Sexuality, HIV/AIDS and Nomadic Fulani Women: Communication Challenges

E.A. Nyager

Communicating to rural groups with the HIV/AIDS message poses challenges, communicating with nomadic groups carries greater challenge but communicating with rural, nomadic women should present even greater challenge. Although AIDS prevention campaigns are said to be well underway throughout Africa (Africa Health, MAY 1997), these campaigns continue to be done mainly through the mass media which target mostly urban audiences. Rural (and nomadic) groups have more limited communication option for them to be reached. One medium that has been most used is the radio due to its pervasive and far-reaching character. The rural and nomadic woman presents a special case however, because she does not own a radio and since she usually lives a distinct life from her husband's she may not always have the opportunity to listen to the radio. Television is of extremely limited access to nomadic people. The question therefore is what other communication options may be used to reach out effectively to the nomadic Fulani woman with the HIV/AIDS message? This paper attempts to answer this question.

Introduction

Since this paper is concerned with HIV/AIDS and the nomadic Fulani woman the issue of sexuality is of necessary consideration. Though she lives a sexually protected life, certain cultural practices may impinge upon her safety from contracting HIV. One of these is the issues of early marriage with its attendant health risks – VVF inclusive. The issue of polygamous marriages also poses great safety challenges to the nomadic woman vis-à-vis HIV infection. The “Buki” traditional and cultural practice in which young adults engage in indiscriminate sexual intercourse is another case in point. Child-bearing in a bush-setting could also increase vulnerability to infections including HIV. Other practices associated with child-delivery like the cutting of the navel and later, scarification all harbor on risk-taking behavior due to lack of education and limited access to information. Overcoming the challenges of reaching out to rural Fulani women will therefore required innovative strategizing. How do we get her to listen to the radio, for instance but, in addition to the radio, what other communication options could be used to effectively reach her?

This paper offers among other communication options, Theatre for Development (TID), a culture-friendly communication strategy that offers
both horizontal and vertical communication channels for effectiveness and ultimate change in behavior. Since mass media which present only vertical forms of communication have a number of limitations, TdD becomes an option that can overcome these limitations. For, according to Bosley:

One of the key weaknesses of mass media approaches is that their effectiveness tend to be limited firstly, by the difficulty of directing sufficiently sharply-focused messages to the target groups most at risk and secondly by failing to engage with the community level processes which play a key role to behavioral decision... Only integrated community level strategies will exert sufficient influence on the individual to change sexual behavior in a significant way (Africa Health, May, Vol 19 No 4).

Theatre for Development which will be looked at in greater detail in the course of this write-up could be built around popular festivals of the target nomadic group since festivals offer opportunity for both male and female to intermingle.

Mobilization through Radio

The necessity and usability of radio for reaching out to mass audiences has already been mentioned. In spite of its pervasive advantage and its far-reaching character it has limitations some of which have been mentioned above. There is however a more effective use of radio namely: the entertainment-education strategy of radio communication which has been used successfully elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Tanzania). This also is recommended and will be looked at more closely along the line. This paper therefore strives to present both radio and Theatre for Development as a combined force for reaching out to the nomadic “Fulbe” (another name for Fulani) in a more effective strategy that will not overlook the nomadic Fulani women. Through TdD, she could even be sensitized about the necessity to listen to specialized and customized messages on radio.

The Entertainment-Education Strategy of Communication has been described as the intentional incorporation of educational messages into entertainment media in order to change audience members' behavior (Singhal and Rogers). The entertainment medium may be radio or television, soap-opera, popular music, a feature film, a comic book or street theatre. In this approach, the characters in the entertainment media serve as positive or negative models for audience’s individual behavior. According to supporting work done by the following Kincaid et al (1996) Singhal et al (1993) Singhal et al (1994) Piotrow et al, (1992) the entertainment-education strategy has been utilized to bring about behavior changes in family planning, HIV prevention, gender equality and adult literacy in 75 projects in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Although, no base-line research has yet been published on the impact of work being done by an indigenous NGO that uses entertainment-education, radio soap opera for development purposes, one can safely presume that much impact is being made through ARDA’s (Africa Radio Drama Association) an indigenous NGO, based in Lagos. ARDA (African Radio Drama Association) has aired entertainment-education radio dramas on wide-ranging development issues (including HIV/AIDS) with catchy titles-like RAINBOW CITY and “Ku Saurara” (a Hausa language drama series).

