

Radio Serials to Change Social Behavior

Kriss Barker
Vice President for International Programs,
Population Media Center

145 Pine Haven Shores Road, Suite 2011
Shelburne, Vermont 05482 USA
Tel: 802-985-8156
www.populationmedia.org

The Sabido methodology is an approach to development of mass-media serial dramas. However, unlike typical “soap operas,” Sabido-style serial dramas are not used to sell sex or soap, but rather, social change.

In this paper, we explore the Sabido methodology and the reasons why this theory-based approach to behavior change communication has been so successful. How do Sabido-style serial dramas differ from “soaps” and how does the Sabido methodology differ from other entertainment-education approaches? Why do audiences from the Philippines, to India, from Tanzania to Ethiopia, and from Mexico to Bolivia find these dramas irresistible – and much more than merely educating in an entertaining way?

Miguel Sabido: “Entertainment with Proven Social Benefit”

Miguel Sabido was Vice President for Research at *Televisa* (Mexican television) during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. While at *Televisa*, Sabido developed a theoretical model for eliciting prosocial attitudinal, informational, and behavioral change through commercial television programming. He called this model “entertainment with proven social benefit.”

Between 1973 and 1981, Miguel Sabido produced six social content serial dramas in Mexico. During the decade 1977 to 1986, when many of these Mexican soap operas were on the air, the country underwent a 34 percent decline in its population growth rate. As a result, in May 1986, the United Nations Population Prize was presented to Mexico as the foremost population success story in the world.

Thomas Donnelly, then with USAID in Mexico, wrote, “Throughout Mexico, wherever one travels, when people are asked where they heard about family planning, or what made them decide to practice family planning, the response is universally attributed to one of the soap operas that *Televisa* has done. ... The *Televisa* family planning soap operas have made the single most powerful contribution to the Mexican population success story.”

Results of *Yeken Kignit* (Ethiopia)

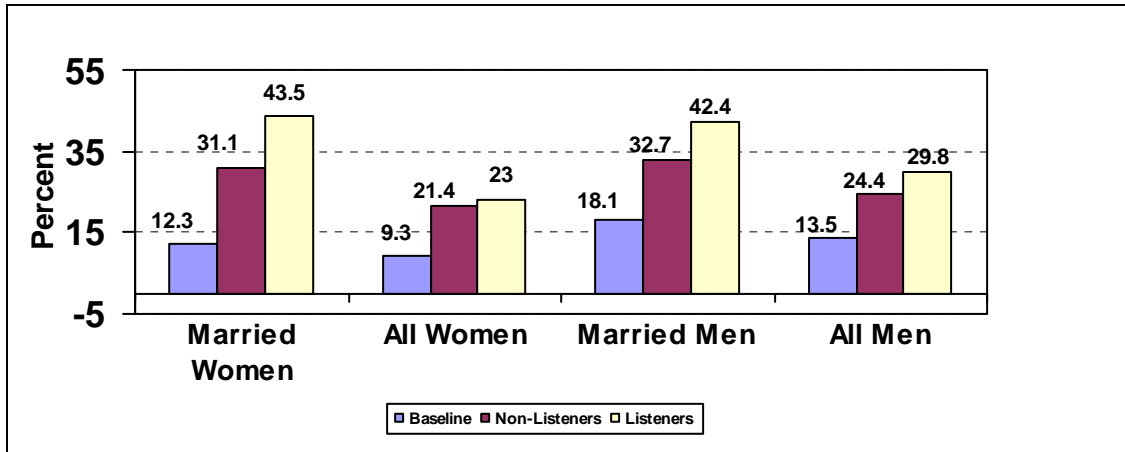
Recently, Population Media Center (PMC) completed a radio serial drama in Ethiopia using the Sabido methodology for behavior change communication. The program, *Yeken Kignit* (“Looking Over One’s Daily Life”) was broadcast in the Amharic language over Radio Ethiopia in 257 episodes between June 2, 2002 and November 27, 2004.

