

Reaching youth through creative media

Nuru is a smart, gregarious Kenyan girl—a dutiful daughter and a loyal friend. She and her schoolmates confront problems many African youth face, although few should: incest, rape, pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS. Although the problems are real and all too common, Nuru is fiction. She is a character in a comic book and radio drama series designed and produced by PATH—both part of a creative public health project helping African youth make informed, healthy choices about relationships, dating, and sex.

Radio's powerful potential

Radio is the major source of information and entertainment throughout Kenya, especially in rural areas. In a country where young people aged 15-24 account for more than half of all new HIV infections, it has proven a powerful and important tool in encouraging young people to make positive choices about their health and well-being. Since 2001, PATH has tapped into the power of radio to prevent the spread of HIV through *Kati Yetu* (Between Us) a nationally broadcast, weekly serial drama featuring Nuru. The drama is a compelling look at the struggles and successes of a group of teenagers—like the show's very own listeners. Interlocking plots and cliffhangers draw listeners in—and give them a chance to think and talk about the issues they face every day, from teen romance to drug use and the risk of HIV. Following the 15-minute drama, a PATH staffer facilitates a short talk show featuring young people and the show's hosts, who share health information, answer questions, and interview audience members who share personal experiences about the positive decisions they've made. These conversations shine a spotlight on real-life Nurus who made their lives better by making healthier choices.

Comic books, change, and choices

Nuru is also the star of a PATH-produced comic book series, bringing the same characters and conversations to the page. Like the radio drama, the Nuru comic addresses difficult issues youth face, involving sexual activity, drugs and alcohol, relationships, and family. Nuru has a page-turning plot, colorful graphics, and characters who face life-altering decisions and consequences and meet challenges with growing self-esteem and the courage to do what is right. PATH has produced six issues and distributed more than 375,000 copies to young people in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

In the hands of youth

PATH gathers feedback from adolescents to shape both *Kati Yetu* and the Nuru comic book. *Kati Yetu* listeners share ideas and respond to emerging questions and concerns from the show, and their comments guide upcoming story lines. The producers also use quizzes and award prizes to keep listeners talking about the issues. Recently, more than 500 young people wrote letters containing advice for Nuru about abstaining from sexual activity, talking with a parent or other trusted adult, seeking treatment from a health center, and respecting and supporting people who are HIV-infected.

In 2003, an independent study found that youth as well as adults listened to the show, but it's the hundred of letters from listeners that keeps the show's creators motivated. Listener feedback indicates a strong awareness about the program, characters, panelists, and health messages.

Tune in again

Although funding for the radio broadcasts through FHI's USAID-funded IMPACT project ended in May, Nuru's legacy lives on as community groups access *Kati Yetu* cassette tapes for their own health education programs. Nuru's message will continue inspiring African youth to protect their own health and that of others.

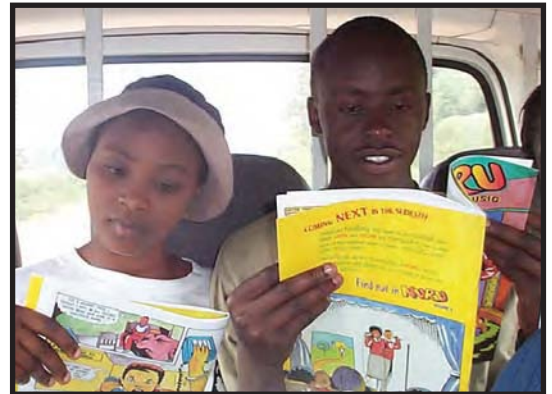


Photo: PATH

PATH improves the health of people around the world by advancing technologies, strengthening systems, and encouraging healthy behaviors.

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