In Tanzania, we understand that the pervasiveness of radio made it the most appropriate mass communication channel for broadcasting an entertainment-education programme. Since radio ownership is therefore prevalent among nomadic Fulani populations, the entertainment-education communication strategy could become an appropriate option for creating awareness and channeling information to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS among this people group. Previous efforts by Radio Kaduna in the use of Open Broadcasting have been criticized and viewed as having limited impact or a number of reasons. Open Broadcasting strategy has been criticized for having certain inherent limitations that have failed to impact the ‘target’ audience (Tahir 183-6). According to this work, research findings suggest that it is too much to expect open broadcasting on its own to lead to significant changes in the behavior of a people.

A combination must therefore be made of open broadcasting and the radio Soap Opera form also known as the entertainment-education strategy that has been described above. However, the challenge to specifically mainstream the nomadic Fulani woman into the communication agenda most still be looked into.

Profile of a Nomadic Fulani Woman

The nomadic Fulani woman shares a lot with other African women. Like other African women she is expected to be domestic and is treated as a second-class citizen. In many instances she may even be considered third class, coming after children! From a child she is brought up in a distinct way from the boys of her family. The nomadic Fulani woman is however more obscure than the average African woman by virtue of her nomadic existence. She goes where her husband goes and all ‘domestic’ and economic activities are for her, centered around camp settlement and environs. Her visibility kin term of personal identity is therefore
very obscure. Although her physical image has been artistically captured, romanticized and popularized by the stereotypical portrayal of the slender figure, forever carrying a gourd, ornamented and visibly on the move; she has no voice. Not much is known about her since little attention has been given to her study. Therefore, her life-style and other issues concerning her life like her sexuality have not been adequately documented.

In a recent interview with a Fulani man on the nomadic Fulani woman, the following (which has in no way been corroborated) was gathered.

The nomadic Fulani woman is reticent in the discussion of sexual matters. Most African women feel some inhibition (particularly rural African women) in the discussion of sex-related matters. However, nomadic Fulani girls marry early. As from twelve years girls may be married off, so sexual activity may begin at that tender age. Consider therefore the following scenario. A girl is married off at age 12 to a man with two other wives. Unknown to her, her husband is HIV positive/infected. She contracts the virus and before she celebrates her 20th birthday she lives with the "PLWA" title and dies. She had no voice in the choice of a life-partner and subsequently no voice on life-choices. The fate of the other two wives is also set. They will die voiceless and choiceless. If they had any children, because of lack of access to education they knew nothing about acting correctly to protect their children so the children could also contract the virus and the cycle continues. (Medibbo Usman is a staff of the National Commission for Nomadic Education, Kaduna).

When a girl is born, she is most likely to be brought up by extended family that plays a very important role in her future marriage. This relationship, within the extended family is so important that biological parents may simply act as "nanny" to the girl-child. She can be betrothed at birth although her upbringing is strictly guarded from that of her male siblings and other growing boys in the pastoral community so that the only opportunities for mixing with the opposite gender is at public fora like festivals. *

Asked whether there are many cases of adolescent pregnancies, our informant affirmed that this does happen occasionally. He however disallowed abortion cases! Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is also not practiced among the nomadic Fulani, according to this informant.

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**The Nomadic Fulani Woman and Work**

The nomadic Fulani woman as has been observed above is physically visible, active, always on the move but in social identity, she is invisible and voiceless. Yet she is an important and moving factor to her community in terms of labour and productivity. In most rural subsistence societies, women and girls are usually over-burdened. The distribution of labour is heavily against women. In nomadic Fulani settlement communities for instance, women take on heavy duties like the construction of settlement shelters and girls are usually trained to play the same roles as their mothers. A girl wakes up; gets to the source of water, fetches it home, prepares breakfast, washes up, begins planning for the next meal etc. This work activity may go on for most of her waking hours. Yet this labour is unrecognized and of course unrenumerated.

