicator for child rights and development issues, and SCI as a model for innovative and participatory communication for development. Within UNICEF, SCI has been integrated as a supportive communication tool in Education, HIV/AIDS and Rights Promotion and Protection programming, in line with UNICEF's country program Medium Term Strategic Plan. It is regarded as a facilitating tool for integrated programming at community, district and national level programming. Current and planned activities include:

- Sara boxes with all comic books, a videotape and facilitation guide will soon be disseminated to all CHILDSCOPE Schools and teachers will be trained.
- Discussions are currently ongoing in the Ministry of Education (with the Girls Education Unit and the Curriculum Development Department) to institutionalize the Sara Initiative in the education system. It is recognized that Sara materials can be used to encourage child-to-child and child-to-teacher/parent communication on issues related to life skills development.
- The HIV/AIDS Peer Education program is currently integrating the Sara materials and tools into their existing Peer Education Manual and will be supplied with the materials at the beginning of 2003. Sara provides a strong facilitation tool to encourage participation of young people and focus on risk perception and social acceptance of change.
- Sara is becoming a facilitating tool in the Participatory Action Research for UNICEF's project: "What Every Adolescent Has the Right to Know".
- In the Child Panel training on child right issues, the Sara materials and concepts have been introduced and the materials can be used for interactive processes in the community.
- The Operation End Kayayei has adopted the Sara story on domestic child labor and a drama group is bringing the story to many communities in NR and UER.
- In 2003 Sara will be serialized for newspapers/magazines and for TV-broadcast.
- At national level, through an active 'Partnership Drive', key players in girl child development, HIV/AIDS and child rights have joined the **Sara Partnership**:
- A *Memorandum of Understanding* was signed between UNICEF and the John Hopkins University/CCP in Ghana. The two organizations will join hands in the implementation of the initiative through their programs in HIV/AIDS prevention and girl child education. Development of new materials and extensive training programs will be part of this partnership.
- Several organizations have been introduced to Sara over the past few months. Their eagerness to start using Sara will give the initiative more national exposure and support the creation of Sara as a national popular figure. Enthusiasm has been expressed from the *National Theatre, Catholic Action for Street children (CAS), Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO), Olinga Foundation, Glona, SAGE, Alliance Media, Story Time (TV3), Mmofra Foundation, AYA*, and others. The Sara Partnership can count on UNICEF's technical support to strategy

development and capacity building for Sara, but the organizations are developing their own resource mobilization strategies.

- UNICEF is looking at establishing *Sara as a communicator*, where appropriate, e.g. on CRC communication materials, in the integrated communication manual for ICBD, on advertising/bill board signs at schools to communicate messages related to education, etc.
- In addition to the regional Sara packages, the Sara team in Ghana area planning a range of locally developed materials that can support implementation:

Facilitation and training kit: A practical and user-friendly facilitation kit that contains background info on Sara and on the program context, a detailed Training-of-Trainers plan, facilitation guidelines for various settings, and (laminated) activity cards that give step-by-step descriptions of activities that you can facilitate using the Sara materials. The cards give guidelines and questions for different groups and different issues you might be working with. The activities are very often derived from traditional Ghanaian games adapted to Sara issues. The activities will help to go beyond the obvious use of focus group discussions and will encourage genuine two-way communication.

Advocacy Kit: A set of issue/rights based leaflets have been developed to focus on the use of Sara in specific thematic areas. In a similar layout there is a leaflet with more practical information: prices, materials, etc. The kit also comprises ready-made presentations and flyers. All the materials are gathered in a nicely designed folder. This kit might be helpful when introducing Sara to new partners and lobbying for integration of the initiative.

Drama plays / trained drama groups: Work has been done with The National Theatre and Gub Katimali to translate the Sara stories into drama plays. These groups could be asked to perform their plays, or to train other groups. There might be need to strengthen the actual facilitation of the drama as a communication tool. We have to broaden the activity from focus group discussion to more interactive games and discussions.

Puppetry: The first Sara string-puppet has been produced in Ghana! Puppet-makers and puppeteers in Ghana have started to transfer the Sara characters and stories into a puppet-show. This may be developed into a concept of ‘Theatre and Puppetry for Development’, which will offer a whole range of educational activities using drama and puppetry. Both interventions should not be limited to adult groups performing to youth or children, but children and youth should get involved in the activities themselves (making their own roles, making their own puppets and play a character). This also provides opportunities to translate the stories in local languages.

Stories and readers: Traditional storytellers in Ghana will review the story lines in the comic books to be re-written into the traditional story telling format. These can be developed into readers, easy (and low-cost) for production as well as for translation into local language.

Guinea Bissau

- The Country Office undertook a planning workshop in November 2000, with facilitation support from the SCI regional team.

Nigeria

- An inter-sectoral Technical Committee was established, led by Ministry of Education’s

National Educational Technology Centre, to co-ordinate planning, implementation and evaluation activities.

- Technical Committee has drawn up detailed plans for advocacy, training and dissemination through school system, mass media, cinemas, video outlets, community and youth organisations.
- Sara was presented at 1998 International Conference for African Broadcasters on Broadcasting and Development in Africa, involving 400 broadcast executives from Africa, Europe and USA.
- African Independent Television aired 3-day promotion of Sara, including a televised call-in show.
- Mainstreaming in Government: continuing consultation on regional materials development and national activities with a multi-sectoral technical team for SCI; integration into training and social mobilization activities of different sectors; training of Federal Ministry of Health School Health Administrators and Health Education Officers; progress made in mainstreaming SCI materials into schools nationwide.
- Sara materials used by NGOs and state organisations involved in adolescent reproductive health, following national conference.
- At school level: a training manual for school teachers was developed; SCI was mainstreamed through various courses at primary and secondary levels; training was conducted for trainers of School Guidance Counselors, School Health Management and Social Studies teachers; SCI was integrated into Child Rights Clubs in schools and used as a communication kit for promoting life skills in extra-curricular activities (e.g. debating and drama societies).
- 12 pilot schools in 4 zones of country selected and teachers trained in using SCI. These pilot schools will be monitored by national Technical Committee to analyse and refine implementation strategies in formal education system.
- 300 adolescents and 25 teachers from Lagos Mainland oriented on using SCI for education on Child Rights.
- Sara materials under review for Ministry approval for use in Nigerian education system.
- Networking with NGOs: National NGO seminars and workshops were used to orient NGOs to the use of SCI as a communication tool in their programs.
- Mass media: Over 25 TV stations (public and private), including national TV, have broadcast Sara; briefings were given for women journalists and the Nigerian Institute of Journalism; the radio package was broadcast in the Northern, Hausa-speaking areas; Kano State Broadcasting Corporation translated and produced a series of SCI radio jingles.

5. EVALUATION OF PILOT EPISODE

In September 1999, UNICEF documented the evaluation of the pilot episode.

By July 1999, the Sara story, “The Special Gift” had been evaluated for acceptance in nine countries in Eastern and Southern Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and in Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire in West Africa. The package evaluated consisted of a range of materials based on the story, “The Special Gift”.

- video
- comic book
- poster
- radio programmes 1 and 2

Typically, in each country, the research teams conducted focus groups in two contrasting areas of the country, to give a range of responses from different cultural communities. These areas were also selected to provide different groupings visited in the two rounds of formative research on “The Special Gift”. As a whole, the researchers thereby aimed to gain as wide a picture as possible of reactions to the Sara initiative from across their country. For example, in Kenya, evaluation research was conducted in Kwale on the coast and in Kisumu in western Kenya. In Namibia, formative research had been undertaken in the north and central regions of the country, so the evaluation research was done in the centre and south.

Each country conducted between 8 and 16 focus groups, discussing at least two of the materials in each. The groups were composed to give a broad range of respondents from each community. For example, in Kenya a total of 12 focus groups were formed as follows:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Kwale: | 1. Girls in school: | <i>poster and video</i> |
| | 2. Boys in school: | <i>poster and video</i> |
| | 3. Women in community: | <i>comic book and radio</i> |
| | 4. Men in community: | <i>comic book and radio</i> |
| | 5. Male teachers: | <i>poster and video</i> |
| | 6. Female teachers: | <i>poster and video</i> |
| Kisumu: | 7. Girls in school: | <i>radio and comic book</i> |
| | 8. Boys in school: | <i>radio and comic book</i> |
| | 9. Women in community: | <i>video and poster</i> |
| | 10. Men in community: | <i>video and poster</i> |
| | 11. Girls out of school: | <i>video</i> |
| | 12. Boys out of school: | <i>radio</i> |

Main Findings in Eastern and Southern Africa

These findings should be read alongside the formative research findings on "The Special Gift", given in Appendix 1:

- Sara is seen as a universally acceptable and entertaining symbol for the adolescent girl throughout the region.
- The story and its objectives were well understood.
- Sara is seen as a credible source of education on the themes.
- Most audiences consider the situation portrayed as real.
- The use of animation does not distract from the reality that the story puts forward.
- Sara is seen as a daughter or the girl next door in diverse cultures.
- The characters are acceptable in all cultures - including the animals that are seen as thematically intrinsic to the stories.
- The Sara materials are seen by target groups as having great potential for behavioural change and behavioural development of children.
- The story not only describes the situation of girls in Africa, it offers realistic solutions.

Quotes from Respondents

*"If my father ever asks me to leave school, I will tell him Sara's story from the film."
Girl in Mabanja, Mozambique.*

"Sara is the best girl in Africa. We will all learn from her." Man in Mabanja, Mozambique.

"Sara's story shows just what happens in my house." Girl in Mabanja, Mozambique.

*"I want to see Sara completing her education successfully and coming back to help the community."
Girl in Kisumu, Kenya.*

"Sara's story is meant for me. I have always made my daughters work so hard that they have little time for their studies or for themselves." Woman in Ambo, Ethiopia.

"Uncle's character is a realistic example that, although so much attention is given to male children, males can grow up into rogues." Woman in Goromonzi, Zimbabwe.

*"The story rightly shows how women do all the work and men take all the credit."
Woman in, Zimbabwe.*

Findings on Each Medium

Video:

Story was fully understood by all respondent groups in nearly all areas. Any comprehension problems were due to language difficulties. Local language versions are required.

- Objective was understood as:
 - Girls (and boys) should continue their schooling.
 - Parents should ensure that girls go to school.
 - There is no difference between boys and girls and they should be treated equally.
- People felt the story was realistic and related directly to their lives.
- Sara was universally admired for her patience, energy, intelligence, hard work, innovativeness and persuasive powers. (Some respondents in Zimbabwe felt she could be a little too-good-to-be-true. Others disagreed.)
- People "loved to hate" the Uncle and found his character very realistic and amusing.
- Zingo was loved by children as Sara's friend and companion. Although monkeys are not common as pets, adults too accepted and understood Zingo's role in the story.
- Potential for change: Video would encourage:
 - girls not to give up their aspirations.
 - parents and others to see what a difference girls can make to the community.
 - school children to take their studies seriously.
 - teachers to support their pupils like Ms. Matata supported Sara.
 - leaders to support the education of girls in their communities.
- Some respondents still felt that such cultural attitudes would take a long time to change, but that Sara's story at least provoked discussion on the issues.
- Suggested uses: Video should be shown to everybody in markets, schools, cinema halls, mobile cinemas in rural areas, video parlors, youth and women's groups, churches and at home.
- Video format appreciated. "It makes the story come alive." It was found highly entertaining.

Radio:

- No difficulty in understanding radio programmes, except in a few communities where people were not fluent in the language used. Local language versions are required.
- Objective understood as:
 - To help girls facing problems similar to Sara.
 - To show how girls are discriminated against.
 - To encourage parents to treat boys and girls equally.
 - To change parents' attitudes about boys doing chores at home.
- Drama of radio programmes was enjoyed and found full of suspense.
- Where the language was fully understood, the voices were found clear. Some words of the song are not audible. Children in some communities had problems understanding the language and the speed at which it is delivered.
- Sara's intelligence was appreciated and her ability to apply her knowledge to a real situation. The stories showed "the ability of an African girl who people usually believe is not very capable and good for nothing". (Mozambique)
- Potential to change: Story can encourage people to reconsider their attitudes, especially if the radio programmes are followed up with discussions.
- Suggested uses: Groups listening to radio or audio tape, followed by discussion; producing as live

drama to reach people without radios; re-broadcasting on radio and publicizing times.

Poster:

- Poster visuals and message fully acceptable. Without the written message (for non-literates) the poster is still understood to promote girls' education.
- Visuals are considered realistic and are identified with across the region. A few questioned the presence of the monkey on the roof (Ethiopia) and the boy's uniform (Zimbabwe). A few responses (Kenya and Zimbabwe) said the writing "Sara" was too close to the monkey and could give the impression that Sara is the monkey.
- The poster was thought to act as a reminder of the story of a girl and what she endured.
- Suggested uses: Respondents wanted the poster left in their community to remind people to send their girls to school. People could hang it at home, discuss it with friends, display it on school gates, in market place, on shop walls, at health centre, church, community hall.

Comic Book:

- Reading and understanding the comic book presented no problems. School children were able to read and follow the bubbles and frames. They understood the difference between speech bubbles and thought bubbles. The writing is clear and easy to read. Non-literates were able to follow picture frames correctly.
- Comic book was greatly enjoyed and valued. Colourful format was appreciated.
- Suggested uses: Children would read it at school and to their siblings, parents and friends at home. It can also be used in schools (included in curriculum), in church, youth and women's groups. The comic book should be serialized in local papers.
- Many groups said they preferred the comic books as they can keep them and read them again at their leisure and share the story with others. Also the comic book can be made more widely available than the video version.
- Many communities want the story translated into local languages.

Lessons learned:

In general the research process went smoothly. However, in a few cases there were some limitations. While the materials have initially been produced in English, Kiswahili, French and Portuguese, in a number of areas the researchers felt that better comprehension and a fuller discussion would have been achieved if the materials had been available in the local language. A number of countries have subsequently started producing their own range of language versions to meet this need. In some cases discussions were impeded when the research team were not fluent in the local dialect. For example, in Esigodini in Zimbabwe, the students would have been more comfortable speaking their own local language, Nbedele.

Summary of Findings from Kenya

The materials were very well received by all categories of respondents. They also felt that they had a real opportunity to reflect on and discuss the issues of girls in a more focused and thought-provoking manner. The problems articulated in these materials were found to be common in the research areas. The question of girls' "push-out" from school was prevalent in Kwale, where forced marriages and son preference have ruined many a girl's aspirations for higher education. In Kisumu they felt the

problem was more due to poverty, girls' workload, and teenage pregnancy, although negative attitudes towards girls contributed significantly.

To the women, Sara emerged not only as representing all they would wish for in a daughter, but also as a painful reminder of their own unfulfilled dreams. Many women relived their own past frustrations as they discussed the video. The heaviest criticism from the women was directed at Sara's father. It was not clear to them why the father would be sending money through the uncle. This they felt demonstrated a lack of trust and poor communication between him and his wife. Others thought it reflected badly on the character of the mother. Why didn't she make her own efforts to find out what was happening when her husband didn't send the money? Instead she seems content with what Uncle says and leaves all the worrying to Sara. She should stand up to the uncle and try to find ways of solving the problem.

The men felt that the ill-treatment of Sara by her uncle illustrated the sad reality in the treatment of children entrusted to the care of others. In Kisumu, where the problem of AIDS orphans is particularly severe, the mistreatment of Sara and her family by their "ill-tempered, dishonest and jealous" uncle served to remind parents of the importance of staying with their own family and also saving funds for them in case they (parents) die. The story reminded them of the many AIDS orphans being mistreated by the uncles and reinforced the need to "stay alive for the sake of your family."

