

Life in Lulu:

How can radio drama shift peoples' perceptions around violence and support women to resolve disputes?

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Introduction

In many parts of South Sudan, protracted conflict and ethnic tensions continue. Violence, including gender-based violence, is normalised to resolve disputes at household level and between groups and communities. BBC Media Action research¹ shows that gender norms, or “informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behaviour on the basis of gender”² prevent women from speaking out against violence and being actively involved in decision-making and peacebuilding processes.

Men are expected to make all important household decisions, including those related to finances, educating the children and when the children get married. Despite economic pressures increasingly forcing women to look for work outside the home, men generally refuse to help women with housework and childcare because this is seen as ‘women’s work’ and they are likely to be ridiculed by the community if they do so. Intimate-partner violence is widely seen as justified if women do not perform the role expected of them or if they challenge their husband’s opinion. Women are expected not to report this violence to police or other formal authorities.

Decisions in the wider community, including those related to resolving disputes, are also made by men. Men are viewed as more knowledgeable, regardless of their relative education level compared to women. If a woman speaks up in community meetings, particularly if she contradicts a man, most community members would consider her badly behaved and lacking in respect.

“ When people have gathered for a meeting, when [women] want to say [something about] issue[s] that are affecting them, [...] they may be told to keep quiet, that they are just a woman, they have no use, they are voiceless. So this is where men are to raise their voices, but women are to keep quiet. ”

Female focus group participant, aged 15-24, Torit

Excluding women from decisions that affect their lives, in both the household and wider community, makes them more vulnerable to violence. It also undermines the long-term success of the peace process as women’s participation in negotiating peace agreements makes them more sustainable and more likely to include provisions that address gender equality.³

¹ Research conducted in February and March 2019 as part of the ‘Amplifying Women’s Voices’ project funded by Global Affairs Canada.

² ODI (2015) *Social norms, gender norms and adolescent girls: a brief guide* <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9818.pdf> [accessed 29/07/2020].

³ UN (2019) *Facts and figures: Peace and security* <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures> [accessed 07/10/2020].



Members of the Life in Lulu production team and actors in the recording studio

The project

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded BBC Media Action from December 2017 to November 2019 to produce and broadcast seasons five and six of *Life in Lulu*, a long-running 15-minute radio drama set in the fictional village of Lulu. The drama demonstrated how disputes can be resolved peacefully without resorting to violence and included storylines challenging traditional power dynamics between men and women, role-modelling the importance of involving women in decision-making processes and highlighting the negative consequences of violence, including gender-based violence.

The drama was produced in Dinka, Nuer and simple Arabic and broadcast on 28 radio stations across all 10 states. Following the broadcast, local radio stations hosted a 15-minute live call-in discussion programme, where listeners were encouraged to apply what they had learned from the drama to their own lives. To extend the reach of the drama to communities without radio access, local community-based partner organisations created community listening clubs, where people listened to and discussed the programme as a group.

Research methodology

This briefing includes findings from in-depth interviews conducted with *Life in Lulu* listeners in April, May and October 2019 in six locations, listeners’ comments from local radio stations’ live call-in discussion programmes that follow the drama, and a survey conducted in November 2019 with 1696 respondents aged 15 and over across five states. Survey respondents were asked about their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour related to non-violent conflict resolution and gender norms, and whether they had listened to *Life in Lulu*.