The nomadic Fulani woman is the image of activity and should be recognized as a moving force for her husband’s success. Safeguarding her health therefore is a necessary commitment that should be taken up by all concerned with the economic and social development of this country.

**HIV/AIDS: The Global Challenge with Local Implications**

HIV/AIDS is a development issue particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The pandemic has killed over 25 million people and 40 million more were reported in 2002 to be currently infected (World Bank Report 2000). Still, no cure has yet been found for the disease and no vaccine has yet been found. The World Bank report goes on to identify HIV/AIDS as not just a public health challenge but a development issue as it is reversing decades of development gains, increasing poverty and undermining the very foundations of progress and security. Indeed, the epidemic is said to demand response that confronts every sector.

In the developing world, it’s been reported that nearly all HIV-infected persons die from AIDS-related illnesses (Chober Vol.52 No.4). According to this source, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is a serious problem in many world regions, but it is especially severe in Africa. In a separate study it is even observed that in sub-Saharan Africa, the epidemic is even bigger Nyager (2002). The United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated in 1997 that sub-Saharan Africa had 20.8 million people infected with HIV which was two-third of the world total for that year. (Chober Vol.52 No.4). Yet the extent of the growing epidemic is difficult to gauge since most AIDS cases are never here reported and so current and actual figures today must be staggering.

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the high level of HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa among which is a high incidence of
multiple concurrent sex partners. Wives for instance may become infected by their husbands if such husbands have outside sex partners. Another factor is poverty which leads to a generally low health status thus making individuals less able to stave off infections of many kinds including STD which are an open gate to HIV-infection. Both of these factors have grave implications for women’s vulnerability and susceptibility to HIV infection.

Sub-Saharan Africa thus has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the world with an average of 8.4 percent of the population infected (ILO Publication, 2000). According to this same publication, at 28.1 million, the region has more people living with HIV/AIDS than all other regions of the world put together. In this number, about 55% are women.

The implications for these regions are therefore grave. HIV/AIDS as has been noted above has ceased to be just a health issue but a development one. It is undoing many development gains and leaving countries with reduced populations which translate into fewer people available for productive work. Economies are being weakened and it has become the major cause of poverty and discrimination. It is also aggravating existing problems of inadequate social protection and gender inequality. This gender inequality when linked to patterns of social, economic and cultural inequality makes women more vulnerable to infection. The situation is made even worse by biological differences between men and women and as the epidemic spreads, women are faced with the double burden of having to work and cope with the additional responsibilities of providing support for family and community members who fall ill (Gender, Work and AIDS, 13). Again, because multiple partners and sexual infidelity are condoned for men in many African societies, women’s vulnerability is further enhanced. The effect of HIV/AIDS on individual households and communities can also lead to the intensification of poverty and even push some non-poor into poverty (Collins and Rau 7).

Women are the poorer gender in most societies. Poor people suffer from higher levels of illiteracy and lack access to health and social services. There have been reported cases of infected couples where the husband could afford the high cost of HIV/AIDS management but the woman could not. Illiteracy also makes it much less likely for those affected to receive information about HIV and how to avoid infection. Among the nomadic Fulbe for instance, men have access to the radio which they always carry about. The nomadic Fulbe woman does not own a radio and because culture forbids her to freely mix with men she may not even be in the radio is

in Fulbe. Again, even when in hearing distance of the radio, she may be tuned-off as listening to the radio may be considered by her as a manly pre-occupation.

Again, poor diets and poor housing can make those infected by HIV more vulnerable to opportunistic infections. This places the Fulbe nomadic woman at higher risk status than the man. When families suffer food shortages, it is the woman who undergoes the greater disadvantage – they are the last to eat (traditionally in Africa). This low nutritional status coupled with the poor housing lifestyle of the nomad could increase her chances of infection by these opportunistic diseases if already infected by the virus.

According to another World Bank Report (HIV/AIDS at a glance, March 2002) there are more women getting infected than men in many developing countries and as mentioned earlier women account for 55% of adults living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed gender inequality has been identified as a contributing factor to the epidemic that need to be addressed in the long term through measures such as improving education and labour force participation of women. A good basic education is considered the most effective and cost effective means of HIV prevention (Wollensohen, 2002). Since education has a key role to play in modifying behavior. Education also promotes health and prevents disease through behavior modification and skills that reduce risks improve care and reduce the impact of illness (Charles, et al 2002). This is an important challenge therefore to the nomadic Fulbe women who have little or no access to education.