Girls found the story "sad and sweet". Sad, because it told of the suffering girls had to go through in life experiencing discrimination. But it was also sweet because, in spite of all the problems, Sara triumphed and managed to show the community that "girls are important too". Girls wished to see Sara completing her education successfully and coming back to help the community, while Tsumi (her brother) should fail in education(!) For the boys the story was enjoyable and interesting. They seemed to enjoy the more humorous parts of the video, like uncle falling in the basket and Zingo's antics. While they felt the story had useful lessons for them (like helping girls with domestic chores), some felt girls had more to learn as "the story would encourage lazy girls to work hard like Sara"! The groups found the characters realistic and credible except they felt that Sara's grandmother was not playing the traditional role of a grandmother - to educate, support and advise her grandchildren. She was seen to be too opposed to Sara while they expected her to be close to her. All the groups thought that the materials had vast entertainment and educational potential. They felt that they have the capacity to change attitudes and behaviour, but that this could only be sustained if the materials were followed up with serious discussion and follow-up actions each time they were used. They felt that other channels should be explored to make the materials accessible to more people at the community level.

Report by Judith Miguda and Justus Olielo

Researchers' Experience

A 'Snapshot' of Evaluating the Comic Book in One Community in Mozambique

The Sara comic book was evaluated with men, women, boys and girls in separate groups in Mabanja, a tiny rural area 60 to 70 kms from Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. The village is accessible only by a dirt road. The community is not only cut off from the mainstream, but also looked very poor.

Though most of the children were going to school, most of the adults were only semi-literate. The way they appreciated the book was revealed by their remarks. A man said: "The book will make the community realize what a girl can do even when the adults are not helping her." A boy said: "We will treasure the book and will read it to everyone in our village. If we get the book it will stay with us for ever." One girl continued: "And then people will allow girls to go to school." The women said: "The book should help to change minds on girls' education and could influence other women to do the same thing as Sara." Many felt it could prompt parents to change their attitudes and behaviour towards girls. One girl said: "If my father ever asks me to leave school, I will tell him Sara's story." The children understood the comic book story very well. They enjoyed it, saying that they liked the pictures in the book as they help them to understand the story. They preferred the book to the radio programme as the book will stay with them. They will read it at leisure. They will read the story to their parents and neighbours. The adults responded very favorably saying that the story reflects their own lives and that they have no problem in believing it. The story is an "eye-opener", they said. One man said: "Sara is the best girl in Africa. We will all learn from her."

Mira Aghi, SCI Research Director and Bertina Oliveira, Researcher, Mozambique

Main Findings in West Africa

Overall findings:

- The stories and the problems they highlight, are very relevant to the social and cultural context in Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. The focus of this research was on evaluating the acceptance of Episode 1 ("The Special Gift" on girls' push-out from school). In addition, in Nigeria, groups were also exposed to Episodes 2-5 (some in draft form) and in Cote d'Ivoire, to Episode 5.
- The problems raised in the Sara series, including push out from school, sexual harassment and teenage pregnancy, are very real issues for West African girls.
- The stories appear very realistic, even in these two West African contexts. The nature of village life, the interaction between different members of society, society's institutions and the solutions to social problems are all very similar.
- The stories were enjoyed and sometimes provoked passionate debate in the groups. Literate and non-literate groups both engaged meaningfully with the story.
- The research report from Nigeria concludes that "Sara material has the possibility of being utilized in Nigeria as effectively as in Eastern and Southern Africa where it was evolved. These results present a possibility of Sara's relevance in other countries of West Africa as well."
- Both studies envisage that there should be no difficulty in introducing Sara into the West African context, at least in these two countries, one Anglophone and one Francophone, where the materials were fully acceptable. As the report from Cote d'Ivoire concludes: "the Sara Communication Initiative for Eastern and Southern Africa could become the Sara Sub-Saharan Initiative with great ease, which would ensure maximum use of these materials, developed at such great effort and cost."

Quotes from respondents

"There is no reservation whatsoever that Sara is African. She is Nigerian. She is ours."

Woman, Kaduna, Nigeria

"Sara's troubles pained me. I felt like I was going through her plight."
Woman, Ibadan, Nigeria

"We should be like Sara, faithful, happy, patient and always go to school."
Girl, Marcori Anounabo, Cote d'Ivoire

*"When there is a problem, there is a way you can solve it. Girls can do what boys can do.
We should have confidence in ourselves."* Girl, Ibadan, Nigeria

"There are many uncles who take money which doesn't belong to them."
Girl, Sikensi-Katadji, Cote d'Ivoire

*"One problem is that children don't let their parents know what they are learning. They don't put
what they learn into practice during the holidays. If they did, parents would be much more
interested in keeping them at school."* Man, Sikensi-Katadji, Cote d'Ivoire

"These are bad days for men. Females are likely to leave them behind."
Woman, Ibadan, Nigeria

Video and Comic Book of "The Special Gift":

Comprehension:

- In general, the story was clearly comprehended. Sara's reason for making the stove in order for her to continue in school was well understood, although less saw the more generic message of the importance of sending girls to school. The uncle's political ambitions and hence his interest in the stove were less well understood. The father's role and support to Sara was clear.
- Some perceived that Sara wanted to contribute to the development of her village. Some commented that Sara was good because she applied school learning at home. They felt this was rare and considered this one of the reasons why parents get discouraged from sending their children to school.
- In general, adolescents showed a higher comprehension of details of the story than adults did. This was attributed to two factors: higher levels of education amongst young people, and the fact that the story targets this group and hence engages their attention more directly.

Interest:

- The groups seemed very interested and there was a lot of laughter during the video screenings. Zingo's antics were very popular indeed. She was thought to make the stories lively and to hold people's attention. Children saw Zingo as Sara's friend. A man commented: "Monkeys are common to us. Some of us make a living by showing tricks that a monkey can play for the people on the marketing days."
- People enjoyed the arrival of Sara's father and the unmasking of the uncle. They were also interested by Sara's construction of the stove and by the depiction of rural life, fetching firewood, cooking, etc. People stated that others in their country would also find the films highly entertaining.

Realism and acceptance:

- The film was seen as a realistic portrayal of rural life in Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. Girls do nearly all the housework, which gives them little time to do school work. At the same time, parents prefer to send their sons to school because they have to go out and work in life, whereas the girl will "just get married". In addition, parents say that if they educate a girl, they will not benefit, only her husband. Even girls' groups accepted this as the natural order of things. Some boys disliked girls going to school because it made them "too proud and misfits".
- There are many absentee fathers. The wife often stays with her own parents, but it sometimes also happens that the wife stays with her brother-in-law. He accepts this responsibility because he expects to benefit later when his younger brother gets a job. There are also many men like the uncle who are selfish. In situations of poverty, money is a terrible temptation.
- Identifying with Sara's activities, some young people talked of what they do in the school holidays, such as making animal traps and toy cars.

Characters:

- People identified the characters as familiar figures from their own environment. All the characters, including Zingo, were thought to exist in West Africa. The response was especially vivid in the case of the uncle, who is symbolic of "many an uncle" in Nigeria.
- As usual, Sara was liked and admired in all that she did. Researchers were surprised that many groups, including girls' groups, really liked Sara for the way she worked so hard without complaining.
- Sara was perceived as a positive role model. When asked how Sara affected them, girls replied: "When there is a problem, there is a way you can solve it. Girls can do what boys can do. We should have confidence in ourselves."
- Men and women thought that Sara represented a virtuous girl, who is capable of solving her problems and has the power of conviction. Both urban and rural women said they were very proud of Sara. One Nigerian woman said, after seeing the film: "I feel proud to be a mother of a girl and would not mind even if I had six children and they were all girls."
- Sara is perceived as a challenge to her peers. She is able to solve problems that boys may not be able to solve.
- Ms Matata, the teacher, was praised for her support to Sara and for lending her the book.
- Uncle was universally disliked, but seen as very realistic and representative of "many an uncle", who takes money intended for their nephews and nieces. In one group they said that there are some men who are worse than uncle because they go to the witchdoctor to kill others so that they can take their money.
- Sara's father was liked very much, for supporting Sara and dealing with his brother. It was agreed that there are many absentee fathers who work in towns. Young people stated that many such men forget their village families, but said that there are some good fathers, like Sara's.
- Zingo was very popular indeed and raised many laughs when the video was being shown. There was no adverse comment at all about her. The groups wanted her to stay in subsequent films. However, they did not see any point in keeping the lizard, which cannot help Sara, although they liked it when Sara sang songs.

Solution:

- Sara's way of dealing with her problems and her parents' support were seen as a good solution to ensure that she stayed in school.

Cultural Sensitivity:

- There were no problems identified at all. Some groups went further and stated that the film was well adapted to their traditions.

Educational messages and potential to change:

- In Nigeria, all classes of respondents felt that the story had the power to change people's behaviour. Men denied that they were against the education of the girl child and blamed poverty for what happens. However, people felt that the Sara film would help convince people, despite their poverty, of the value of educating bright girls. Some groups felt, nevertheless, that in cases of absolute poverty, the film would have no power to change parents because they simply cannot afford the school fees.
- In Cote d'Ivoire, it was felt by many groups that the major message for adults was that they should not behave like the uncle and take others' money. Surprisingly few groups recognized girls' education as the major issue. They rather saw messages in terms of personal moralities: working hard like Sara; not being selfish like Uncle, etc.

Preferred medium:

- While the animated film created a lot of interest, many preferred comic book as the best way to spread the message, since it is easier to buy or obtain. People felt that lack of access or ownership of television and irregular power supply made books more appropriate. They also liked the fact that you could take the comic book home and read it several times to understand it better. However, others, especially young people, said that they found the film easier to understand. In Nigeria, people appreciated the use of animation, as a medium especially suited and familiar to children.
- As in Eastern and Southern Africa, there was a need for materials to be produced in local languages, not just in French (for Cote d'Ivoire) or in English (especially for Northern Nigeria).
- Groups also thought that Sara stories could be disseminated through oral story telling.

Lessons learned on the research process:

In Francophone countries, as with many Anglophone countries, it will be necessary to translate the stories into the relevant local languages and use researchers, or research assistants, who are fluent in these languages. Use of local language would encourage more of the elders to participate actively in discussion groups.

6. MID-TERM EVALUATION

The protocol for SCI's process and outcome evaluation was designed and supervised by an independent research expert from the University of West Michigan, USA (Russon, Nov. 2000). The results are summarized below. The research capacity in five countries was also reviewed in order to identify the national research teams to undertake this work.

The first component of the SCI evaluation was a study of the *implementation process*, conducted in July-September 1999. It was decided that documentation on the differences in the way that SCI had been implemented throughout the region would help to explain variations in the initiative's outcomes and impact at a later date. The implementation process study was conducted in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique in the first phase. It was conducted through interviews with key UNICEF personnel and partners, a review of documentation, and interviews and group discussions with Sara users and intended audiences.

The second component of the evaluation was a study of *outcomes* with both quantitative and qualitative parts. These findings, it was believed, would enable UNICEF and its partners to monitor the progress of the initiative, and are also necessary for accountability. The qualitative component of the outcome evaluation was designed to understand the SCI's effect on behaviour development and change. This was conducted through qualitative case study research with communities in Uganda and Kenya. A set of case studies was conducted in 1999/2000. In addition to the extensive formative research on each episode, this research provides further information on the extent to which SCI is responding to the priorities of local people.

Craig Russon, PhD, of the Evaluation Centre, Western Michigan University, USA, was identified to lead the evaluation programme. In early 1999, he visited 5 countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa), interviewing 28 research organisations and/or individuals to identify those that would be qualified and have the capacity to undertake various evaluation studies.

While Dr. Russon undertook the process evaluation directly, African research agencies were recruited to conduct the outcomes studies. Dr. Russon worked with a national research team in Tanzania to develop the questionnaire and sample design for the quantitative research. In Kenya and Uganda, he supported research agencies in conducting the qualitative studies in communities that have been exposed to SCI. He also prepared a mini-manual for undertaking this form of case study research.

Results of the Implementation Study

The *implementation process* study's findings were reported to UNICEF's SCI Regional Task Force, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process, thereby enabling the regional and country Sara teams to revisit their implementation strategies. This study focused on four issues:

1. How have UNICEF policies influenced the implementation of SCI?

2. How has the UNICEF country programme's acceptance of SCI influenced its implementation?
3. How has UNICEF worked with inter-sectoral social partners to implement SCI?
4. How have contextual factors (economic, social, political, cultural, religious) influenced the implementation process?

The findings included the following key issues:

- The importance of an **enabling environment** within UNICEF country offices, with strong leadership providing support for SCI.
- The value of a strong **advocate** for Sara within UNICEF to move programming forward.
- SCI has moved far where SCI focal points have done successful **internal marketing** to gain support across programme sections within UNICEF.
- The necessity of promoting broad **ownership** within countries so that the partners who are implementing SCI feel that the initiative belongs to them.
- **Brand management**: concerns for quality control need to be balanced with the demands for developing Sara materials at country level.
- Because of the intensive, detailed development process, **production scheduling** has been semi-regular. While this allows countries to maximise on the use of each package as it is produced, in some cases it has been difficult to sustain marketing campaigns.
- Regional **funding** for SCI has not always been constant, which has delayed implementation in some countries. By contrast, countries which have raised their own funds have been able to scale up activities more quickly.
- The regional **implementation process** has been necessary to synergize the regional creative and production expertise. Thanks to the capacity building activities of the regional team, several countries have now developed core groups of writers and artists able to produce good quality Sara materials for national purposes.
- **Contextual factors** play an important part in SCI implementation, e.g. where countries are decentralising power to the district level, SCI has been able to move through district level planning processes.

Results of the Quantitative Study

The survey was conducted in 25 districts in Tanzania mainland where SCI has been implemented for 2-3 years and has reached a level of maturity. The principal investigators in this survey were Prof. M.C.Y. Mbago and Dr. F.J. Sichona, Demographic Training Unit, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Key findings reported in July 1999 included the following (Mbago and Sichona, Nov. 1999):

- Out of 635 girls interviewed in 25 districts, 32.4% could correctly identify Sara when shown an illustration.
- 18.4% of girls interviewed said that they had read the comic books.
- 14.8% said they had shared the story with others.
- 14.3% of the girls interviewed had been exposed to the comic books at school.
- 10.2% of girls interviewed had heard the radio show.
- 15.3% of girls interviewed had seen a Sara video.
- 13.4% of girls interviewed had seen the poster for episode 1.

It was concluded that where Sara had been applied in programming in a concerted way, she was rapidly becoming known to target audiences. In only two years of programming work she was already recognized by a third of the girls in the programme districts. This, it has been concluded, is a positive sign. Commercial market shares or recognition usually constitute shifts of 2% or 3% annually.

Results of the Qualitative Evaluation Studies

The third component of the evaluation was the qualitative study of outcomes, to provide insights into the role of SCI in attitude and behaviour development and change. This focused on: 1) how the life skills that girls learned through SCI have fostered their participation in their families' and communities' development, and 2) how SCI has influenced gender relationships of boys and girls. These studies were conducted by national research agencies in Kenya and Uganda, two countries which had seen a certain level of implementation activity. The Kenya research study was conducted by the Institute of Development Studies, affiliated with the University of Nairobi's College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Uganda study was conducted by the Makerere Institute of Social Research at Makerere University, Kampala.

The research involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Case studies of some girls and situations were carried out, working closely with girls and their communities to explore the impact of SCI on their lives.

The following conclusions on the qualitative studies are taken from the summary report on the Mid-term Evaluation by Dr. Russon:

Issue 1: How SCI influenced gender relationships among girls and boys

SCI has provided a role model for boy/girl relationships. For example, Faith, from the IDS study, stated that she would prefer the type of relationship like Sara and Juma, where they assisted one another with homework and whenever there were problems.

Issue 2: How the life skills that girls learned through SCI fostered their participation in development

The second issue was somewhat more complex. The studies first established that Sara materials taught (or if they did not teach, then strongly reinforced existing) life skills such as problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, creative thinking, self awareness, assertiveness, communication, negotiation, coping with stress and emotion, conflict management, empathy and interpersonal relationship skills. It was then demonstrated that these life skills could foster girls' participation in development. (The term "participation in development" was operationalized as claiming rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.)