Yeken Kignit addressed issues of reproductive health and women’s status, including HIV/AIDS, family planning, marriage by abduction, education of daughters, spousal communication and related issues.

An independent research firm conducted an evaluation of the impact of *Yeken Kignit* in December 2004. Preliminary findings from this study show significant results in terms of family planning and HIV/AIDS knowledge. The results also showed evidence of behavior change: most notably in terms of use of family planning methods, and in willingness to be tested for HIV. In most cases, there were significant differences in these knowledge and behavior change measures between listeners and non-listeners of *Yeken Kignit*, showing that the program had a differential effect on knowledge and behavior between listeners and non-listeners.

For example, among married women who were listeners to *Yeken Kignit*, current use of **any** family planning method increased from 12.3 percent to 43.5 percent (a 31.2 percentage point increase). Among non-listeners, use increased from 12.3 percent to 31.1 percent, an increase of only 18.8 percentage points. Among married men who were listeners to *Yeken Kignit*, current use of any method increased from 18.1 percent to 42.4 percent, an increase of 24.3 percentage points. Among non-listeners, use increased by only 14.6 percentage points.

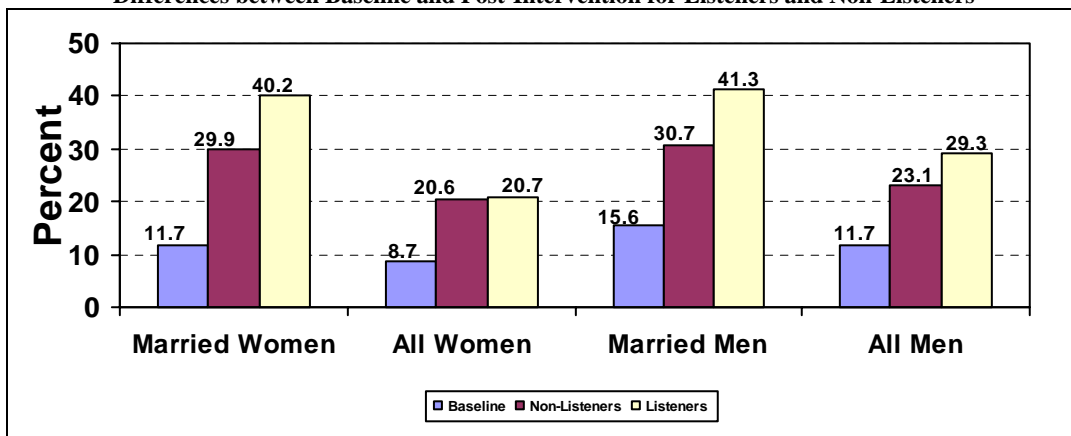
Yeken Kignit (Ethiopia)
Current Use of FP (Any Method):
Differences between Baseline and Post-Intervention for Listeners and Non-Listeners



source: Population Media Center – Ethiopia. *Final Evaluation (Preliminary Report)*. December 2004.