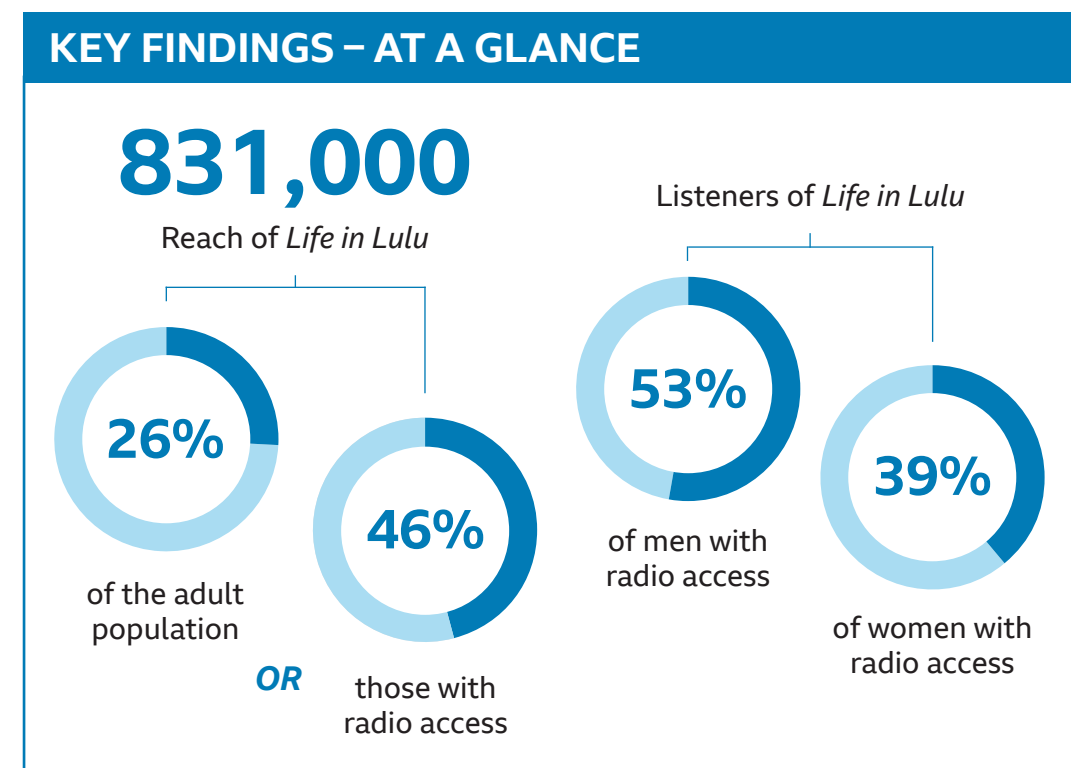
Research findings

Gender norms around key household decision-making and control over access to media make it more challenging to reach women than men

Life in Lulu reached approximately 831,000 people (26% of the adult population or 46% of those with radio access) in the five states surveyed. Women were less likely than men to listen to the drama, even when accounting for their lower radio access – 53% of men with radio access listened compared to 39% of women with radio access. However, a similar proportion (roughly half) of male and female listeners were highly engaged, meaning they listened regularly and were **emotionally engaged** with characters and storylines – suggesting that the smaller female audience is not because they did not like the programme.

Highly engaged listeners are those that listened to *Life in Lulu* regularly (to at least every other episode) and said that the story affected them emotionally, the drama was relevant to their everyday lives, and they felt sorry for characters and could imagine themselves facing similar situations

Qualitative research shows that gender norms stipulate that men will and should make key household decisions and act as gatekeepers of information. This ensures that men are more likely to have access to radio than women and have more control over what a family listens to on it, including *Life in Lulu*. This means that to expand the female audience, it is important that men see the need for women in the family to listen to the programme too.



How can drama influence gender norms?

By highlighting the negative impacts of violence against women and showcasing how empowered women can speak out against it

Samuel often gets drunk and beats his wife Monica. During a violent argument he accidentally sets fire to their house, almost killing Monica and their daughter. Monica's father demands that she is granted a divorce and the case is heard at the village council. During the hearing, Faida, a female character, speaks out about the violence Monica has experienced and Monica tells Samuel how much his behaviour has hurt her. Eventually, after Samuel apologises in front of the whole community and starts treating Monica with more respect, she accepts him back. The story showcased women having the confidence to speak up and being supported by influencers to be able to do so.

Listeners found the story about Samuel and Monica engaging – it prompted a lot of debate on live call-in discussion programmes about whether Monica should go through with the divorce. Listeners interviewed as part of the research mentioned learning about the importance of avoiding drinking too much alcohol and discussing problems calmly rather than quarrelling and using violence. Some listeners said that they had changed the way they interact with their spouse as a result, as a male listener from Juba explains.

“ [My wife and I] used to quarrel because of any small arising problems, but after listening to *Life in Lulu* programme I have totally changed. Instead of quarrelling with my wife all the time, [...] We just face each other with words without fighting or quarrelling. ”

Male regular listener, Juba

Two female listeners interviewed in Yambio said they had discussed stories about domestic violence from *Life in Lulu* with male neighbours to encourage them to stop beating their wives.

“ One of my neighbours.....used to drink every day and always beat his wife once he was drunk. One evening while *Life in Lulu* was playing... he came and asked what it was all about. Then I started telling him that the programme is talking about drinking, quarrelling, fighting, husbands beating their wives and how to stay well. Since that day he stopped drinking and he did not beat his wife. I believe the programme has played an important role in helping him change his life. ”

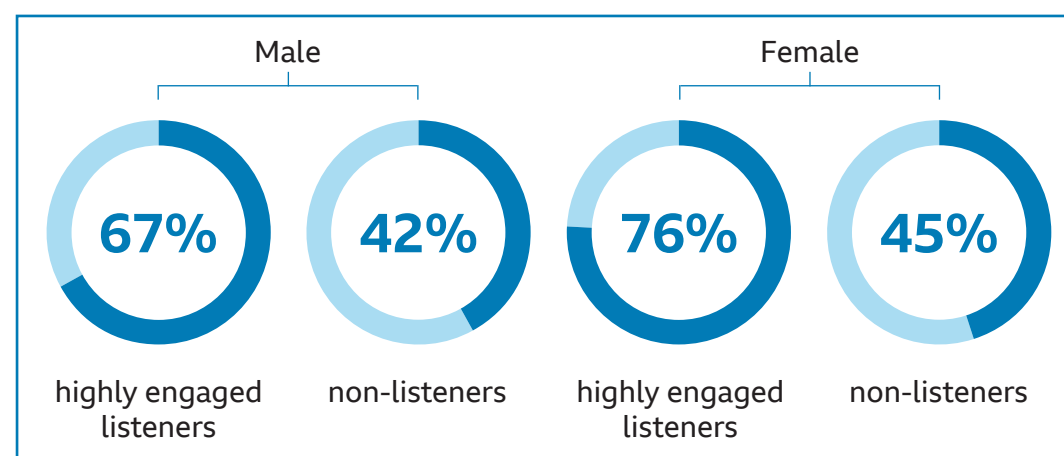
(Female regular listener, Yambio)