The narrative in the Mid-term Evaluation report summarises how girls in the four studies were influenced by SCI to develop and use various life skills in laying claim to

their rights. The analysis examines in what ways the girls in the studies were able to translate Sara's life skills into action in their own lives. The theory of behavioural change that underpins SCI states that development of life skills in relation to one context affects people's sense of self-efficacy to act in other situations. In some cases, the link between Sara's example and the girls' behaviour is stated explicitly; in others, an influence may be inferred, but may require further investigation.

It should be noted that in most cases the girls in these studies were not just exposed to the Sara stories, but were facilitated through a process of discussing the stories, relating the issues to their own lives, and thereby reflecting on the development of their own life skills. The studies also illustrate that, while life skills may strengthen girls' ability to act effectively, in many cases their rights can only be fully realised within a supportive environment, where others take responsibility to meet and protect their rights.

Extracts from Uganda data

Nuwagaba, A. and Neema, S. (July 2000) The findings indicate that the adolescents have been exposed to SCI and are aware of Sara as a model adolescent girl. A comment from an adolescent girl from the FGD in Mukono High School (S.3) sums up the sentiment about Sara; “For me, I have learnt a lot from *Sara*. I have learnt how to solve problems for my friends e.g. a friend tells you that she is in love with somebody who has promised to marry her and yet she is still young. I advise her not to do it because in case of pregnancy, he will deny and will cause her problems; thus girls should say no to such men.”

Decision-making refers to selecting among different choices or options and taking the most appropriate alternative. It is a life skill, which constitutes one of the SCI elements. Adolescent girls were requested to indicate their life experiences regarding decision making and the findings from the FGD composed of S.3 adolescents revealed the following; “A man trapped me and started buying small gifts as handkerchiefs, watches and necklaces and sending them to me through his sister. The man is our neighbour at home. I refused his gifts because I knew that these gifts were being given not in good faith. I knew that this man will reach a point when he will demand them....”

A respondent from the same FGD interjected and asked; “Suppose he comes and demands his gifts and finds that you no longer have the watch he bought for you” and the group member retorted; “There is no such a thing as gift. What this man calls a gift is only a means of coming closer to you. For me what I do in such a situation is first of all not to accept gifts from men. Girls should learn how to be contented with what our parents give us. You have to decide between good behaviour and conduct or accept such cheap gifts and you risk getting led astray.”

From the foregoing, it is apparent that these adolescent girls have acquired skills of discerning the virtuous and the evil actions. It is interesting that adolescent girls recognize the dangers associated

with developing relationships with men through acceptance of gifts. While it takes unwavering courage for one to reject gifts, it is clear among majority of adolescents that small gifts from men constitute the greatest danger for the survival of adolescent girls.

In order to understand the nature of decision making among adolescent girls, it was revealed in one FGD (S.2) in Mukono High School that; “---This is the message that we learnt in the life skills clubs about Sara. When time came, a boy whom we study with at school came and exactly told me that same thing as we learnt from *Sara*. He said that even of ht meant dying he was determined to die because of his great passion towards me. His words seemed sweet but that good heart inside me kept haunting me, saying, ‘do you remember what you learnt in SCI and life skills club? ---I decided to put the boy off, telling him that if he loved me, there was no problem but that he had to wait until the right time came.”

Through in-depth interviews with eight girls at the Mukono schools, a great deal of insight was gained on Sara’s influence in girls’ lives. A summary is provided below.

Case 1: Age 16 yrs , Class: Senior 3 at Mukono High School, Resident: Nasuti Trading Centre. Both parents alive but she is staying with her sister.

She first heard about Sara when she read it from the Young Talk newspaper in 1999. Then she again watched it on TV. She was also given books of Sara by the head of life skills club. The patron of their club explained some of the issues from the books about Sara. Her understanding of Sara is that she is a girl who stayed with her uncle. She is a brilliant girl, well disciplined and she has capability of assisting others. Her father, working elsewhere, would send money for Sara’s school fees but the uncle would use it for other things. Sara likes studying so much. Sara was a good advice giver. She gave advice to her friend Amina not to work in the bar as she would get pregnant and catch diseases from men. Sara advised other students not to be tempted by *sugar daddies*. She was hard working, she made a special gift for her uncle – a stove that was using less wood.

What the interviewee liked most about Sara is the way she gave advice to her friends and thought more about something before she took a decision. She also liked Sara because she was hard working.

She usually talks with her friends about Sara when they meet in their life skills club. They talk about critical thinking, peer resistance (to make the right decision even if your friends are doing wrong thing), self esteem, self-awareness (to stand for what you are and do what you think is right for you). They read and discuss some of the things learnt. She does not talk about Sara with her parents, brothers, sisters or relatives.

She has been inspired by Sara and has applied what she has learnt from her; “I have learned how to make decisions. I first see what is right and wrong then I act accordingly. I have learnt to think critically before I do something. I have also learnt to advise others to stop going with *sugar daddies*. It gives courage to lead others and be disciplined and obey our elders. If not, you land

into trouble. I have learned how I can protect my life. Sara gives me courage to be hard working and get better results. Also to help others if possible.”

She reported that one day, some boy tried to pull her dress and she stopped the boy and showed she did not want him to do that. She found a way of avoiding him. In case a friend’s brother approached her for sex, she said she would not accept, she would resist. She would tell her friend that she would never come back. She would tell the boy that she is still interested in her studies and does not like to play around with boys. She would advise other girls also to resist and tell the boys that they are not interested.

She thinks about her future and she wants it to be bright; “If I begin going with men at this age I will get STD or become pregnant. I want to study hard and be well off. I want to be a lawyer or a journalist.”

Case 2: Age 19 yrs, Class: Senior 3-Mukono High School, residence: rural. She is a member of life skills club. She has both parents alive but she is staying with her sister. Her father is a small farmer and her mother is a housewife. She has three sisters and four brothers

Case 2 first heard about Sara when the life skills club started last year at their school. They got books and watched a film about Sara. Her understanding of Sara was that she was a primary school going student but lacked money for fees to continue to secondary school. Sara was seen as a friendly girl and helpful. She reported that she likes Sara because; “She was a girl of critical thinking. When she was told that she could not continue in school she went to her bedroom and thought about it and expressed herself and talked to her teacher about it. I also like her behaviour; she respects people and she is bright. She also likes schooling very much.”

From Sara she has learnt to wait and make a good decision, be humble to parents. By formulating your own activities you can succeed; “I have also learnt to create good friends. If you create good friends they can give you good decisions.”

She has learned to be hardworking and study hard. She has been inspired by Sara and has started making handcrafts and selling them and bought herself clothes. She said; “If you have a problem don’t fear to express it someone might help.”

In the Sara club when they talk about Sara they talked about how to make decisions, put on plays, create songs and poems and hold debates. They also talked about education (to concentrate on their studies and to make some handcrafts). Reaction towards sexual abuse and exploitation she said; “I was going to market to buy things then I found a group of teenage boys. They started calling me. I did not respond. They tried to touch me. They asked me that I should be their lover. I refused and run away and went back home.”

If she was asked for sex when visiting her friend she reported; “I would tell the boy that I am still a dependent and I am still young and I do not want to get into those bad things.”

She would advise other girls also to resist and abstain from sex until they have completed their studies; “I would tell them that if anybody wants to tamper with you don’t accept them.” She thinks about her future; “I want to have education with the aim of getting a job in future. I do not want to get involved in sex when I am not ready for it. I have three choices: I want to become a journalist, a lawyer and if I fail I will be a teacher. I also like teaching.”

Case 3: Age 17yrs, Class: senior 2-Mukono High School, residence: rural. She is a member of life skills club. Both parents are living. Her father is a driver and mother a housewife

She came to know Sara in Young Talk magazine. She has also seen a Sara videotape. She said; “Sara is a girl who helps her friends. She is a determined girl who did not accept Juma’s love. She was given a letter by a man to meet at the junction and she refused. She has learnt to help her friends when they have problems to solve.”

What she liked most about Sara is the way she Sara was innovative. She made a stove for her uncle after acquiring skills from her teacher. She explained that they usually talk about Sara when they meet in their critical thinking club. They talk about the fact that girls should be educated like boys are. They read and discuss some of the things learnt.

She has been inspired by Sara and has applied what she has learnt from her; “When I have a problem I tell my teachers and teachers.”

She would advise other girls to abstain from sex until they have completed their studies. She thinks about her future and she wants become an engineer.

To her, critical thinking is; “---the ability when you have a problem and able to solve it with friend.”

She has not had a serious problem. It is only that she sometimes does not have enough time to revise her work, because she is busy doing housework.

Case 4: Age 15yrs, Class: Primary 7, Trading Centre, School: Mukono Boarding Primary School Her father is a retired engineer and the mother has died so she is staying with her step mother. She came to know Sara last year from her class teacher. According to her Sara is a helpful girl. She obeys her parents. She has critical thinking and empathy. She always wanted to help her friends who were in problems; “Sara respects her parents, when they told her that there is no school fees she felt bad but did not react badly. She has learnt to help her friends when they have problems to solve.”

What she liked most about Sara is the way she interacted with her friends and would solve their problems. What she does not like in the stories is when those big men wanted to have sex with

Sara. Her friends and her usually talk about Sara during their free time with friends and in their life skills club meetings which take place on Friday Monday and Wednesday evenings. They talk about, making good friends and helping each others always. She does not talk about Sara with her parents, brothers, or relatives. She also talks about Sara with her sisters. She has been inspired by Sara and has applied what she has learnt from her. For instance my step mother mistreats her; “So I told my elders and they consoled me and told me to persist and finish my studies then I can leave the place.”

Her reaction towards sexual abuse and exploitation: She said that nothing of that sort has ever happened to her. If it happened she would shout so that people who are near can help her. She can also report the boy to police. And if she visited and a boy asked for sex she would not allow it and the she would report the boy to her friend.

She thinks about her future and she wants become a doctor like her mother was a nurse; “I think about my future that is why I do not want to be disturbed by the men who will make me pregnant and I may get AIDS. I want to read my books and be somebody in future.”

She is aware of some of the children’s rights. They include the fact that children are not supposed to stop schooling. They are not supposed to be beaten when it is not necessary. Children have the right to express themselves. She indicated that she is free to talk and express herself; “When I tell my parents to give me money for extras they refuse. For instance at school we the P7 stay up to 6.30 p.m. sometimes they do not give me the money for those hours of prep. I have faced my teachers and told them this problem and sometimes they allow me to study without the money.”

Case 5: Age:15 years, Senior Three-Mukono High School, Parents Occupation: Father: Tax Collector. Step Mother: Hair Dresser

She learned about Sara in May 2000. She was introduced to Sara through newspaper and a book. She describes Sara as a girl who was living with her uncle; a girl who had the best of advise for her friends. For example, she advised her friend, Amina, not to work in a bar with her sister. She told Amina, that she was still too young to work in a bar. She also advised another friend to avoid con men and drug users because they would spoil her education. Sara was a member in several clubs. Sara was a well-behaved girl who usually gave advice to her friends and she also was able to think critically. When something happened she would think deeply about it.

When asked what she would do if boys tried to abuse her sexually, she said; “In most case I avoid boys. I am normally in the company of girls. Such boys who behavior in such a manner are normally bigger in size and body – so you cannot fight them. So if such a thing happened to me – the best action would be to report the case immediately the senior teacher or to my parents. Such behavior is very bad and makes me feel bad. I would certainly feel that such a boy does not have respect for other people. I would try to run, to get away from him or even shout loudly for help. If a boy at this school did such a thing to me, I would face him and ask him to get off me and leave me alone. I would scold him and remind him not ever to touch me because I am not a kid. I would

also advise him to go to the street if he wants a woman to touch. I hardly laugh or joke with boys. I avoid them – If you laugh back or smile then they think you are ‘easy going’ and you like boys. If you smile back they think you enjoy it.”

She was asked, what message she would give to other adolescents like her. She replied; “They should be self-aware about such situations and develop right solutions. They should avoid sex; they should avoid bad peer groups; and they should think about their books and less luxury.”

When asked what she thinks about her future, she replied; “I think about the future and myself a lot of the time. I want to become a teacher some day or a preacher because I am a born again. Sara has good advice – she is involved in problem solving. I do not hate a thing about Sara.”

Case 6: Age: 15 years, School: Mukono High School. Father dead, Mother unemployed. Brother looks after her. The brother is a teacher.

She said; “Sara is a role model who saved her friend Amina who was going to be spoiled by truck drivers. Sara advised Amina not to work with her sister in a bar. Sara had no money for fees. She fetched firewood and sold it. She made a stove.” She reported; “I read a book and saw a film at Namangunga Primary School. I also attended a peer education workshop 8 to 12 May 2000. I also read the story from the newspapers plus saw a Sara a calendar. At my school we are nine peer educators. One shifted to another school recently.”

She reported that after attending the peer education workshop; “We talked to other students about facts of life and skills – the formation of friendships; critical thinking – think before you act; ask yourself whether your act will benefit you or not; self-awareness” On knowing yourself she said one must know “your weaknesses, for example; if you are poor do not pretend to be rich”; and on negotiation; “in meetings with friends, you have to stand on your own ideas and say what you want to say; you can agree or disagree”; on coping with stress; “Do not worry about what will happen during exams, do not panic – people should be relaxed.”

She claimed that; “I have learnt not to be driven by peer group pressure. I have learnt to select good friends who can give good advice (Sara gave good advice); I have learnt to think before acting – Amina, for example, was deceived by truck drivers; I have learnt not to go to dark places alone; and I have learnt that it is important to make friends with people of my age.”

She gave an example of application in daily life; “One time my brother sent me to buy food in town at around 9.00 p.m. It was pretty late, but I had to go since there was nobody at home. On the way to town, a man stopped me and asked if I needed to take a lift with him in his car. This was the conversation :

Man: “Do you want a lift in my car.”

Girl: “To take me where? I can of course take myself wherever I plan to go.”

Man: “You a stupid girl. How can you decline a free ride – I am not asking you to pay.”

Girl: “That is how you make people stupid and harass them. Of course you would not take me for free. You would have suggested something else later. I know that these days there is nothing free!”

The man drove off very fast, grumbling.

“In yet another incidence, I was returning home from the market carry a heavy load of foodstuff. A man stopped me and asked if he could assist. The time was around 6.00PM”

Girl: “I have enough strength – which is why I bought this much.”

Man: “You are an arrogant girl. If a person provides assistance, why should you be rude to them? It is funny that you do not need to be assisted!”

Girl: Stares at the man

Man: (Continues....) Okay if you do not need help to carry your stuff, I would still like to say hello to you.

Girl: Do you really need to waste so much time and energy before you can get to the point? Or before you can greet me.

Man: (He insists...) I need to stop walking so that I can greet you properly.

Girl: I really do not want you to greet me – it does not add anything to me. Besides, I did not have to stop to greet anyone on the way!

Man: (Continues walking very fast behind Lydia).

Girl: (Suddenly stops and asks him) Why are you walking very fast behind me? Are you intending to grab me? I know you men are known to take advantage of young girls.

Man: I cannot do such a thing. I am a big mature person who is reasonable.

Girl: (Fortunately a friend of mine came by and we walked back home together. She asked me what the man wanted from me. She advised me never to go to town late).

When asked if she was ever sexually harassed and touched by men, she said; “Yes, this has happened to me several times when I going shopping in the market. The men in the market are not respectful. One time I stopped and shouted at them. I told them that – “Basajja mwe mumanyilira”. I also reminded them about the law against indecent assault. They challenged me, ‘Laws in Uganda do not work’---You are proud, arrogant and an ugly girl.’ I could not respond to such comment – I walked off very fast. These days, I avoid the market place. If I visit the market, then I do my shopping in a hurry.”

Her message to other adolescents: “Avoid discos and blue movies; avoid things that they cannot afford; avoid looking for relationship for purposes of making money – but the outcome is either pregnancy or AIDS.”

She said that she thought about her future everyday; “My future is about how I can prepare for my examinations and how to pass them. I try to read hard. My brother’s income is limited. I think of where I could find other sources of school fees because my brother is over-burdened.”