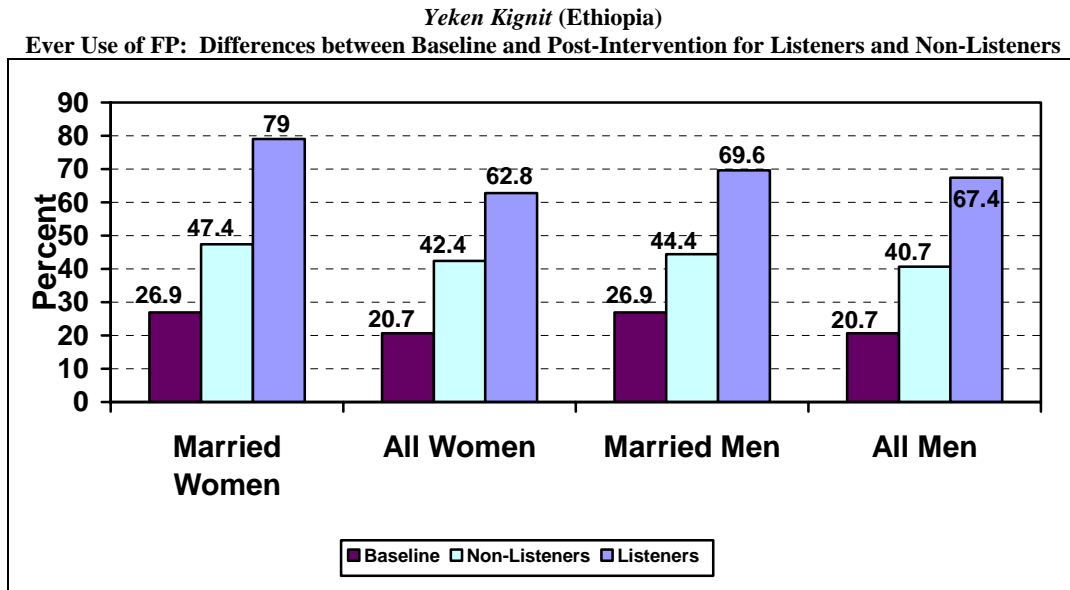
Current use of **modern** family planning methods also increased significantly among listeners, compared to non-listeners. For example, use of a modern method of family planning by married women who were listeners to *Yeken Kignit* increased from 11.7 percent to 40.2 percent, a 28.3 percentage point change. Among non-listeners, use increased by only 18.2 percentage points (from 11.7 percent to 29.9 percent). Among married men who were listeners to *Yeken Kignit*, current use of modern methods increased from 15.6 percent to 41.3 percent, an increase of 25.7 percentage points. Among non-listeners, use increased by only 15.1 percentage points.

Yeken Kignit (Ethiopia)
Current Use of FP (Modern Methods):
Differences between Baseline and Post-Intervention for Listeners and Non-Listeners



Source: Population Media Center – Ethiopia. *Final Evaluation (Preliminary Report)*. December 2004.

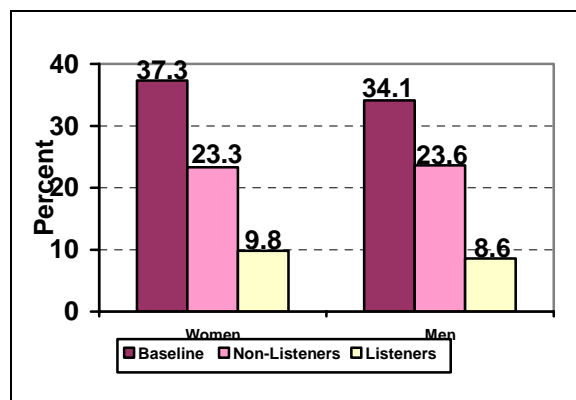
The evaluation also measured differences in **ever use** of family planning among listeners and non-listeners. Among listeners, ever use among married women increased from 26.9 percent at baseline to 79 percent (an increase of 52.1 percentage points). Among non-listeners, ever use increased by only 20.5 percentage points, from 26.9 percent to 47.4 percent. Among married men who were listeners to *Yeken Kignit*, ever use increased from 26.9 percent to 69.6 percent, an increase of 42.7 percentage points. Among non listeners, ever use increased by only 17.5 percentage points.



Source: Population Media Center – Ethiopia. *Final Evaluation (Preliminary Report)*. December 2004.