Although records show an enrolment figure in nomadic schools in Nigeria of 157,837 pupils out of which 65,000 by this estimate were girls as against 92,290 boys, (Journal of Nomadic Studies, No. 3) it is doubtful whether this same number of girls go on to complete even these elementary education programmes.

The World Bank (1998) reports that the African pastoral sector has experienced the greatest concentration of failed development projects in the world. Also, in terms of social services provision, the Bank pointed out that pastoral areas are usually among the worst served parts of any country; this tells us that reaching out to the nomadic communities with any development project is an enormous task. HIV/AIDS is a development issue and its prevention is a development challenge. This challenge is made even greater where the nomadic population is concerned. The greatest challenge of Nomadic Education for instance, has been the integration of Nomadic peoples into on-going development process (Journal of Nomadic Studies, No. 2).
Communication and Nomadic Fulani: Challenges

Nomadism is a world-wide phenomenon. Nomads are referred to as ethnic or socio-professional groups who travel and migrate in large or small clan/groups in search of means of livelihood within a community. Tahir (1998) traces the meaning of nomadism to the Greek word "nomos" which refers to a pastoral activity carried on by a group of people over a traditional route or area for over a period of time, who shares the territory occasionally with sedentary populations. A contemporary definition of "nomadism" however refers to any type of existence characterized by the absence of a fixed domicile.

Aminu (1991) reports that the pastoral Fulbe, known widely as "Mborro", form the largest nomadic group found across the African continent from Mauritania to Burundi. In Nigeria, they are about four million (Ardo 22) concentrated in the Savannah region of Northern Nigeria. They constitute 45% of the Fulbe ethnic group (Ardo 22).

Two types of movements characterize Nigerian Fulbe: split movement and total movement. In split movement the family, comprising young men with their wives and children and sometimes with younger relations move. At the base camp the rest of the family is left with a few milking cows for their sustenance before the split groups return to the base camps at the onset of the wet season. The drift by the split groups to the areas of new pasture and watering are usually intra-state (Ardo 24).

Under the total movement pattern, the entire nomadic family, both old and young plus all animals move. Usually families move with other family groups related within the same clans. This type of movement pattern is reported as usually transcending state boundaries in Nigeria. The total movement group is very large, often comprising from ten to twenty families.

Thus, the family is the most important unit in the social organization of the Fulbe. In spatial distribution, the pastoral society is split into small family units with space identification of which each unit is referred to as a Waro (Riesman quoted in Ardo 1997). This socio-geographic unit has a man and his wife forming a Waro, but at other times with other members with whom they share significant ties of kinship or neighborhood. Riesman also adds that a man is always the head of Waro and any grouping in a larger sense which sees itself as a community is also a Waro.

Waro is opposed to hoggo corral which comprises of a group of pasturing herdsman in a camp in the bush (ladde) where the herdsman sleep at night around the fire without women and without organization. Women are important only in the social living unit of the Waro. Thus

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Waro is a basic living unit and it is an actualization in space and time of society which connotes living together (gonqala) (Riesman quoted in Ardo).

This social organization and pastoral lifestyle of the nomadic Fulbe thus poses grave challenges to communication that is exogenous (coming from outside). This situation has long been recognized as a national challenge to the effort to integrate nomadic groups into mainstream development processes. The Nomadic Education Programme became government's effort to confront this challenge. Whatever gains are being made along these lines notwithstanding, the challenge still remains of reaching out to the nomadic Fulbe with other development initiatives and in the case HIV/AIDS prevention and management, finding effective communication strategies remain an important area of challenge. The challenge is made even more acute when our focus becomes the nomadic Fulbe woman who must be reached with the HIV/AIDS message. She is twice disadvantaged by virtue of her not just being a woman but (also) a pastoral and rural woman. She is also largely illiterate and poor. These factors pose the peculiar needs of access, health and education to her.