What she learned from Sara; “Sara’s story is good. It shows problems of adolescents and solutions to the problems. A number of skills are included in the story. I discuss Sara with my friends oftenWe also discuss Sara during the life skills club meetings. The club has 24 members and we meet every Friday.”

Case 7: Age 12; Class P.6- Mukono High School; Double orphan (1995), Guardian-Stepmother, has five siblings.

She was exposed to Sara through life skills club at school in 1999. She reported an immediate application of Sara: “A man at home who has a shop and gave me sweets and asked me; ‘When will you give me?’ I ran away and told my guardian but she did not mind because she does not love me. In reporting this man to my stepmother I behaved like Sara. I then report him to the teacher.”

Her advice to other adolescent girls was; “Stop over-familiarizing with boys and help those with problems. Because boys can cause you to become pregnant.” She advised; “To respect parents and not to overlook them; poor or rich because I am mistreated since I lack parents. I wish I had parents rich or poor! Parents are parents.--- Also be very cautious to interact with strangers, whether male or female. Just resolve within yourself why have they called you. Even these women can be sinister and be used by wrong elements. Strangers should be treated with the necessary suspicion!”

In thinking about the future she said; “I want to be a doctor because science is my best subject and also you work less and get a lot of money.”

Case 8: Age:14; Senior one –Mukono High School; Orphan: Stays with grandmother father plays a supplementary role. 2 brothers stay with their father 13 and ten years old.

She reported; “In 1999, I learned about Sara. I read Young Talk at school. It is normally brought by the headmaster. Sara is the one who knows the rights of every child that develops their personality and talents, e.g. a right to inherit of life, including protection against HIV/AIDS. Right of freedom from sexual exploitation and abuse. A right to health and health care. She reported that from the Sara stories she learned; “ To be aware of issues coming forward, and problems that one is likely to find, such as when walking you come across someone in trouble you should solve that problem - such as when Sara helped Amina solve her problem of being raped by truck drives. Helping my friends solve their problems, such as one of my friends who did not have school fees and then I advised her to go and explain to her uncle who helped her pay the school fees.”

She further reported what she likes about Sara: “Her monkey (Zingo) is so good, it tells her how to handle situations, she illustrates how you are likely to get in problems and how to solve them. She is bright in class.”

The outcomes evaluation in Kapchorwa, Uganda involved a study (Nuwagaba, A. July 2000) on the use of the Sara episode, “Daughter of a Lioness”, in an area of Uganda where female genital

cutting (FGC) has been a cultural norm. Here are some of reflections from girls:

"When I was at school, REACH (an initiative against FGC) brought us a video film and a seminar. It was on the dangers of FGC. So when I went back home, I heard that Chebet Mary was going to be circumcised. Immediately, I went and told her about the dangers of FGC like: over bleeding, risking to catch AIDS and opening yourself naked for all the community members to see you. On hearing, Mary said thank you very much for telling me. Now my eyes are opened. I swear never to go or think of female circumcision again.... Sara teaches us not to let anybody force one into female circumcision. Sara encourages us to always stand firm against all odds, regardless of the amount of pressure from parents or relatives." (*Jamilla*)

"I visited my aunt during the season of circumcision and she suggested it to me. I told her that maybe you produce you own children and then you circumcise them if they want. But for me, leave me alone. I cannot accept to be circumcised. Even I threatened to cut short my stay. But she pleaded to me and promised never to say such a thing to me again." (*Zuwena*)

"Sara teaches us never to give up. Not to think that because a friend has accepted to circumcise, so you should also follow." (*Justine*)

"Sara suffered so much but she managed to succeed from not being circumcised. So, I learn to always remain honest to myself and be firm against FGC even if all my friends have deserted me." (*Zubaika*)

The Kapchorwa study also dealt with issues beyond FGC. It analyzed how girls were using Sara to deal with other threats to their health and future prospects. One girl related how she used critical thinking skills, learned from Sara, to deal with an older man:

"I was approached by a man for sex. Can you imagine somebody coming to you for the first time and claims that he loves you! Anyway, I told the man that I am not opposed to his love, but that he should come and tell my parents how he loves me. I could tell that the man hated me... I encourage the girls to use the same tricks in order to beat off such men and save their lives like what I did. And I had learned that from the story of Sara."

Extracts from Kenya data

The outcomes evaluation in Kenya (Institute of Development Studies, 2000) revealed some interesting findings:

GOAL drop-in centre for street children in Nairobi

The children were playful and noisy at the beginning, but very enthusiastic and much at ease with the video. Some of them had watched up to three different episodes of the Sara stories before. They were very excited as they watched and some even spoke along. Several of them had mastered most of the wordings. The same familiarity was reflected as they sang along. The children did not miss to take note of hilarious episodes as exhibited by Zingo (Sara's monkey), as well as the treachery

demonstrated by the two truck drivers when they offered Amina soda that was mixed with beer.

The television was in a room with benches lined up in two rows. The children sat on the benches and a few tables, watching the video with rapt attention. There was a slight division as girls sat together on the bench. However, they seemed to interact freely with the boys. They laughed occasionally and they even sang along with Sara. After the video show, the children were asked questions and they debated actively about various answers that were being suggested.

The children expressed great love for the Sara stories. They found most of the episodes comical and with a moral teaching. The children were aware of the fact that it is wrong for young girls to get involved with sugar daddies. They suggested that the government should arrest these men. They were also able to relate the Sara materials to real life situations. They talked about their own encounters with lorry drivers. They advised that girls should learn to say no to the advances from men who want to exploit them sexually. They recommended that girls should learn to be sly whenever they feel cornered. In spite of having spent much of their lives on the streets, these children were able to enumerate some of the things that they consider necessary for a child's development. These included education, love, respect and good moral conduct.

Nevertheless, some of the girls were not as well equipped. When asked what they would do if they were to find themselves in Amina's situation, some responded rather desperately. Some said that they would have given in to the demands of the truck drivers. And, while Sara emerged as a favourite person in the episodes, there was a feeling that she is rather 'green', whereas, in reality, most of the girls living on the streets are sexually active and experienced. Teachers at GOAL noted that the major achievement of the Sara project is that the majority of the girls at the GOAL centre are especially encouraged by the character of Sara and the stories constantly reassure them of their abilities.

Interview with Pirus, a boy living at the GOAL centre for street children, Nairobi

“I am called Pirus and I am 14 years old. I play football and *tae kwondo* with my friends, both boys and girls... GOAL assists me with food, education, protection and guidance. But I have to work for my clothes and shoes. --- I first encountered the Sara materials in January this year. I watched a video in class and I have since read (episodes 2-5 in Swahili). I am able to read because I left school in Standard Seven, when I was sent away due to non-payment of school fees. From the Sara materials, I have learnt how to be sly so as to escape from danger. I have occasionally used this skill when some of the bigger boys want to beat us on the streets or when they want money from us or when they send us and we refuse to comply. I have made noise and people have rescued me. I think that I am like Sara because if I was not I would still be out on the streets. I have achieved discipline and I have changed my attitude. I do not insult my friends as I used to. - -- My plans at the moment are that I save money and when it reaches some good amount I can start a business of selling sweets or go to my mother at the Ngara Market so that she can get me a business space. But, I must first get education. I would even like a better job, but my results may not be good enough. So I must wait and see what I achieve in education. But, I think things are going to be difficult because of money. I might not finish school. --- I would like to see the

community help by not looking down upon us, as we are also human. I can change the community by assisting them and helping them. I would also like to be educated in a normal school situation.”

Lisa, a 16 year old student at Nyabisawa Girls High School in Mogori District, Kenya

"Lisa feels that she has benefited from Sara. She has felt encouraged to be more principled. She has also learnt that even if one is young, they can help the community and even teach them new ways of doing things. Lisa's younger sister has read *The Special Gift* and this has helped her not to make hurried decisions. The Sara materials have also been of assistance to Lisa's schoolmates. The girls now feel free to talk about their problems, even to their teachers. Sara has also taught them to be principled as long as they know that they are doing the right thing. They have also learnt that girls too can be good in science subjects and they can be good examples to others, including the boys."

Marion, a 17 year old community youth volunteer at Kibera Community Self-Help programme in Nairobi. Marion left school after Form Two owing to lack of school fees.

"Marion thinks that community problems can be solved if girls know their rights. She gave an example of her Nubian neighbours who practised female circumcision. But after she gave them the Sara book *Daughter of a Lioness*, they now seem to think differently... Marion likes Sara because she is brave and she did her best. Sara has educated her and given her ideas and hope that "girls too are supposed to go to school." She also noted that members of her family have benefited. Her mother used to be very harsh, especially when Marion's friends used to come for visits. After reading the Sara materials, her mother's attitude has changed."

Conclusion on Mid-Term Evaluation

The analysis of the various research studies for the mid-term evaluation provides good evidence that Sara has the potential to be recognised widely throughout Sub-Saharan Africa as a symbol for girls' empowerment in the face of HIV/AIDS and other threats to health and well being. She is seen as a supportive, positive role model for girls' rights in areas where a reasonable attempt has been made to program with Sara communication stories and tools. However, uptake by UNICEF country offices has been uneven due to the decision-making process in each office. It was recommended by the mid-term evaluators that UNICEF should capitalise on the investment and continue to support and expand the SCI implementation process in Sub-Saharan Africa.

7. COMMERCIALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

At the time Sara was conceived it was decided that the products should be made available to a wide group of potential partners and organisations through a partnership with the private sector. Beginning in 1996, a search was made for a regional publisher with capacity to market, distribute and sell Sara products throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. A tender was issued and five regional publishers submitted proposals that then underwent a lengthy review process. Maskew Miller Longman, (MML) Cape Town, a publisher with excellent outreach and long-term experience, was chosen.

The giving of publishing rights to a private sector partner was not an easy concept to sell in UNICEF. The alternative was for Sara materials to remain within UNICEF alone and be dependent on program decisions and budgets of its various offices in Africa. As in most organisations, such initiatives rely on a few committed people who want something to succeed and when they move on, it was thought that Sara would not easily survive. It was felt that it was imperative for a commercial, educational publisher to act as the repository of the printing masters and to also have the job of marketing those materials to reach their full potential.

The commercial contract with MML took over three years to negotiate, involving lawyers from UNICEF New York and UNICEF Supply Division, Copenhagen. Every detail of the commercial relationship had to be worked out. In the end, MML signed a 10-year contract for exclusive rights to Sara print materials in Sub-Saharan Africa and non-exclusive rights to Sara videos in English, French, Portuguese and Swahili. They also have the rights to do language versions and to propose new products. UNICEF earns a small royalty from non-UNICEF sales. This private sector contract is, perhaps, one of the first of its kind in development communication. It provided the basis for a sustainable communication initiative.

The other element of sustainability in Sara's original conception was that of a foundation or NGO taking over the responsibility for operating Sara regionally, and collaborating with the commercial publisher on new products and raising funds for this from donors, as appropriate and needed. To date, this latter development has not proven possible, although it may still be feasible to do. Some discussions were held with MML on this matter but it was thought that Sara had to prove herself commercially first, making new inroads to partners and customers in many countries.

The sustainability of communication initiatives is a key issue for development communicators. Very often programs and initiatives start and die quickly and there may be no trace of them after a few years, except, perhaps, in libraries and repositories. It was felt that a mechanism was needed for making Sara materials available in perpetuity, as long as Sara and the stories she tells resonate with the people and social issues of Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Appendix 1

SCI FORMATIVE RESEARCH: DETAILED PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Overview of the Formative Research Process

People will only relate to communication media if it evokes their own experiences. Formative research is required to make communication programmes responsive to the needs of the audience. It is not a fixed methodology, but rather has the potential to evolve to suit the demands of each situation. When effectively used, it demonstrates how a communication initiative has to start from the people and not from the professionals. It is necessary first to learn from people's experiences and then build on that to design a product for their consumption. The viewers themselves also value their involvement in the production process.

The materials that have been produced for the Sara Communication Initiative (SCI) bear testimony to the value of the formative research methodology, which has been evolved to such a degree that the ownership of the films rests fully with the people. With this kind of research the materials produced and the stories they tell are indeed of the people, for the people and by the people. This document aims to show how formative research enables this to happen.

The objective of the SCI is to highlight the problems faced by girls in Sub-Saharan Africa. These issues are to be raised, discussed and dealt with in such a manner that people recognize them and understand that they hinder the development of girls and society as a whole.

The solutions also have to fit into the lives of the people. They need to feel that they are *their* solutions. In the SCI, therefore, people are partners in the creation of the materials from the beginning. The people's perceptions, suggestions and anecdotes are then used to evolve a story line, which is discussed and modified repeatedly, until the people are satisfied with the portrayal of the problem and the solution suggested. Only then are the materials produced. As the materials are intended to cross many countries and cultures, many cultural groups participate in this creative process.

Aims of Formative Research

This kind of research seeks to find out how the stories can play a significant role in bringing about positive development and changes in the attitudes and behaviour of people towards adolescent girls. Through in-depth research, the SCI seeks to identify characters, background settings and story lines that strike a common chord of cultural identity across such a widely heterogeneous population. It is vital that every girl is able to relate to Sara, the heroine, and the problems she confronts. Sara's character and actions have to be credible.

On economic grounds, formative research is also necessary. Production of animated film, in particular, is very expensive so it is essential that all details of the film are carefully researched and agreed before production begins. While animation offers an opportunity to address sensitive issues through an entertaining film, in-depth research on the pilot episode is necessary to ascertain its credibility and effectiveness as a medium for communicating serious issues. The SCI aims to tackle controversial and delicate issues related to gender disparity in an open but unthreatening way.

Research is therefore needed to define these parameters with people of diverse socio-cultural life styles.

Formative research is also used to ascertain that the stories maintain the delicate balance between 'education' and 'entertainment' - between weighty social issues and entertaining tales that appeal to both children and adults. Particular care is needed to prevent the materials becoming overloaded with messages, or, alternatively, to ensure that a serious issue is not treated flippantly.

The research examines people's understanding of each issue or message, the appropriateness of the story line and characters and the acceptability of the solution to the cultural milieu. This is done through exhaustive sessions with people to reveal their attitudes and values regarding specific topics. This determines whether the issues raised are of real concern to the girls and their families and whether they consider the solutions as viable. The project seeks to promote behaviour that is universally acceptable and does not alienate any particular community or section of society.

Research Plan: What we do

Formative research in animated film production is used at a number of stages in the development process. This is adapted for other media, such as radio production, but the principles remain the same. The role and objectives of the research are defined by the stage of development.

a. Research on concepts

Initially existing research data is used to identify the issues that are priority problems for the adolescent girl. This could be, for example, issues of girls' workload or girls being 'pushed out' of school. The researcher's task is then to validate this concept with the people, to establish whether they really do consider this to be a problem. Introducing the topic to the group discussion, the researcher probes people's understanding of this issue, along with their main attitudes, beliefs and values. People discuss different dimensions of the problem and are also stimulated to suggest solutions.

b. Research on draft story lines

The findings from the concept research are used as inspirational material to develop the initial drafts of the story line. These are reviewed by technical experts within and outside UNICEF. These story lines, which blend educational and social concepts with adventure and humour, are taken back to the people to establish the entertainment value, comprehension and credibility of the story line. The researcher either reads the story or plays a pre-recorded version on audio cassette. Respondents are urged to suggest changes and improvements to any aspect. Some story lines may be eliminated in the process. With feedback from research, the stories are modified by the scriptwriters and then returned once again to the field for further testing. This process of refinement is continued until the respondents, researchers and scriptwriters are satisfied with the story.

c. Research on storyboards

The story is then produced with a series of still colour images from the storyboard. This can either be taken as it is and retold with each focus group as a story with illustrations or it can be filmed on video with a single narrator. This decision depends on the availability and cost of video players in the field. The respondents listen to the illustrated story and discuss how the issue is treated. They are invited to step into the shoes of different characters in various situations and see if they can guide the film. The

concept and story line are again validated in this process. At this stage, people can also respond to the visual representation of the characters and events. Attention is given to visual details, such as the portrayal of the characters, their expression and dress, and the houses and scenery, to ensure their acceptability across the region. Only when the feedback from the research in all the countries has been synthesized and agreement reached on all aspects of the film, can it be taken forward for production.