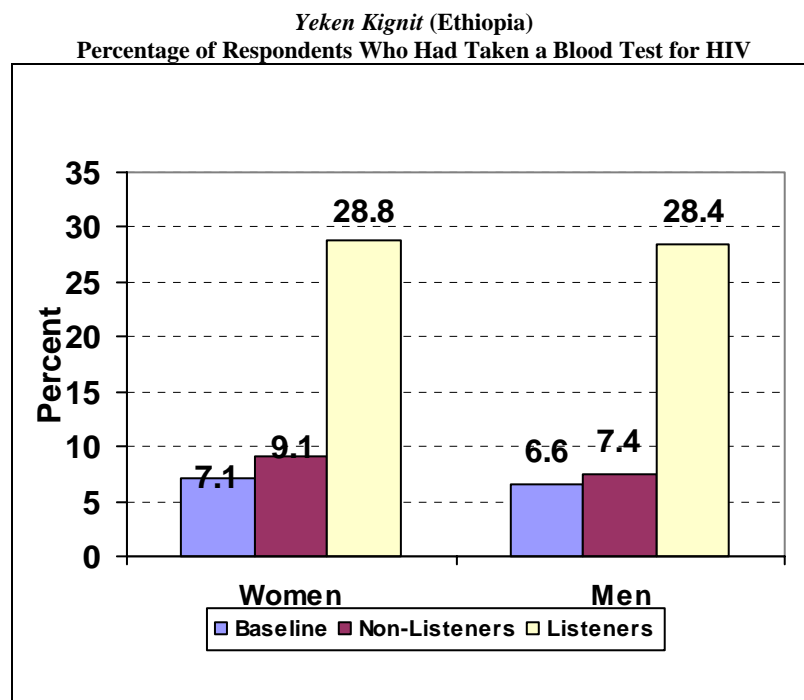
The percentage of respondents who know how to determine HIV sero status increased considerably after listening to *Yeken Kignit*. The proportion of those who said that there is “no way to determine” one’s HIV status declined from 37.3 percent among women and 34.1 percent among men to 9.8 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively, after listening to *Yeken Kignit*. The proportion reporting that a blood test is a means to determine one’s HIV status increased by 51.4 and 37.5 percentage points, respectively, for women and men.

Yeken Kignit (Ethiopia)
Percentage of Respondents who do not Know of Any Means to Determine HIV Status



Source: Population Media Center – Ethiopia. *Final Evaluation (Preliminary Report)*. December 2004.

The percentage of people who had **taken a blood test** for HIV after listening to *Yeken Kignit* more than tripled for women, and more than quadrupled for men.



Source: Population Media Center – Ethiopia. *Final Evaluation (Preliminary Report)*. December 2004.

Results of *Gugar Goge* (northern Nigeria)

PMC is currently implementing a radio serial drama project in Nigeria in collaboration with the Rotarian Action Group on Population and Development (RFPD) and with a Nigerian organization, Multi-Sector Projects. The project involves a 70-episode program in northern Nigeria aimed at improving maternal health and preventing obstetric fistula through delaying marriage and the onset of childbearing until adulthood. In addition to Rotary support, the project is funded by the Conservation, Food and Health Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The radio serial *Gugar Goge* (“Tell Me Straight”) serving Kano and Kaduna states went on the air in June 2006. In less than four months of broadcast, the program is being cited by name by 33 percent of new reproductive health clients and 54 percent of fistula patients as the primary reason for seeking medical services.

The Sabido Methodology: An Empirical and Reproducible Approach to Entertainment-Education

Yeken Kignit and *Gugar Goge* produced such impressive behavior change results because they were designed using the Sabido methodology, which uses elements of communication and behavioral theories to reinforce specific values, attitudes, and behaviors.¹

Sabido-style serial dramas achieve results because they are developed using an empirical and reproducible approach to behavior change communication via mass media. In fact, every detail

of a Sabido-style serial drama is developed according to a theoretical and empirical research-based formula in order to reinforce a coherent set of interrelated values that is tied to specific prosocial behaviors. The Sabido methodology is also a replicable methodology that, although formularized, is still adaptable to the individual values and cultures of each country where it is used.⁶

The Sabido methodology is based on theoretical and social research which is used to develop mass media serial dramas that are based on the realities that people in the audience face daily. These dramas communicate at the emotional level as well as the cognitive level, and further establish the conditions for social learning to take place. Sabido-style serial dramas portray role models who realistically learn to live more fulfilling personal and interpersonal lives.⁶

The major tenet of the Sabido methodology is that education does not have to be boring – and that entertainment can be educational. Sabido originally termed his approach “entertainment with proven social benefit.” Since then, many communication professionals and scholars have applied the term “entertainment-education” to the Sabido approach. However, the Sabido methodology is more than mere entertainment-education.