The most pervasive communication medium used for the nomadic Fulbe in Nigeria has been the radio. As already noted above, Radio Nigeria, Kaduna has used Open Broadcasting for the Fulbe in Northern Nigeria. These broadcasts have aimed at motivating the Fulbe pastoralists to participate in their own development by creating an awareness of new policy, new products and services through the dissemination of information to induce behavior change (Tahir 182). Even though the Fulbe nomad is widely known for carrying his radio around, it is doubtful if the open broadcasting strategy has succeeded in effecting in him the desired changes in behavior.

Open Broadcasting is a communication strategy that is usually aimed at an unorganized and heterogeneous audience. It seeks to disseminate modest amounts of information and also motivate the audience. It is essentially "message-centered" or "message-driven" and relies heavily on radio broadcasts to carry the message. These broadcasts have to succeed on their own with little or no support materials or follow-up activities for the audience (Tahir 181).

One such programme on Radio Kaduna has been the 'Fulbe Health Talk' broadcast show. This has been criticized for a number of reasons. First has been the question of how to ascertain that these broadcasts are listened to. According to Umar (in Tahir 183), research findings suggest that it is too much to expect open broadcasting on its own to lead to significant changes in the behavior of a people. Secondly, the Health
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Talk broadcast show for instance, has been criticized for using a wrong presentation format i.e. an inappropriate variant of open broadcasting. Again, research on the use of this format, has been reported, has shown consistently that it is not popular with audiences and is therefore least effective (Bogge, 1979; McAnary, 1973). It is judged as too didactic and as trying to impart too much information within too short a time.

Radio programmes of the appropriate type can however ride upon the persuasiveness and far-reaching nature of radio to effectively communicate development messages and ideas to the nomadic Fulbe. Entertainment-education programmes on radio could well serve this purpose as has already been mentioned. The Tanzanian experience which was referred to earlier was based on report findings from a large-scale field experiment evaluating the effects of an entertainment-education radio Soap Opera on the adoption of Family Planning, and HIV prevention. The findings indicated overwhelming success. A concluding part of the report reads:

The entertainment-education strategy is particularly effective in stimulating interpersonal communication about the educational content of the entertainment-education messages. The emotional and involving nature of the radio Soap Opera encouraged interpersonal communication about Family Planning and HIV prevention, leading to widespread behaviour change on the part of our respondents.

In Nigeria, as also earlier mentioned, the indigenous NGO, African Radio Drama Association (ARDA) based in Lagos is into entertainment-education radio broadcasting. This writer has personally been involved with this NGO as a script-writer. Project concern has always covered a variety of development issues like (proper) elections management by INEC, proper organization of voters, voters rights and powers, HIV prevention, HIV/AIDS management, Adolescent Sexuality, Women's Reproductive Health, Gender Equality, etc.

Entertainment-education radio broadcasts could hence serve an effective communication strategy for reaching out to the nomadic Fulbe - even the nomadic Fulbe woman with development messages. The persuasiveness of radio as already observed gives it immediate advantage over television, which could be cumbersome and 'impossible' to operate for most nomads. In addition television is far more expensive and easily out of reach for the average peasant/nomad. An entertainment-education radio soap opera, customized to the information needs of the nomadic Fulbe woman could be effective in bringing about desired behavior changes with respect to HIV prevention and AIDS management.

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However, as good as this communication strategy sounds it still has limitations where the nomadic Fulbe woman is concerned. We must remember that she does not own a radio. She is most likely to listen to her husband's radio for reasons considered earlier. Even township women are usually too busy with household chores to listen to radio. Television is out of the question. What about mobile phones? Is this channel of communication an option? Recently, CNN has been promoting the use of mobile phone messages in passing across 'Tips' to People Living with AIDS (PLWA). Could this also be 'made' to serve the nomadic Fulbe woman? With little or no education, even if she could be taught the basics of operating a mobile phone, how could she maintain the instrument?

Sara Stuart makes a report on how an illiterate woman along with others are taught the skill of making video recordings as a development strategy. The illiterate woman's testimony reads:

I did not know what video was ... still, I learned to make programmes, to operate equipment and to do replays. I am illiterate and do not have electricity in my house but I learned to make video programmes and became a producer (47).