Once the animated film is complete, it can once again be tested for its impact and the ways in which it can be exploited to maximize its effectiveness. The lessons learned from this post-test are used in the development of subsequent episodes. The other elements of the communication package, such as the posters, stories for radio and audio cassettes, comic books, etc., are pre-tested in the same way with their target audience.

Through this participatory research process, the films and other materials are not made for the people, but rather made by the people themselves.

Formative Research Process: How we do it

The research design is prepared to conduct simultaneous research in the countries involved. The broad guidelines and strategies are made to pursue a uniform approach for research. The research tools are designed to suit each stage in the development of the film. These tools for data collection are themselves pre-tested. The national research teams identify the sites for research in different parts of the countries and make the necessary arrangements.

The qualitative research methods of focus group discussions, focused small group interviews, in-depth one-to-one interviews and observation techniques are used for data collection. The group discussions have 5 to 7 respondents, while interviews are with 1 to 3 people, at most.

The schedules and guides for data collection include:

- a. Structured questionnaire to collect general information about the selected field site and the people.
- b. An observation schedule to study the attention and reactions of the group through non-verbal expressions, while watching the animatic video or listening to the story line.
- c. A semi-structured questionnaire for group discussions on the stories and illustrations and for gauging their attitudes and beliefs.
- d. A semi-structured questionnaire for focus group interviews to study, in detail, the responses of the audience to various aspects of the material, especially if there is a specific problematic area.

In order to elicit the spontaneous impressions and responses of the audience, open-ended questions are used. Leading questions are avoided unless strictly necessary. At each research site, prior to fieldwork, local contacts are tapped to help make the arrangements for equipment, transport and local participation. The people are requested to form small groups. They are introduced to the research team and the purpose of their visit. The researcher stresses the importance of the respondents' role in helping to make a film (radio programme, etc) that will educate and entertain people in many countries. It is

now in the respondents' hands to see that whatever goes into the story line/films is appropriate, relevant, realistic and acceptable.

The story/film is then presented to the people without interruption. The researcher then initiates the discussion. While the group is taken through the questionnaire schedule, two research assistants take notes. The feedback is analyzed at a debriefing session held by the researchers and assistants after returning from the field. A typical research session lasts about two hours and often includes a series of shorter sessions at the same site with different groups.

Issues which are controversial or sensitive in a particular socio-cultural setting are tackled through private interviews or small group interviews. Similarly, some other issues, such as female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS, are investigated in select groups. It is often more revealing to discuss sensitive issues in the third person. For example, if a mother is asked directly whether she gives preference to her son rather than to her daughter, she may well deny it and become defensive. However, if the researcher asks whether there are any families nearby who might behave in this way, a more open response will be elicited.

Examples of Questions in Formative Research

Given below is a sample of the general questions usually asked to clarify the concept at the start of the research process. It is important to note that the researcher cannot pre-determine the order in which the questions will be asked. This will depend on how the discussion or interview progresses.

- When do you hear this term (e.g. sexual harassment), what comes to mind?
- What do people mean when they talk about this?
- Have you heard your friends/neighbours talk about it?
- In what context do they talk about it?
- Is this issue important? Should we discuss it?
- Does this problem really exist?
- How does it affect people you know? ...your friends, relatives, neighbours?
- (If rapport is good) How does it affect you?
- How can this problem be explained in your view?
- Do you think other people also think similarly?
- What do men think about it? Women? Girls? Boys? Old people? Young people?
- Can you help me with any examples or stories?
- Is there a solution to this problem?
- Who can solve this problem?
- Do we solve this together or individually?
- Can children/young people/girls solve this problem by themselves?
- Who can help them the most?
- How can a film deal with this issue? What would you like to show?

Once the concept has been validated and the draft story line developed, the research involves questions on:

- Comprehension and credibility of the content
- Appropriateness to the country and culture

- Acceptability of the characters and roles
- Educational messages/issues
- Practicability of the solution
- Agreement with the gender perspective and overall philosophy of the series
- Entertainment value and appeal

At this stage the most significant questions are geared towards establishing the contextual reality. Examples of such questions include:

- Is this what really happens?
- Do you believe this story/film?
- Will other people/your friends believe this?
- Will this help in any way to change people's attitudes and behaviour?
- What do you think is not right/not acceptable/not real?
- How can the story/film be improved?
- Suggest alternative stories.

The storyboard is pre-tested mainly to establish:

- Comprehension of the story
- Acceptability and credibility of the story and visuals
- Appeal and entertainment value of the story.

The People and the Place

The film series, radio series and other media are intended for the general public, so the research is conducted with a wide range of socio-economic groups. In each country at the various stages of development the materials will be researched in urban, urban slum, peri-urban and rural areas. Depending on the issue to be discussed, the groups may be homogenous or heterogenous. The groups are stratified by the following parameters: age; sex; educational level; socio-economic class; geographical location; religion. Specific groups, such as village leaders, teachers, social workers or health workers, are involved as required.

Since the initiative aims for behavioural development and behavioural change in both children and adults, it is necessary to involve both in the research. Children, and particularly girls, are included to reflect on the characterization of the girl heroine. It is important to ensure that girls are able to relate to the heroine and her experiences. Adults are needed to advise on the issues and credibility of the film and to indicate its potential to change adult behaviour towards girls. Sara is intended as an advocate for girls in society as a whole, so the widest possible range of participants in the research process have been involved to ensure the project's broad acceptability. The members of the groups are tailored to suit the needs of each topic. For example, in the episode on sexual harassment, "Sara Saves her Friend" research was conducted with school going boys and girls in mixed and separate groups, with parents, and also with lorry drivers. The issue of female genital mutilation was discussed in separate groups with different family members as well as community elders.

Reactions and Response

The pre-testing of the Sara stories is an enriching experience. Each session is a chapter in learning how the concept of this creative initiative works and what potential it has. The process provides

valuable feedback, central to the development and refinement of the materials. It has also enhanced our understanding of the fundamental nature and potential of qualitative, participatory research.

People in the different countries have been very willing to cooperate and eager to participate and contribute to the creation of the stories. If people seem at all inhibited when discussing a sensitive issue, the matter can be taken up later in more private groups. If resistance or disharmony ever develops in the focus group discussions, it should be enough to wait and watch while the people themselves resolve the issue. In general, the respondents have expressed very positive opinions of the initiative. They have stated that these stories could have a good impact in changing attitudes towards the adolescent girl. It is the formative research process which seeks to ensure that people across the region identify closely with the issues raised in the stories and look upon girl and her family as their own people.

Research Training

The research teams from the ten countries involved in this initiative have received in-depth training in the formative research process. The initial training was conducted in 1995 at two workshops, in Uganda and Malawi, using participatory training methods. The groups were introduced to the methodology and then jointly developed question guidelines to conduct research on concepts and draft stories. These tools were pre-tested with nearby communities, modified and finalized. The research teams then prepared their national plans to carry out formative research, seeking to cover the major ethnic/cultural groups in their own country. On-the-job training has also been provided by Dr. Mira Aghi, to researchers in countries that have joined SCI since 1995. The country research teams also receive regular refresher training at the annual regional workshops, where they are also able to share experiences with colleagues from other countries.

Guidelines for Research Teams

These notes are based on the orientation given to research teams before they conduct research.

Focus group discussion to find out:

- * how people perceive or experience the issue/problem
- * whether the story is appropriate for the country and culture
- * whether the characters are acceptable
- * whether the story educates effectively
- * whether it promotes the intended behaviour in line with the gender perspective and overall philosophy of the series
- * whether the audience comprehend the story
- * whether the story is acceptable and credible
- * whether the solution is regarded as practicable
- * whether the story is appealing and entertaining
- * who they think the story is for.

Samples for Focus Groups:

Focus group discussions tend to be more frank and informative when the group is homogenous. Selection of the groups is therefore determined by the following:

- * sex

- * age
- * geographic area
- * education level
- * socio-economic level
- * religion

The range and composition of focus groups is determined by the issues raised in each episode.

Although, in general, groups should not be mixed as this tends to make the participants feel inhibited, in certain cases it may be useful to hold a mixed group to gain insights into the dynamics of interaction between the generations or sexes. Usually there will be 5-7 respondents in each group.

Procedure for running groups:

The research team consists of:

- 1 moderator/questioner
- 2 note-takers
- 1 narrator (when stories are being told)

The narrator should be the best storyteller in the group. She/he may also be the moderator.

Preparation for the research team:

- * Familiarize the team with the materials
- * Practice narration of the story with visuals (as required)
- * Familiarize the team with the discussion guidelines
- * Prepare all materials & equipment required against a checklist

Introduction to the group:

- * Introduce yourself and the team
- * Explain the purpose of your visit:
 - What you want to do
 - How much time it will take
 - How you need the group's help to improve the stories - making them more useful and entertaining.
- * Explain that you have come on behalf of UNICEF. It is important to state that the story has been written by someone else. The respondents might otherwise be constrained by politeness if they think you wrote it.
- * Tell the respondents that their contribution will help others by making a better film.
- * Tell the respondents the discussion is confidential. Don't write down their names.

Moderating the group discussion:

- * Approach the group with an attitude of respect for their ideas.
- * Only the moderator asks questions.
- * Others in research team listen/recorders to take notes.
- * If necessary, others can ask questions at the end.
- * Use the question guidelines as a check-list to ensure that all the issues have been covered,

while allowing the discussion to flow naturally.

- * Encourage all group members to speak.
- * Be sensitive to the dynamics of the group. For example, if the discussion is not flowing easily, it may be necessary to:
 - change your line of questioning
 - ask other members of the team to leave (especially members of the opposite sex if a sensitive issue is being discussed)

Asking questions:

- * Show respect and interest in the respondents' answers.
- * If there is no response, your question is not right.
- * Rephrase the question and try again from a different angle.
- * Make sure questions are non-confrontational.
- * Never put respondents on the defensive.
- * Try to avoid starting questions with "you".
- * Ask about other people - in fact they may, indirectly, be talking about themselves.
 - e.g. Don't ask: "Do you plan to get your daughter circumcised?" Instead ask: "Do any people in this community get their daughters circumcised?"
- * Don't try to influence the respondent
- * Avoid questions with in-built answers.
 - e.g. "Girls and boys should be treated equally, shouldn't they?" presupposes agreement with the questioner.

Illustrations of Research Training Process

As part of the training process used to orient the researchers to the idea of concept research, this exercise was conducted at the first regional workshop in Kenya in October 1994. The participants divided themselves into groups of 4-5, with at least one artist in each group. The groups were then taken through the following series of exercises. At each step they presented their progress to the other groups for feedback. Each group:

1. Identified a **concept**. e.g. girl's workload, sexual abuse, etc.
2. Worked out a **problem analysis** framework for this concept, including its:
 - immediate causes
 - underlying causes
 - basic causes.
3. Prepared and performed a **role play** to illustrate their analysis of the problem.
4. Prepared **question guidelines** for focus group discussion.
5. Conducted **focus group discussions** in the neighbouring community to research people's perceptions and experience of the problem and their proposals for a solution.
6. Analyzed and synthesized their **findings**.
7. Created a **story line** drawing on their research findings for inspiration.
8. Developed **illustrations** for the story line with a team artist.
9. Prepared **question guidelines** for focus group discussion.
10. Conducted **focus group discussions** in the neighbouring community to research people's reactions to the story and its educational and entertainment value as well as their perceptions

- of the illustrations.
11. Analyzed and synthesized their **findings**.

Details of Formative Research Findings

"THE SPECIAL GIFT"

Issues: Preventing girls from being ‘pushed-out’ from school
Value of education to child and family
Life skills: self-concept, negotiating skills, problem-solving.

SUMMARY OF STORY

Sara, an adolescent African girl, lives with her mother, younger brother, sister and grandmother in her uncle’s homestead. Her father has gone to the city to look for work. Sara loves school and has her eyes set on higher education. But her ambition is threatened when there is a financial crisis and her uncle, who doesn’t believe in education for girls, decides Sara should leave school to allow her younger brother, Tsumi, to continue. --- Appalled at the prospect of losing her dream, Sara thinks of a way to change her uncle’s mind. She discovers a fuel-saving stove from a book and builds one with the help of her friends, Amina and Juma, and Zingo, her pet monkey. Her uncle is delighted with the innovation, seeing in it a chance to boost his popularity and further his political ambitions in the community, which is facing a serious firewood crisis. --- Sara intends to let him take the credit for this as her way of negotiating her continuation in school. The community is excited with this invention and asks the uncle to explain how he made “his” stove. Sara comes to his aid and in the process he publicly declares he will ensure Sara stays on in school “to learn more useful things”. However, the uncle’s false claims are revealed in an ironic twist when Sara’s father returns and it emerges that the uncle has been taking money sent by Sara’s father to cover his children’s education.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

This story emerged as a combination of two other stories by writers in Tanzania and South Africa that went through the first round of research. Both stories addressed the issue of girls being forced out of school by economic pressures on the family. While the original stories lacked credibility in some key areas, there were aspects that provoked important discussion. One story showed the vulnerability of Sara’s family when the father had left to work in the city without making adequate provisions. The other story demonstrated how Sara herself used her skills to convince her parents that she should stay in school. (She made toy cars that her father could sell to cover school costs.) The two writers worked collaboratively on the final story, which was again researched with picture illustrations in all 10 countries. This story became “The Special Gift”, the first episode to launch the Sara initiative.

Main changes:

- Staying on in school was presented in the final version as a girl’s right - and also as a valuable contribution to the welfare of the whole family. (One of the earlier stories made Sara’s future education conditional on her father being able to sell her toy cars.)
- Sara’s education is seen to benefit the family and community as a whole when she develops the fuel-saving stove. This innovation was seen as practical and relevant.

- Sara's parents are presented in a positive light - and the uncle becomes the key opposing (and comic) character. Sara's father also returns home to become a more concrete figure in the story.

Comprehension:

- The story was well understood.
- The objective of the story was understood as the importance of education and gender equality, and the equal capabilities of girls and boys. The issues of wood conservation and air pollution were also identified through Sara's discussion of the smokeless stove.

Interest:

- The story was found to be interesting and, in parts, humorous. The issue of the stove is not very exciting, but it addressed a need felt by many communities and also demonstrated Sara's innovative intelligence. The ironic comedy of the uncle's role and the capers of Zingo the monkey are highly enjoyed.

Credibility:

- Several issues of credibility meant that the original two stories were radically reworked.
- The final story was seen as credible because it addressed important issues with which communities could readily identify, including poverty, migrant labour and gender discrimination.
- At first Sara's father sent money back to the uncle. This suggested that the father did not trust the mother. It was believed more likely that he would send the money directly to Sara's mother (and the uncle intercepts the letter).
- The story should not overplay the 'animals of Africa' as it is unrealistic to have these wild animals wandering around.

Solution:

- The solution was found to be credible, since it clearly demonstrated how valuable a girl's education can be for her family and also showed that girls are equally capable as boys. The two central problems, Sara's continued schooling and the village fuel crisis, are both satisfactorily solved.
- It was appreciated that Sara had used her intelligence to find a solution to her problem.
- It was necessary to stress that all girls have the right to stay in school, not that Sara's special gifts gave her a unique right.

Characters:

- Sara was the favourite character with all respondents. She was found to be bright, innovative, determined and affectionate.
- Sara's mother's role was radically changed to show her as more caring. Early versions saw her as unnatural and negative.
- In the original stories the father was strongly disliked. In one version the absent father was seen as negligent, in the other he was thought to be weak and to favour his son. The rehabilitation of the father's role in the final story was crucial. He is seen now as a positive role model.
- It was also important to clarify the relationship between the father, mother and uncle. It was fully accepted that such interfering uncles exist, but the way it was originally presented demeaned the characters of Sara's parents and suggested that there was no trust between them. The debate over their relationship was clouding the other central issues.