Since the 1980s, the entertainment-education strategy has been used in over 200 health intervention programs in over 50 countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, dealing mainly with reproductive health issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning, environmental health, teenage pregnancy prevention, and gender equality.⁵

Entertainment-education comes in many different sizes and shapes:

- Single films and videos have been important in Asia and Africa where they are shown from video vans as well as on national media.
- Variety shows are increasingly popular with youth in developing countries – many of these programs engage young people directly in content and production.²
- Television and radio spots often include entertainment-education through short narratives or through use of familiar characters.^{3,4}
- Locally, street theater, community radio, indigenous storytellers, drama contests, and community rallies with local performers incorporate and/or adapt national entertainment-education productions.⁵
- Popular songs and music videos, which are inspired by the role modeling techniques used in Sabido-style serial dramas.

Many of these entertainment-education programs have attracted large audiences and have brought about major changes among audience members in terms of knowledge, attitudes and behavior.⁶

However, although they certainly produce results, these various entertainment-education programs have not demonstrated the same magnitude of effects or cost-effectiveness achieved by Sabido-style programs, such as *Yeken Kignit*¹³ and *Gugar Goge*.

What makes Sabido-style programs so different than other forms of Entertainment-Education?

Successful use of the Sabido methodology hinges on two key factors: (1) use of the serial drama format and (2) rigorous adherence to the theories underlying the methodology.

First and foremost, the Sabido methodology requires the use of serial drama. Serial dramas continuing for several months or years are an extremely powerful form of entertainment-education that can influence both specific health behaviors and related social norms. Why?

- Serial dramas capture the attention and the emotions of the audience on a continual basis;
- Serial dramas provide repetition and continuity, allowing audiences to identify more and more closely over time with the fictional characters, their problems, and their social environment;
- Serial dramas allow time for characters to develop a change in behavior slowly, with hesitations and setbacks that occur in real life;
- Serial dramas have various subplots that can introduce different issues in a logical and credible way through different characters, a key characteristic of conventional soap operas; and
- Serial dramas can build a realistic social context that will mirror society and create multiple opportunities to present a social issue in various forms.⁶

By modeling the process of change gradually, serial dramas are less likely to result in backlash, or negative reactions by the audience, than programs that try to bring about behavior change too quickly. Ideally, Sabido-style serial dramas should continue for at least 120-180 episodes (over the course of several years).

Telenovelas vs. US Soap Operas

The US type of soap opera has its roots in domestic novels and film chapter plays, both directed to an almost exclusively female audience, whereas the origins of the Latin American *telenovela* can be traced to the nineteenth-century serialized stories and novels that appeared in European newspapers and magazines and were penned by the likes of Charles Dickens and Eugene Sue for male and female readers alike.⁷

The US soap opera is an open-ended story that continues as long as advertisers and ratings are in sufficient abundance; each *telenovela*, on the other hand, consists of a finite number of episodes, in which a central story is told until its conclusion.⁸

The *telenovela* is the backbone of the Sabido methodology for several reasons:

1. The emotional tone of this format produces an identification which can be used to teach the audience a desired social behavior.
2. In contrast to the North American soap opera, the Latin American *telenovela* has a definite beginning, middle and ending; and thus provides an opportunity to tie-in, and expand the needed infrastructure services.
3. The *telenovela* format allows connecting the audience with the infrastructure services in short epilogues at the end of every episode, in order to convey relevant information.
4. Since the *telenovela* format is a reflection on what is good and bad in society, it is easy to add characters for identification by audience individuals and groups, so they can learn social behavior change without harming audience ratings.

Second, the Sabido methodology is based on various communication theories, each of which plays an essential role in the development of a Sabido-style serial drama. The application of these theories is critical to the success of the drama in achieving behavior change.