Although this example illustrates how with determination, even the illiterate could be taught skills that will develop them and their community, accessing the nomadic Fulbe woman is a challenge in the first place. How do we have access to her also as to train her? To reach her therefore, we must seek a communication strategy that will fit her mobile and nomadic lifestyle. We therefore recommend Theatre for Development (TID) as a suitable communication strategy for reaching out to the nomadic Fulbe woman on issues of sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

Introducing Theatre for Development: Advantages

In recommending approaches in effective communication to the nomadic Fulbe, Umar has this to say:

...messages should be taken to bridge the cultural gap between producers (who are urban based) and Fulbe audiences who are rural-based. Fulbe should be involved in the radio production process. Development communication ought to be participatory. Its major aim is to engender greater participation in the development process. Related to this is the need to exploit the immense potentials of the folk aspects of Fulbe culture which can be utilized... Their folk tales, folk songs and folk dances have attractive qualities which should be explored and utilized by
broadcasters. ... Finally Supplement Open Broadcasting with other media (Quoted in Tahir 180).

The above quotation could go for a TID scenario outline. Theatre For Development is a development communication strategy that could well take care of the above recommendations and do much more. TID offers a forum for a variety of media approaches, both folk media as the ones mentioned above and even some electronic media like video/TV and radio. It is also culture-friendly as can be deduced from the incorporation of folk performances. It is community oriented as well as mobility oriented. These qualities give it advantage over other media in reaching out to the Fulbe nomadic (woman). It has been used variously to empower women and other minority and disadvantaged groups all over the Third World.

All over the Third World organized groups of peasants and workers are rediscovering the new tradition builds on a long history of people's songs, drama, dance, drumming, and puppetry being used in resistance against colonial and other forms of oppression (Kidd 10).

Theatre for Development is defined as:

Theatre (different from the traditional western theatre) that is people/grassroots oriented and that seeks to bring about... change. It is his goal to bring about change in the quality of life of chosen target groups in society that makes it a development tool (Nyager in Dauda ed. 91).

Among its other advantages for nomadic communities is the fact that TID has cultural friendliness and a quality for providing a forum for investigative and instigative dialogue. Since the nomadic Fulbe woman may be culture-bound and shy, approaching her through the language of culture an inter-personal level may yield greater results. TID gives room for both discussions and enactments of issues in an attempt to proffer acceptable solutions. Thus it is the participatory component that empowers and gives disadvantaged people a voice. In getting involved in both the performances and the discussions, the target community becomes part of the process of developing the drama and ultimately the development of their community.

The Fulani love festivals! According to a Fulani informant, one Usman Modibo, nomadic Fulani have ceremonies for several stages of human life - circumcision, coming-of-age ceremonies and other age-grouping ceremonies; marriage ceremonies and naming ceremonies. These ceremonies are said to serve as fora for boy/girl meetings - the only fora where this inter-mingling is allowed. These festive fora could be integrated into Theatre for Development workshops where issues of development could be staged. An advance mobilization through Open Broadcast radio could be used to inform and coordinate dates and venues for such workshops. Theatre for Development also offers interpersonal channels of communication and has a follow-up component which could be used for entrenching the development message and change.

If Open Broadcast radio is followed by TID workshops, even the question of whether the broadcasts are being listened to would be explored. The target audience through the TID workshop forum could also be sensitized towards specific radio programmes. A chain reaction can be created in the alternation of radio and TID that would ensure a more in-depth entrenchment of messages for greater and more structural change. For, according to Umar (in Tahir ed. 183) research findings suggest that it is too much to expect open broadcasting on its own to lead to significant changes in the behavior of people (especially behaviour that is predicated upon entrenched cultural practices) [brackets mine]. For instance, because the nomadic Fulani pay much attention to their personal appearance, tattooing and scarification are practiced extensively among them (Mba, in Journal of Nomadic Studies, No.2). Scarification involves making deep incisions with surgical knives. These practices can become great avenues for HIV transmission and these practices need to be challenged and tackled through appropriate education and communication as recommended by this work.

In conclusion therefore we opine that although several communication options may exist for tackling the communication challenges of reaching out to the nomadic Fulani woman with the HIV/AIDS message, making the right choice of communication media is imperative. We recommend in this paper a combination of Entertainment, Education Radio and Theatre for Development as per above.

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