- Uncle was widely disliked, but nevertheless accepted as a key character in the plot, without whom there would be no story. The interfering nature of the uncle needed to be made more explicit to demonstrate how he was going against societal norms.
- Reactions to Sara's grandmother were mixed, since she does not try to protect Sara and accepts gender discrimination as natural. It was decided to retain this ambivalence as a discussion point.
- The monkey is not common as a pet, but she was well liked for adding humour to the story.

Cultural sensitivity

- In general the story did not touch on sensitive concerns and the issue of gender discrimination was dealt with in a non-confrontational manner.
- Any sensitivities revolved around the relationship between the father, mother and uncle. In an early version, uncle's behaviour did not conform to African tradition in the way he followed his sister-in-law around, even coming into her kitchen and eating there.
- In a few places Zingo raised some questions since monkeys can be related to witchcraft. However, even in those places, she was acceptable as performing good deeds and being well trained.

Potential to change:

- The majority of respondents saw the story as having a positive effect on attitudes. They thought that it showed that girls should not suffer discrimination, that boys and girls are equally valuable and capable, that education is important and socially beneficial, and that parents should be wary of corrupt guardians with whom they may leave their children.
- Girls suggested that girls would be challenged to develop their talents and gain confidence. They thought that boys too might be challenged to work harder.
- Adults felt the story would prompt parents to work hard to send all their children to school.
- Girls and boys felt the story would encourage girls to take science subjects.

Visuals:

- The smokeless stove raised much interest, needing to be carefully researched and drawn.
- In some illustrations Sara was thought to look too mature and unattractive.
- The chief needed to be made more dignified and chiefly.
- Sara's uncle needed to look better dressed to signify that he is groomed at the expense of Sara's education.

A Researcher's Experience

People were happy to see Sara as their sister, daughter or wife. When boys were asked if they could cope with her, they said that Sara was the kind of wife who was needed these days, not a wife who sat submissively at home. In Zanzibar, some men were not happy about the Sara-Juma relationship. "You cannot put a lion with a goat." But other men, the women and boys all disagreed with him. --- There was general agreement that there are many men like the uncle. Before the relationship between Sara's father, mother and uncle was clarified, one villager commented: "If the uncle has been given so much authority over his sister-in-law, what is to stop him from turning her into his wife or making her pregnant?"---- In an area of great firewood shortage, women wanted to know when they would be given demonstrations of how to make the stove.

Richard Mabala, writer/researcher, Tanzania.

"SARA SAVES HER FRIEND"

Issues: **Sexual harassment**
 Risks of HIV transmission
 Life skills, including risk assessment

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

Sara's best friend, Amina, tells her that she may have to leave school and go to work like her sister, Grace, since they are orphans and have no one else to support them. Sara believes that there must be some other solution and tries to persuade Amina to remain in school. --- Later Amina and Sara go to see Grace who works in a bar. Sara has to leave but is worried about Amina. She asks Zingo, her pet monkey, to keep a watch on Amina. Sara goes to discuss her worries with her friend Juma. --- Meanwhile, Amina serves the bar customers while Grace has a sleep. Some truck drivers trick Amina into drinking some alcohol. With her judgment impaired, Amina is lured into taking a lift with the truck drivers to find a job in the city. Zingo the monkey goes too on the roof of the truck. --- Sara and Juma ask his elder brother, Themba, to help them retrieve Amina from the bar. They discover that Amina has left with the truck drivers and set off in pursuit in Themba's van. In the truck, as Amina sobers up, she is alarmed to find the driver and his mate trying to touch her legs. She resists and asks to be taken home but the men ignore her and laugh in a threatening way. Luckily, they have to stop to buy cigarettes and so Sara and her friends are able to catch up. Sara gets Zingo to let the air out of the tyres so the truck cannot drive away. Amina is rescued and her abductors are taken off to the police.

Finally a sober and repentant Amina is restored to her older sister Grace. She now realizes the huge risks she ran of being raped and possibly contracting HIV. But she is still concerned about her future. At Sara's instigation, Themba offers her some work doing his accounts and the villagers offer to set up a fund to help orphans like her to continue in school. Sara and Amina are delighted.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

This story was based on an actual incident reported in the newspapers in Zimbabwe. However, the research showed that the story is all-too-common a scenario across the region, with girls being forced out of school by economic pressures and becoming prey to sexual harassment and abuse. The story stimulated lengthy debate on how girls can avoid such risks, but also on the responsibility borne by men and the role of the community as a whole to protect girls and condemn sexual harassment.

Main changes:

- The most significant changes made to the story related to Amina's behaviour and the reasons why she went with the truck drivers. In the original story Amina decided to drink alcohol because she was depressed and had ceased to care. She also consciously decided to take the lift because she wanted to go to the city to find a job. Many people thought that Amina decided to go with the drivers to get their money, perhaps knowing that she might be required to provide sex in return. To many people, Amina was as much to blame as the truck drivers, especially as she appeared to make no efforts to free herself.
- In order to raise clearly the issues of sexual harassment and the risks posed to adolescent girls, it

was necessary to change the story to show unambiguously that Amina was tricked by the truck drivers into drinking alcohol and that, as a consequence, this made her incapable of recognizing the risks she was taking in accepting a lift. She should also show resistance to the men's advances when she sobers up and realize the implications of what she has done. It should be seen as a clear situation of abduction and abuse. Without these changes, discussion generated by the story was diverted into debating the level of Amina's culpability. The issue should be Amina's lack of life skills, not her moral standing.

- The contrast between the two girls needed to be strengthened to illustrate Sara's use and Amina's comparative lack of life skills. Amina is not able to assess the risks she is taking (including going into the bar in the first place) whilst Sara is shown to demonstrate a range of skills including empathy, assertiveness and problem solving. In the first version of the story it was Zingo the monkey who thought of letting down the truck's tyres. The final story clearly shows that it is Sara herself who works out how to solve the problem.
- It was also important to emphasize the serious nature of sexual harassment and to show the men being exposed and brought to account at the end of the story.
- However, in order to avoid stereotyping or stigmatizing truck drivers in general, other positive models were included in the story: i.e. Themba, Juma's brother, who drives a small truck, and the bus driver who takes the villains off to the police at the end.

Comprehension:

- The original version of this story created some confusion. In particular it was overloaded with messages and the central objective of the story was not clear. The original story was seen to contain several messages, variously interpreted as: *Don't play with AIDS; don't have casual sex; practice safe sex; students should keep out of bars; don't accept gifts from strangers; young people should concentrate on studies and not be led astray by pleasure; the folly of pursuing men and money.*
- This confusion in the message of the story stemmed from the portrayal of Amina and the lack of clarity as to why she went with the truck drivers. The final story had to clearly demonstrate that she was tricked into getting drunk and that this impaired her ability to assess the risks she was taking. The treatment of the truck drivers also had to make absolutely clear their own culpability, so that sexual harassment became the central issue, combined with the risk that adolescent girls face of contracting HIV.

Interest:

- This story is found to engage people fully with its strong, dramatic plot and very immediate and recognized issues. People welcomed its combination of humour, drama and serious concerns.

Credibility:

- The story is realistic in showing a girl being under pressure to leave school to support herself and her family. Many cases were reported of girls running away to the city to find work.
- The issue of sexual harassment and the entrapment of girls by men, often with money, was felt to be fully believable, as part of contemporary life.
- Originally Sara and Juma sneaked out at night in pursuit of Amina without informing their parents. This was neither credible nor acceptable. In the final version Sara rushes off after Amina during the day, but is also criticized by her mother for doing so.
- While a monkey is not a common pet, Zingo was found to be credible within the context of the

story, as well as being entertaining and crucial to the plot. However, it was not thought credible when she decided herself to puncture the tire. Instead Sara shows her what to do.

Story's Solution:

- Deprivation and poverty were seen to shape Amina's behaviour. It was considered important to show how girls can have viable alternatives and opportunities for earning.
- The original story, in which Amina is offered a job in Sara's family store, did not address Amina's predicament effectively. People raised many questions: Would the job at the store provide her with sufficient income? What about her education? Can she do both and how effectively? What is the guarantee that Amina's father would not try to seduce her himself? (People saw the sexual harassment of young girls as endemic.) In the final version, Amina is able to earn some money doing Themba's accounting work, but at the weekends and at her own home!
- It is implicit in the story that Amina is probably an AIDS orphan. The final story also suggests how the community as a whole can try to look for solutions to help such children.

Characters:

- Sara was widely appreciated for her determination, intelligence, maturity, loyalty and courage. However, it was important to show more clearly how she uses her life skills to help her friend.
- Amina originally appeared very weak. Some groups felt that she would run away again as she didn't realize the implications of her actions. Some respondents actually disliked her, as she acted without thinking. Some pitied her for being poor while others questioned her conduct and motives. Did she want to be rescued since she made no attempt to free herself? Amina's characterization and motivation therefore needed to be clarified.
- Amina's sister, Grace, was seen to be weak and ineffective. In the first version she tried but failed to persuade Amina not to accept the lift. This was changed to show Grace asleep and hence unaware of the situation Amina has got herself into. Grace was included in the ending as people wanted to know what happened to her.
- Zingo's role needed to be toned down as she was a bit distracting.

Cultural sensitivity:

- Care had to be taken in showing Amina's role in the bar. It was considered inappropriate for young girls to work in a bar and so it was necessary to show that Amina is only helping her sister while Grace has a rest.
- The roles of Amina and Grace had to be carefully written to ensure that there was no sense of stigmatizing them as orphans of parents who had died of AIDS.
- Sensitivity over the role of the truck drivers was important to avoid stereotyping them.

Potential to change:

- The story was thought to have some potential to influence girls in Amina's predicament, since it shows the possible consequences of the risks she took (including the risk of AIDS), and also illustrates that other viable, more positive options exist for Amina to survive and stay in school .
- The story was also deemed to be educational since it exposes the realities of trying to escape to the city and the dangers which such young girls face.
- It was suggested that the story could make some drivers realize the harm they cause to girls whom they lead astray. However, other respondents thought the story would annoy drivers since it shows

them in a bad light. For this reason, some positive roles for drivers were included.

Visuals:

- The storyboard visuals showed Amina being roughly handled by the men and also having her hands tied to the steering wheel. For many groups this indicated that Amina was in fact raped. This therefore left a question mark over her future since she might have caught HIV. Through the visuals and the story line it was therefore important to clarify that Amina had not in fact been raped.
- Amina's appearance was changed as her original looks, especially her hairstyle, were considered 'provocative'. It was not credible to show a girl in a bar with her school uniform on. Amina therefore puts on an overall before serving the customers.
- The bar needed to include more realistic details and have female customers.

A Researcher's Experience

One time in Kisumu district we were asking a group of mothers whether the role of the truck drivers was credible. They said that it happens all the time. They added that it is not just truck drivers, it is also a problem with people living in the community, like teachers and other workers. One woman became very agitated. Her daughter had recently been made pregnant by a teacher. This story had come too late for her. Maybe if she had heard the story earlier, she could have prevented her daughter's pregnancy. The girl had to leave school. At least the mother had managed to have the teacher exposed. She wanted to replace the truck driver in the story with a teacher. --- We asked a group of girls in Kisumu what was the biggest lesson for them in the story. They said that it showed the importance of parents saving up money for their children, so that if the parents die, the children have something to live on. They identified with Grace and Amina. Two girls in the group had lost their parents. They knew what kind of problems Grace and Amina faced and could understand and sympathize with their behaviour, even though they didn't agree with it. Most of the girls in the group had lost some family member to AIDS. It was clear that the girls thought the situation of AIDS orphans was a key issue in the story.

Justus Olielo, Sara writer/researcher, Kenya

A Researcher's Experience

In some areas we went to, especially one school in Makambako, we felt the school children had been primed not to tell us the truth in line with the Kiswahili proverb "Don't spill the rice where there are many chickens"! However, the Sara stories broke down any reserve or resistance and by the end the groups were telling us what really happened. In Zanzibar, one of the men commented: "There are lorry drivers like that everywhere. They lure the girls into Zanzibar town with promises and the girls never come back." It was particularly touching because one of the girls in a school, where we did the focus groups, had died the week before of AIDS from a similar relationship. In other places the role of the truck drivers were translated into teachers, sons of rich men and in general any man who had money to burn and used it to cheat the girls.

Richard Mabala, Sara writer/researcher, Tanzania.

"THE LIONESSE' DAUGHTER"

Issue: Female Genital Cutting

SUMMARY OF STORY

Sara learns that her grandmother and uncle intend to get her circumcised. Sara is determined to refuse, but her grandmother is equally determined that Sara will not be a 'whole woman' without circumcision. Sara's mother tries to mediate. She even offers a way out: asking the excisor to prick Sara rather than cut her when the time comes. But Sara refuses. Her mother is very concerned that her grandmother and uncle will be angered. They are dependent on the uncle while Sara's father is away working in the city.

Sara has a terrible nightmare in which she is chased through the forest by some terrifying creatures wielding long knives. She is saved when the roar of lions make the creatures run away. --- Next day at school some of Sara's classmates tease her for rejecting circumcision. Their teacher, Ms Matata, stops the argument and explains the scientific facts about FGM. But on the way home Sara is abducted by a group of women. Although the woman tries to persuade her, Sara still refuses to agree to be circumcised. They will have to force her. Just in time, Sara thinks of a plan and gets Zingo, her pet monkey, to carry a note to her friend, Juma. At the circumcision ceremony, Sara pretends to go along with the ritual dancing. Suddenly the people hear a lion roaring in the bush (It is in fact her friends swinging "bull roarer" plants.) In the confusion, Sara is able to escape with her friends.

Sara is soon found by her mother, grandmother and uncle, along with the excisor, the chief and other villagers. While some people are shocked by Sara's behaviour, her mother has come round to support Sara's position and defends her daughter's decision. "Our customs should bring life, not death," she says. Other people also express their doubts about the custom. The village chief concludes by saying that some customs must change. Finally Sara and her grandmother are also reconciled.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS:

This story was only tested in the areas where FGC is practiced. Overall, it was impressive that the research teams and the story itself dealt with this sensitive subject in such a way as to stimulate an open and revealing discussion with groups of both sexes and different ages. The research process allowed the presentation of the issue and possible solutions to emerge from communities themselves. The basis of the story in fact originated from a community in Tanzania. The picture of myths surrounding FGC was also filled out by the research reports from different countries. People stated that the story did not preach; rather it allowed the issue to emerge openly through discussion.

Main Changes:

- The original story had Sara's uncle as the main opposing character. He was determined to force Sara to be circumcised, believing that this will "control" her and make a proper woman out of her - "a woman who knows her place". People found that this lacked credibility. They also did not want a community's debate on FGC to become polarized. Through research it was established that Sara's grandmother should become the main advocate for FGC, but that she does this out of affection for Sara, believing that she is only doing what is best for her. Her character should be sympathetically drawn.

- Research also showed that Sara’s mother was the focal point for change. Her role needed to be strengthened, so that she could be central to the growing awareness in the community.
- The original story also included a final sequence in which the local “guardians of tradition” suggest that all women should be circumcised a second time to prevent any further ‘anti-social’ behaviour - a suggestion which makes the women in Sara’s village laugh. Although this idea came from an actual incident, it was found to lack credibility. The village chief was introduced to present a more positive traditional voice that accepts that some practices need to change.

Comprehension:

- All groups understood the story although comprehension was better with older groups (above 13 years).
- The objective was understood as raising debate about FGC.
- It was necessary to clarify that the “bull-roarer” trick was Sara’s idea - and also to show Sara’s friends using the bull-roarer to show that it was not a real lion roaring at the ceremony.