The different theories that guide the development of Sabido-style serial dramas provide the methodology with a foundation for the structure and design of messages, settings, characters, and plots – a foundation that is based on formative research. The theories also provide a framework for articulating hypotheses for summative (evaluation) research on the impact of the program.

Theories underlying the Sabido Methodology

Theory	Function in Sabido-Style Soap Opera
Communication Model (Shannon and Weaver) ⁹	Provides a model for the communication process through which distinct sources, messages, receivers, and responses are linked.
Dramatic Theory (Bentley) ¹⁰	Provides a model for characters, their interrelationships, and plot construction.
Archetypes and Stereotypes (Jung) ¹¹	Provides a model for characters that embody universal human physiological and psychological energies.
Social Learning Theory (Bandura) ¹²	Provides a model in which learning from soap opera characters can take place.
Concept of the Triune Brain (MacLean) ¹³ and Theory of the Tone (Sabido) ¹⁴	Provide a model for sending complete messages that communicate with various centers of perception.

Source: Theories Underlying the Sabido Methodology (Source: Nariman H. *Soap operas for social change*. Westport, CT: Praeger; 1993.)

One of the main questions posed about communication interventions is: “Did the intervention change behavior?” The Sabido methodology has proven time and again that this approach does, in fact, achieve behavior-change results. The cost-effectiveness of the intervention has also been proven – Sabido-style serial dramas over the mass media have demonstrated a cost-effectiveness unmatched by any other communication approach in changing behavior.

Finally, it should be noted that the Sabido methodology can (and has) been used to address issues other than reproductive health or even health in general. For example, in a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), PMC produced a radio serial drama to address exploitative child labor and child trafficking in three West African countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire). PMC is currently developing a program in Rwanda to address the effect of population growth on environmental preservation. This program will undoubtedly also deal with issues such as conflict mediation and peaceful relations between ethnic groups.

References:

- ¹ Nariman, H. 1993. *Soap operas for social change*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- ² Kiragu, K., Sienche, C., Obwaka, E., Odallo, D., and S. Barth. 1998. *Adolescent reproductive health needs in Kenya: A communication response – Evaluation of the Kenya youth initiative project*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs. Cited in: Singhal, A., Cody, M.J., Rogers, E.M., and M. Sabido. 2004. *Entertainment-education and social change: History, Research and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- ³ Kincaid D.L., Merritt, A.P., Nickerson, L., Buffington de Castro, S.D. and B.M. de Castro. 1996. *Impact of a mass media vasectomy promotion campaign in Brazil*. *International Family Planning Perspectives*. 12(4): 169-175.
- ⁴ Underwood, C. 2001. *Impact of the HEART campaign: Findings from the youth surveys in Zambia 1999 & 2000*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs.
- ⁵ Valente, T.W., Poppe, P.R., and A.P. Merritt. 1996. *Mass-media generated interpersonal communication as sources of information about family planning*. *Journal of Health Communication*. 1, 247-265.
- ⁶ Coleman, P.L. and R.C. Meyer (Eds.). 1990. *Proceedings from the enter-educate conference: Entertainment for social change*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, Population Communication Services.
- ⁷ Frey-Vor, G. 1990. *Soap Opera*. *Communication Research Trends*. 10 No. 2:1-12.
- ⁸ Nariman, H. 1993. *Soap operas for social change*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- ⁹ Shannon, C.E., and E. Weaver. 1949. *The mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- ¹⁰ Bentley, E. 1967. *The life of drama*. New York: Atheneum.
- ¹¹ Jung, C.G. 1970. *Archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós.
- ¹² Bandura A. *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; 1977.
- ¹³ MacLean, P.D. 1973. A triune concept of the brain and behavior, including psychology of memory, sleep and dreaming. In: Kral VA et al. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the Ontario Mental Health Foundation Meeting at Queen's University*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- ¹⁴ Sabido, M. 2002. *The tone, theoretical occurrences, and potential adventures and entertainment with social benefit*. Mexico City: National Autonomous University of Mexico Press.