Interest:

- Girls found the story fascinating. Women, too, engaged fully with it, although some had reservations reflecting their own complex feelings about FGC. Men and boys also appeared stimulated by the story,

Credibility:

- Girls had mixed reactions on the question of credibility. They were not sure whether they could ever take a stand against circumcision like Sara. It had not occurred to them before that a girl can say "No". Resistance to this idea varied according to age. Older girls felt more empowered than younger ones. All felt that the mother’s role needed to be strengthened so that she could support Sara. Boys found the story credible and "possible".
- Women were uncertain about Sara’s protest and where it would lead her, if she were alone. Mother’s change of heart and the growing support in the community needed to be convincingly portrayed. It would not be credible to show the whole community changing.
- Men were insistent that the initial story, including laughter at the “guardians of tradition” and Sara’s uncle, would provoke resistance. The polarizing of roles was played down to show the issues in a more ‘gray’ light.
- As a whole people felt that the response to the film would depend on the kind of community viewing it. A more forward-looking community would find the story realistic.
- The idea of a second circumcision had no credibility at all.
- FGC was still considered a "bitter" reality, although the extent of the mutilation varies between different communities. The prevalence of the practice was said to be decreasing in many communities, with the church cited as a potential force for change.
- It was believed that linking FGC with the transmission of HIV would act as a deterrent.

Story's solution:

- The solution to the story was acceptable, once Sara’s mother was shown as more vocal and her position was endorsed by the chief. In the first version of the story, people felt that the traditionalists in the village could have been powerful enough to swing the discussion. It was not credible to show the uncle changing his mind.

- People also discussed the number of positive benefits to girls in these rites of passage in terms of family life education and cultural identity. It was suggested that the celebrations and educational activities could be kept, while removing the actual circumcision.

Characters:

- Sara was the best-liked character. Her strong resistance was retained, although it was necessary to also establish her affectionate relationship with her grandmother.
- The uncle was widely disliked, but it was important to play down his role in Sara's circumcision.
- In the story the mother reflects the feelings of the community at large. She was developed to appear a bit stronger and more convincing.
- The grandmother's role was radically changed through the research process to represent a more realistic and sympathetic view (and less condemnatory) of a traditional perspective.
- The original story contained a lizard in which Sara confided when she was locked up. Although many children liked this character, overall it was found to be rather strange and in some places had associations with witchcraft. The lizard was therefore changed into a dove.

Cultural sensitivity:

- The story was considered to deal with the issue of FGC sensitively, although clearly in areas still practicing FGM it touched highly-charged concerns. In the first version of the story, some respondents said they liked the uncle because he was seen to be perpetuating tradition and saving the culture. It was therefore necessary to show traditional views voiced by more sympathetic characters, like the grandmother, and to show that these people also had the potential to change.
- It was felt that the term used for "circumcision" should be a neutral one.
- The original title, "Say No to the Knife", was not acceptable. It was too direct, and also inappropriate as a razor blade is often used.
- Many communities circumcise their girls at a younger age than Sara, between 6 and 10 years. In some areas girls are circumcised in infancy. However, the story still raised animated discussion.

Potential for change:

- In general people considered that it was quite likely that a girl who did resist could succeed, although they believed that it was difficult for very young girls to stand up for themselves.
- When the story was changed to show how Sara's community as a whole could be brought to examine their views on FGC, respondents stated that the story would engender a similar debate in their community and raise awareness.
- The key to change was believed to lie in the mother's support, which in itself is based on her empowerment.
- People wanted the negative effects of FGC to be clearly stated. The final story included the teacher, Ms Matata, explaining this in a scientific way to her students.
- Girls, boys and many women felt strongly that the story has the potential to change people's attitudes, though it would face difficulties with 'die-hards'.
- People stated that the story should be written and the film made because it does not preach, but instead provokes discussion.
- In some cases the story provoked an emotional reaction from girls and women who had already undergone FGC. It will be necessary to provide support and training to facilitators using these

materials so that counseling and medical back-up are available for those who have been traumatized by the experience of FGC.

Visuals:

- A number of changes were suggested for the visuals, of which the most significant were:
- The excisor should not be represented as some kind of witch, as had been done in an early version. Rather she should be drawn as a normal “aunt” figure from the village.
- The characters in Sara’s nightmare should be made to look more grotesque and less human.
- The school children should not be stereotyped to equate ugliness with negative attitudes.

A Researcher’s Experience

As a writer/researcher, it was a very special experience to listen to people discussing my stories without knowing that I had written them. I always introduced the stories as written somewhere else, probably Kenya. As a result, I got comments of a frankness that you would never hope to get if people knew that you had written them. It was also gratifying that when I took the FGC story to the community from which I had first got the idea for the story, they commented: “It’s as if the writer was writing about us.” --- When we read the story in Moshi, one woman burst into tears. Afterwards she told us her story. She was not circumcised and got married to a man who was not interested in her being circumcised. However her in-laws were totally opposed to her. They tried to stop their son eating her food on the grounds that she was ‘dirty’ and ‘stank’ and that he would get sick. Her husband paid no attention but when she was very pregnant with their first child, they brought a circumciser and circumcised her by force, as a result of which she lost the baby and nearly died herself.

In many other places also the story evoked strong emotions and some tears. When we read it in Kondo where girls are circumcised at a much earlier age, the girls remarked wistfully that they wished they had been like Sara. In Tarime, where the idea for the story came from (especially the mother’s suggestion to Sara about being pricked rather than cut by the circumciser and the situation of the community conflict), some of the leaders said the story was no longer relevant because the practice was dying out. But they were contradicted by a man who said that the story was very true and that the main problem was precisely that many people no longer wanted circumcision but they, like Sara’s mother, were afraid of their neighbours. The majority of men agreed with him. The women also agreed and told us several stories of how women suffered in childbirth as a result of circumcision.

Richard Mabala, Sara writer/researcher, Tanzania

“THE TRAP”

**Issues: Sexual harassment of girls by older men
Risks of girls’ economic interest in Sugar Daddies; peer pressure**
Life skills: risk assessment; assertiveness; problem solving

SUMMARY OF STORY

On her way home from school one day, Sara is harassed by an older man, Mr. Mbuta, a shopkeeper. He tries to entice Sara back to his house, with offers of books and help with her school needs. Alarmed, Sara refuses and Zingo helps her to escape from Mbuta’s ardent advances. Later, at home, Sara’s granny sees that Sara is upset and half guesses the reason. She tells a story in which a young girl leaves home with a handsome stranger, who then turns into a monster and eats her. - -- At school Sara shares her worries with her friends, Amina and Juma. Then they see a group of girls bragging about the gifts their boyfriends have given them. Sara reminds these girls of the dangers of receiving gifts, but some of them call Sara a boring goody-goody. --- Meanwhile Mbuta has thought of a way to trap Sara. In public, he asks Sara to collect an envelope for her uncle. On her way home, Mbuta confronts her. Again he tries to entice her with offers of money. When she refuses, he attempts to blackmail her, saying that the money in the envelope is less than her uncle requested and Mbuta will say that Sara has squandered it. He commands her to meet him later that evening in the forest.

As Sara’s mother is away, she turns to her friends for help. Themba, Juma’s elder brother, brings his pick-up and joins the others to lie in wait for Mbuta. Just as Mbuta tries to embrace Sara, the friends switch on the headlamps of the pick-up and expose Mbuta. With the ensuing commotion, the community gathers. They agree that Mbuta should be made an example of, to show that the community will no longer tolerate their girls being sexually harassed. As a disgraced Mbuta sits on the ground, the gifts he has given to other girls are thrown back at him. Mbuta is taken off to the police. Meanwhile, Granny gently chides Sara for not turning to her for help. Sara now understands the full meaning of her grandmother’s story.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

This story appeared very familiar to the communities in which it was researched. The respondents gave many examples of Mbutas (Sugar Daddies) – all kinds of men, including teachers. They also talked of the economic pressures that encourage girls to seek Sugar Daddies and of the need to educate girls about the risks of such relationships. The story particularly raised discussion about the role of parents in educating and protecting their daughters, and not expecting school girls to provide for their own needs.

Main changes:

- Although groups thought that Sara’s trick was good, they felt strongly that Sara should not deal with Mbuta alone. Mbuta may be powerful in the community and cause trouble for Sara. Also a girl could be defenseless if adults decide to believe the man’s story instead of her own. It was agreed that the whole community should be involved in condemning Mbuta and the story should show that the authorities would deal with Mbuta. Respondents stressed that the final scene must show a law-abiding community, so that it could not be interpreted as some kind of

lynch mob-taking justice into its own hands.

- There was also concern that Sara did not inform her parents about the harassment from Mbuta. The story was adapted to show that Sara's mother was away visiting her father in the town. Sara is also rebuked by her grandmother at the end for not confiding in her. This plot device has been very successful in spontaneously raising discussion in the groups about the role of parents in guiding and supporting their daughters.
- The role of Sara's uncle needed clarification, as in the first draft of the story people assumed that he was colluding with Mbuta and trying to "sell-off" Sara. Uncle may be an unsympathetic character, but such an interpretation of his motives skewed the story.
- People enjoyed Zingo's role and wanted to see this enhanced to generate further visual humour – such as stealing Mbuta's clothes.
- The original titles were not seen as appropriate: the titles: "Gifts" and "Sara and the Village Ogre" were dropped in favour of "The Trap".

Comprehension:

- People understood the story with no difficulty. The parallel between the main story and Grandma's tale of Wanja and the monster was clear. Two details had to be clarified: the fact that Sara's uncle was not in league with Mbuta and the details of how Mbuta actually tried to blackmail Sara with the envelope containing her uncle's money.
- The story was thought to have many potential lessons: for girls to be assertive in protecting themselves from unwanted advances and to recognize the risks of getting involved with "Sugar Daddies"; for boys to be more supportive and open with girls; for parents to communicate more openly with their daughters and to be more understanding of girls' financial pressures; for communities to actively condemn cases of sexual harassment (including the exploitative relationship of "Sugar Daddies"), recognizing the negative consequences for girls.

Interest:

- The story was enthusiastically received and clearly generated a lot of interest and amusement. People found some parts hilarious and the overall plot full of suspense: would Sara succumb or not? Some saw it as a "David and Goliath" story, with the little person overcoming the big aggressor.
- The issues of sexual harassment and of girls' involvement with "Sugar Daddies" were felt to be very relevant to the communities involved in the research. People also raised the issue of "Sugar Mummies" with boys.
- People enjoyed the humour of the plot, including the bawdy comedy of Mbuta's exposure.

Credibility:

- The scenario of sexual harassment of a girl by an older man was regarded as very realistic. People claimed that there are many Mbutas – not just shopkeepers, but all kinds of men, including teachers. In this way the story generated discussion about how these kind of men should be dealt with in the school and community.
- Sara's behaviour was regarded as credible and admirable, but unusual. Respondents stated that they knew very few 'Saras', who are assertive and clever, and that most girls would succumb to the temptation to receive gifts. As one girl said: *"Girls like gifts and don't think until they become pregnant."*

- In groups containing girls, it appeared that those who, like Sara, resisted temptation and pressure, felt in some way vindicated. These girls related closely to Sara when she is taunted by her school-mates for being innocent and boring. Girls themselves stated how easy it was for them to be tempted and cheated by men, since they wanted to get some small luxuries to show off. One girl said of the story: *“It shows how we boast of the way we are mistreated.”*

Story’s solution:

- It was unanimously agreed that girls alone cannot tackle the problem of sexual harassment, but that the community as a whole should unite in declaring the behaviour unacceptable in their society. The story was changed to show the community tackling the issue together.
- As stated above, the original solution had to be adapted to show the whole community involved in condemning Mbuta at the end. Without this, Sara’s trick to humiliate Mbuta could have seriously rebounded on her. Respondents wanted to see Mbuta firmly punished, with the involvement of the village elders. It was agreed that Mbuta should be taken to the police to clearly show that sexual harassment is a crime. It was important to see the whole community condemn his behaviour: otherwise it was envisaged that he would simply bribe his way out of court.
- There was concern that public anger, such as shown at the end of the story, could lead to mob justice (possibly even the “necklacing” of the offender). It was considered necessary to show the elders as involved in calming the crowd down and ensuring that proper judicial channels were followed.
- One obvious solution suggested was for Sara to turn to her parents for help in this. People were concerned that Sara did not confide in her mother, so it was made clear that the mother was away. The absence of Sara’s parents reflects the reality of many girls’ lives – but also raises discussion about the failure of many parents to counsel and support their daughters. Many girls talked of how their parents expected them to meet their own financial needs, without enquiring how the girls found such money.
- It was suggested that Sara’s role in the final scene must be supported by the other girls, who should also throw their gifts back at Mbuta, to indicate their rejection of his approaches.

Characters:

- Sara was widely admired for being courageous in tackling Mbuta (although some felt she was a little reckless in the first version of the story, so Juma’s adult brother was drafted in to join the group catching Mbuta). Sara was also admired for her maturity, morality and ability to resist pressure – both from Mbuta and from her schoolmates.
- Grandma was liked both for her perceptive use of a moral story, and for her support of Sara in the final scene.
- Mbuta was universally disliked for the way he used his wealth to tempt girls, and more so for the way in which he tried to blackmail Sara when his lures failed. Adolescents drew parallels between this behaviour and the actions of teachers who use the threat of exam failure to pressurize girls. Teachers have also been known to turn the staff against a girl and “cause chaos” if the girl resists.
- The girls with “Sugar Daddies” were seen as realistic characters, rather than disliked.
- Themba, Juma’s adult older brother, was admired as a positive role model. He was seen as unusual. A more common attitude would be: “Let the man enjoy the girl.”

Cultural sensitivity

- There were no major issues of cultural sensitivity with this story. It also serves as a useful and acceptable approach to the related issue of sexual harassment of girls by teachers. This topic would be highly sensitive to deal with directly in materials which are used in schools, but discussion of Mbuta's story invariably led onto talk of other men in the community, including teachers, who abuse their position of power to exploit girls.

Potential to change

- It was believed that Sara's example would give girls strength and encouragement to resist the pressure to enter into a sexual relationship with older men, enabling them to perceive its exploitative nature and high risk implications. People said that the story would enable girls to be "more wily" and less likely to be fooled by older men, since it gave a warning to girls to be wary when men suddenly become generous and also to think beyond the gifts to the possible consequences.
- By presenting the issue from the girl's perspective, it was believed that the story would help parents to be more understanding of their daughters. In adult focus groups, the story stimulated wide-ranging discussion on parents' responsibilities. It was admitted that some families actually encourage girls to go after older men to get money. More commonly the parents draw a blind eye to the girl's activities. A mother emphasized that parents should not tell their daughters: "But you're a woman – why can't you get your own things?" Moreover, they should show concern and ask girls how they have gained any new items. Girls felt that the story would encourage parents to try to understand, trust and communicate with their daughters.
- Adolescents also felt that the story shows a very positive image of boys and girls working together. Boys stated that they often feel threatened by older men, who use their money to lure the boys' potential girl friends. They felt this story gives them a more positive role and image and illustrates how boys and girls can cooperate to avoid risks and keep the "Sugar Daddies" away.
- All groups emphasized that the issue of sexual harassment and exploitation cannot be dealt with by individuals, but rather the community as a whole. The story enabled people to discern how, through inaction, a community can effectively condone the practice. This generated much discussion on how the community should get involved and what action was appropriate.

A Researcher's Experience

One thing that struck me during the research was that people all had the same reactions. People laughed or shyly giggled. Old women, men, boys and girls in or out of school all had something they could relate to. People all seemed to be identifying a "Mbuta" whom they knew from their own experience – even within the discussion group itself! In the adult groups there was often someone answering to Mbuta's description! --- The school girls were very emotional about the story. 'Straight' girls were getting their own back and gaining reassurance that they were doing the right thing. Before it had seemed that the "fast" girls were having all the fun, getting extra sugar, shoes and money at school. These girls were beginning to have self-doubts. One girl seemed very bitter, saying that Sara did the right thing, because in her experience a girl is always blamed when she is seen with an older man. The girls talked of this harassment within the classroom. A male teacher might want to have sex with a girl. If she resists he may make her life unbearable,

spreading bad rumours about her and giving her low marks in exams.

The story created a heated debate amongst men about to what extent can they talk with their daughters. Sex is generally a no-go area for men to discuss with their daughters. One man said fathers should talk about sex education. Another said they can even talk about menstruation. An old man was shocked and declared: “You are lost”! --- Incidentally, Mbuta is the Luo word for Nile Perch. This big bully fish is fat and meaty. It eats little fish, but is itself quite weak and cannot survive when the water hyacinth closes.

Justus Olielo, writer and researcher, Kenya

“CHOICES”

Issues: Avoiding teenage pregnancy and coping with the consequences

School-age mothers returning to school

Developing positive relationships between boys and girls

Life skills: resisting peer pressure; coping with stress and emotions

SUMMARY OF STORY

The main plot deals with the story of Sara’s friend, Tamala, who is made pregnant by Sara’s cousin, Jackson. Jackson believes that the only way to prove his manhood is to have sex with girls. But he is not willing to share responsibility for the consequences, leaving Tamala to cope alone. Sara discovers Tamala’s problem and tries to help her. The sub-plot deals with Sara’s own emotions towards Musa, an older boy, who is in love with her. Musa is pressurised by his peers and tries to push Sara into having sex with him. Although she likes him a lot, Sara is shocked and rejects Musa’s advances. The story reaches its climax when Jackson, afraid to face his father, tries to run away across a flooding river and almost gets drowned. Sara and Musa, together, help him out of the river, and Jackson decides to return to his village and face the consequences. Sara’s uncle reluctantly agrees to pay a fine for the maintenance of Tamala and the baby. With her teacher’s support, it is agreed that Tamala can return to school after the baby’s birth. Sara and Musa also work out a positive way forward for their relationship.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

Main changes:

- The original story was revised fully as the two parallel story lines were too confusing. In the final version, Tamala and Jackson’s story is given prominence, to explore ways of coping with teenage pregnancy, while Sara and Musa’s story is interwoven to show that more positive girl-boy relationships can be negotiated.
- The most significant changes related to the characterization of the central figures to make them fully credible to their adolescent audience. Sara needed to show more vulnerability and human emotion; Musa needed to show greater internal conflict, making his mistake more understandable and his regret more credible so that the audience could believe that his relationship with Sara might have a future; Tamala’s character needed to be strengthened so that she became more likeable and clearly wiser through her experience; Jackson needed to be

further exposed for his weakness and hypocrisy, and unfavourably contrasted with Musa, so that he could not become a kind of anti-hero for adolescent boys.

- While the near final version of the story strongly communicated the central issues, it was still felt that the story lacked the dramatic element to engage its audience. The storm scene and the rescue of Jackson from the river were added to give extra dramatic tension and to allow for Musa's rehabilitation and Jackson's enlightenment.

Comprehension:

- The story in its final form was clear and understood. The two plots had been streamlined and interwoven to give one clear direction through the story.
- People understood the themes of the story in explaining the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy, while promoting ways of dealing with it in a more constructive way, by ensuring equal responsibility is taken by the boy's family and by allowing the girl to continue her education. Sara and Musa's story was also understood as showing ways in which young people can learn to negotiate for a mutual respectful and mature relationship.

Interest:

- The issues generated lively discussion and the characters engaged the audience, but it was noted that the story lacked dramatic momentum. The earlier versions were driven by dialogue and needed some further dramatic action to make the most of its medium in animation. People found the final version very touching. They said that it was stronger than TV drama and hit the real issues.

Credibility:

- Group discussion showed that the final story was very realistic in the way it portrayed the different characters and the pressure they experience. It was noted that boys and girls are under pressure from the peers to engage in sex and also that many boys will use force if persuasion fails. Girls also appreciated the fact that their own emotional and sexual drives were reflected in Sara. As a secondary school girl said: "*Girls have feelings too.*"
- In research it was noted that different communities have different reactions to teenage pregnancy. In most it is thought to bring shame to the family and the girl is blamed. However, in some communities, pregnancy is actually welcomed as a sign of the girl's fertility. The story therefore needed to focus on the range of negative consequences for the girl, including the risks to her own and the baby's health and the implications for her future opportunities, even if she is allowed to return to school.

Story's solution:

- The story provoked lengthy debate about whether teenage mothers should be allowed to return to school. Some people felt that this would give the wrong signals to other girls. The script had to develop a strong case defending the importance of allowing girls to continue their education and to show how Tamala will benefit from a second chance, possibly going to another school.
- Groups also discussed in detail the level of responsibility that the boy and his family should carry. In reality in most cases the girls are left to bear the consequences alone. People felt that the wider community, including the elders, needed to support the claims of the girl to get financial support from the boy's family. They stated that it is difficult for the girl's family to

gain this alone, as the boy will usually deny responsibility. People believed that Uncle and Jackson would not honour their responsibilities unless forced to do so by community pressure.

- It was important to clarify that Tamala and Jackson's relationship is over. The story needed to show Tamala becoming wiser and stronger through her experience. Girls did not want her portrayed as just a victim, but wanted to see her gaining a chance for a future.
- The story raised issues about communication between adolescents and their parents. A parent said: "*We talk and talk, but these girls have no ears.*" The story showed the contrast between dictating to children and establishing a supportive two-way communication.

Characters:

- Sara was admired for resisting pressure from Musa and coping with her own emotions and impulses to negotiate for a more mature and respectful relationship with Musa.
- Musa initially provoked negative reactions. His character had to be carefully drawn to show him as basically a decent person, who is overwhelmed by peer pressure and his own hormones. There was debate amongst boys on whether it was credible for Musa to apologize to Sara at the end. He had to be made a sufficiently modern and attractive character (with a touch of heroism in the river rescue) to make him a palatable role model for boys.
- Jackson also required careful characterization to ensure that he did not become an anti-hero to be admired by the boy audience. He was shown to be both weak and a hypocrite. Jackson is shown ultimately to lose the debate in what behaviour makes a boy a 'man'.
- Tamala was at first disliked because she gave in to pressure from a boy like Jackson. Her character had to be more sensitively drawn to enable the audience to identify with her plight.
- Sara's uncle provided a useful model of hypocrisy in social attitudes to pregnancy and family responsibility.

Cultural sensitivity:

- The issue of teenage sexuality was potentially very sensitive, but people felt that the final story was acceptable to all generations. The story does not prescribe, but rather points to the *choices* young people have to make to avoid the risks of pregnancy and STIs, including HIV.
- There was concern among some adults that open discussion of condoms was not culturally appropriate and could encourage promiscuity in adolescents. While acknowledging these sensitivities, the script retained discreet references to condom use so that the issue could be dealt with, as appropriate, in-group discussion as directed in the topic on safe sex in the users' guide.

Potential to change:

- Respondents felt that the story would help young people to be more aware of their own behaviour and more able to assess risks and resist peer pressure. The realism of its characterization gave a more credible view of the conflicting drives and pressures experienced by adolescents. It was important that Sara should also be seen as vulnerable to these feelings.
- The story certainly has the potential to raise debate about the treatment of the pregnant girl and the responsibilities of the boy and his family. Attitudes to teenage mothers' future education are fairly entrenched (as Uncle's example demonstrates), but the script makes a strong case in its favour. It was felt that Tamala's attitude opened people's minds to the possibility of girls

proving themselves if given a second chance. The story also raises people's awareness of the key role of the community in ensuring a more equitable treatment of pregnant girls.

- Respondents felt that the story could also help to strengthen support for sex education in schools, not least in alerting teachers to the principle that they themselves should not make their pupils pregnant.
- Young people appreciated the example that Sara and Musa finally give of more positive, mature and respectful relationship, rather than preaching an unrealistic message of zero contact.

Researchers' Experience

Through the formative research process in Namibia it became apparent that the dominant reason for girls dropping out of school was pregnancy. In researching a story line on teenage pregnancy, girls in a youth club spoke passionately about the need for girls to be allowed to return to school and for boys to be required to take some responsibility. One young woman spoke poignantly about how her pregnancy at fourteen has dashed her dreams for the future. --- Later we talked with a group of bright articulate secondary school girls, who engaged fully with the Sara story on teenage pregnancy and offered many ideas for its improvement. When asked: "Should teenage mothers be given a second chance with school?" one girl responded: "Even a third chance if need be." Then she told her own story. She had become pregnant twice and her boyfriend's parents were helping to look after the babies. Her teacher had managed to overcome stiff resistance and convince the Parents/Teachers' Association to allow her to return to school. The girl believed that it was not possible for her to get contraceptives from the health services.

*Pamela February, Researcher, Namibia
Rachel Carnegie, Consultant, Sara Creative Team*

"THE EMPTY COMPOUND"

Issues: Living positively with HIV/AIDS

Breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS

Challenging discrimination (particularly against women) on HIV/AIDS

Life skills: empathy; coping with stress and emotions

SUMMARY OF STORY

Sara's cousin, Sofia, is driven out of her in-laws' compound, when her husband dies. Although Sofia's parents-in-law are unable to accept that their son died of AIDS, yet they still blame Sofia for his death. When Sara's family take in the pregnant Sofia and her young child, Sara experiences personally the stigma and discrimination endured by a family associated with HIV/AIDS. Sara stands up for Sofia and they become close friends. One night, they are amazed when Sofia's younger brother-in-law knocks on the window hoping to get sexual favours from Sofia. Sara's father drives him away. The following morning, Sofia is missing. Sara fears that she has committed suicide because she was so depressed. At school Sara shouts at the children who are whispering about her and AIDS. Their teacher talks about the need for support and acceptance for people and their families affected by AIDS. Sara and her family finally find Sofia back at her old compound,

in tears. They discover that she went to the health centre to take an HIV test, although she does not yet know the result. Sara's parents confront Sofia's parents-in-law, who are brought to accept how their son died and to recognize that they can only protect their younger son by being more open about HIV/AIDS. Finally, Sofia and her child are taken back into the family.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

Main changes:

- This story was distilled from two different stories dealing with the issue of HIV/AIDS discrimination and breaking the silence. The challenge was to find a sensitive treatment of the issue that could not, in itself, be misinterpreted to reinforce prejudices. Hence, in an earlier version, Sofia also described how she had had many boyfriends before being tricked into sex by her future husband. Although this was intended to acknowledge sexuality in women, and to avoid the opposite pitfall of 'blaming' men, in the research groups much discussion focused on the issue of Sofia being to 'blame' for infecting her husband.
- It was therefore decided to keep Sofia's sexual history unstated, and also to leave her HIV status unknown at the end of the story. This generated more open discussion about the mutual responsibility within relationships for sexual health. This reflects the fact that, in many countries, married women are the group most at risk of HIV infection since they lack the power to negotiate for condom use.
- In the original draft, Sofia tells a long story about how her future husband, a butcher, had lured her with gifts of meat and then raped her. Only when she became pregnant was the man forced to marry her. This background history was found to be distracting from the main issues, since it gave rise to lengthy debates on whether Sofia was gullible in accepting the meat, etc.

Comprehension:

- The story was clearly understood apart from minor details, which were altered in the final version.
- Although people wanted to know who was responsible for the initial HIV infection - Sofia or her husband - this issue was deliberately kept unclear, as neither should be 'blamed'.
- There was some confusion about the reason for the night visit of Sofia's brother-in-law. This had to be clarified.

Interest:

- The story generated powerful and intense discussion. In some communities, this was the first time that HIV/AIDS discrimination had been discussed in an open way. Although people often knew the facts of transmission, this story allowed them to explore the social and psychological dimensions of the pandemic - the fear, denial, stigma, cruelty and rejection experienced by those affected by AIDS. Sofia's story was, especially for women, a moving reflection of their reality and a call for unity.
- People were very moved by Sofia's experience and suffering and demonstrated strong empathy with her situation. People found her expulsion from her husband's home and her return to the overgrown compound very touching.
- Overall, the story was thought to be dramatic and absorbing, with the night visit of Sofia's brother-in-law providing some light relief.

Credibility:

- People felt that the story was very realistic, showing the widow being chased away. It reflected the discrimination and segregation of people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as the fear and denial of families in acknowledging AIDS as the cause of sickness and death of relations. For children, Sara's experience of stigmatization at school was very realistic.
- In many cultures, women are often blamed for ill fortune and for men's deaths. The story portrayed this reality powerfully and served to explore and challenge these beliefs.
- People acknowledged that in most communities some compounds, like Sofia's, are being left empty because of AIDS.

Story's solution:

- The story raised very complex issues, which cannot be solved in one short episode. Sofia's parents-in-law were drawn in greater depth to show their treatment of Sofia deriving from fear and grief. When Sara's parents are able to reassure them, it was understood that they could have the potential to accept Sofia back.
- Originally, the story had aimed to deal also with the issue of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. However, it was not possible to address this adequately, given the other concerns raised in the story. The prospect of what will happen to Sofia's children, if she is HIV positive, is left for group discussion following the story - although the story does deal in depth with the ideas of empathy, care and acceptance of people affected by AIDS.
- While the story's solution is convincing in itself, people accepted that broader issues of gender discrimination and practices related to the treatment of widows and orphans (including inheritance of property, etc) were complex. This story was valued because it allowed people to discuss these issues more openly, breaking the silence.

Characters:

- When, in earlier drafts, Sofia was open about having other sexual relationships, people became caught up on the issue of her 'culpability'. The aim of the story was to challenge the idea that anyone is 'culpable', and to stress the need for couples and families as a whole to discuss HIV/AIDS openly and responsibly. The final version of the story, which is not explicit about Sofia's sexual past, made it easier for people to relate to her current predicament. She evoked strong empathy.
- Sara and all her family, apart from Uncle, were liked and admired for their compassion, strength and tolerance.
- Sofia's parents-in-law were also accepted because they demonstrated their ability to change. Their fear and grief, which leads them to evict Sofia, were understood, although people still viewed this principally from Sofia's perspective.

Cultural sensitivity:

- Although the story deals with extremely sensitive issues, it was found to be acceptable. The sensitivity lay in drawing Sofia's character carefully so that it could not be used to reinforce existing prejudices about women being to blame for their husbands' death. Similarly, the story should not perpetuate the culture of blame by pointing fingers at Sofia's husband.
- The original story did not include any elders in the final scene of mediation with Sofia's in-

laws. This was seen as necessary to reflect traditional practice.

- Zingo does not appear in this story. Some communities still associate AIDS with monkeys, so it was important not to confuse the issue.

Potential to change:

- It was recognized that the story dealt with very difficult issues, which cannot be quickly changed. However, it was stated that the value of the story lay in bringing these hidden and fearful issues into the open. Sara's story unlocked discussion about people's own lives and suffering. For some, it was the first time that they had openly acknowledged their own experiences of HIV/AIDS in the family.
- Working in discussion groups, the story showed its potential to support communities in becoming more open about HIV/AIDS and in exploring attitudes towards and treatment of families affected.
- This story should not be seen in isolation, but part of wider HIV/AIDS initiatives. Some communities were well aware of HIV transmission, while others sought more information. To have impact, this story needs to be used as part of a wider community based initiative providing information, counseling, testing and support.

Researchers' Experience

We were discussing the story with a group of 10 women market sellers, aged between 25 and 65. They were members of OMM, the Mozambiquan Women's Organisation, in Xinauang, 150kms north of Maputo. When we finished the story, one old lady spoke up. "My daughter died of AIDS three weeks ago. Now I have to support 3 grandchildren. No one in the village knows she died of AIDS. She was a nurse." She described how the staff at the hospital where she worked were good to her and accepted her as she was well liked. --- We were very moved. So were the other women in the group. They hadn't known about the woman's daughter before so they were shocked. We asked the old woman if it was okay to talk about this. She said she wanted to continue the conversation. "It's good you raised the issue. It's good to talk about it," she said. The other women said that they thought 8 people in their village had died recently of AIDS, but their families won't admit it because they are scared. The women discussed the stigmatization of people who are thought to be infected. They gave the example of a rumour about a girl in the market. "People say "SIDA-da" (AIDS-giver) about this girl." --- The women showed great solidarity and support to the old woman who had told her story. The story had helped them to see how they could help each other. At the end the women sang and danced and kissed us.

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