This shows how a powerful, emotionally engaging story was able to challenge traditional norms that justify intimate-partner violence and prevent women from speaking out against it.

By challenging gender norms that limit women to the role of caregiver and housewife and men to the role of provider

After listening to advice from her friend Elli and a local health worker, Angelina, Apai decides that she wants to leave a gap between her first and second child so that she can pursue a career. Sebit, her husband, is initially doubtful, but is encouraged by Elli's husband Victor to discuss it with Apai and try to see it from her perspective. After further discussion, Sebit agrees to the birth spacing and supports Apai with childcare, taking on responsibilities that are strongly considered to be women's and not appropriate for men. Some male characters ridicule Sebit, but he stands up to them and is supported by Victor and Samuel, who says he has learned from his experiences with Monica that women should be treated with respect and as equal partners in marriage.

Apai is among female listeners' top three favourite characters, suggesting that female listeners appreciate the way she interacts with her husband and how they make joint decisions. Through storylines like this, *Life in Lulu* influenced both male and female listeners' attitudes about women's right to make decisions about family planning and when to get pregnant. Some 72% of highly engaged *Life in Lulu* listeners said that they agree or strongly agree that 'a girl/young woman has the right to decide if she wants to use contraceptive methods to avoid pregnancy' compared to only 44% of non-listeners and the difference between highly engaged listeners and non-listeners was similar for both **men and women**:



However, some male listeners calling into radio stations commented that in reality men would not help their wives in the way Sebit does as they would be ridiculed by other men in the community for taking on traditionally female responsibilities. This shows that it will take time to shift norms about gender roles because negative reactions from other male community members make it difficult for individual men to act against the norm.

By providing strong, but relatable male and female characters who are agents of change in their community

When Faida, a female character, wins the majority vote in elections for the position of chief, many male and female listeners calling into radio stations expressed the view that women make good leaders and should be supported. However, some male callers commented that women don't make good leaders because they are too shy and weak, and cannot deliberate on difficult issues.

“ I think women spoiled their chance of leadership from the very beginning of creation. So I think for a woman to be a chief is really hard because they are really weak and until now I think most women who have been empowered are not doing anything. ”

Male listener, Eye Radio, Juba



Members of the cast record dialogue and sound effects in the studio

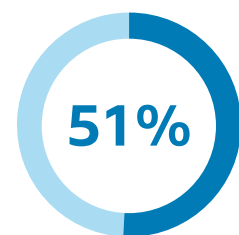
As chief, Faida shows the qualities of a good leader who unites people and ensures that all groups in the community are represented. Feedback from listeners suggests they viewed her choices as leader positively. However, Faida is not in the top three favourite characters for male or female listeners, possibly because she is seen as stepping too far outside the bounds of a traditional female role. In fact, Majak, the male former chief who tries to undermine Faida, is the most popular character for male listeners who say that they learn from the consequences of his negative actions.

Angelina, a village health worker, is the favourite character for female listeners. She listens to women's problems and supports them to take action to improve their lives. For instance, she provides advice to Apai about the benefits of birth spacing and how to broach the subject with her husband Sebit. She is probably more relatable for female listeners as she takes actions behind the scenes to bring about change in her community rather than challenging people openly.

However, Angelina is not as popular among male listeners and the programme seems to have had less impact on their attitudes about the role of women in decision-making and dispute resolution. When asked how important it is to involve adult women in resolving disputes, there is no difference between the responses of highly engaged male listeners and non-listeners. By contrast, 72% of highly engaged female listeners said that it is ‘very important’ to involve adult women in resolving disputes compared to 56% of female non-listeners. To shift male attitudes, it may be important to also include engaging and relatable male characters who support women’s involvement in dispute resolution.

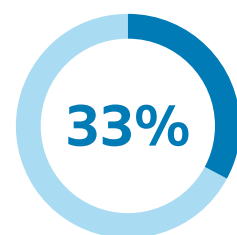
Entrenched norms about women’s role in community decision-making processes prevent female listeners from taking action

There is evidence that highly engaged female listeners feel more confident in their abilities to use non-violent ways to **resolve disputes**. But male listeners are more likely to have taken action after listening, with 67% of highly engaged male listeners saying they had taken action compared to 52% of highly engaged female listeners.



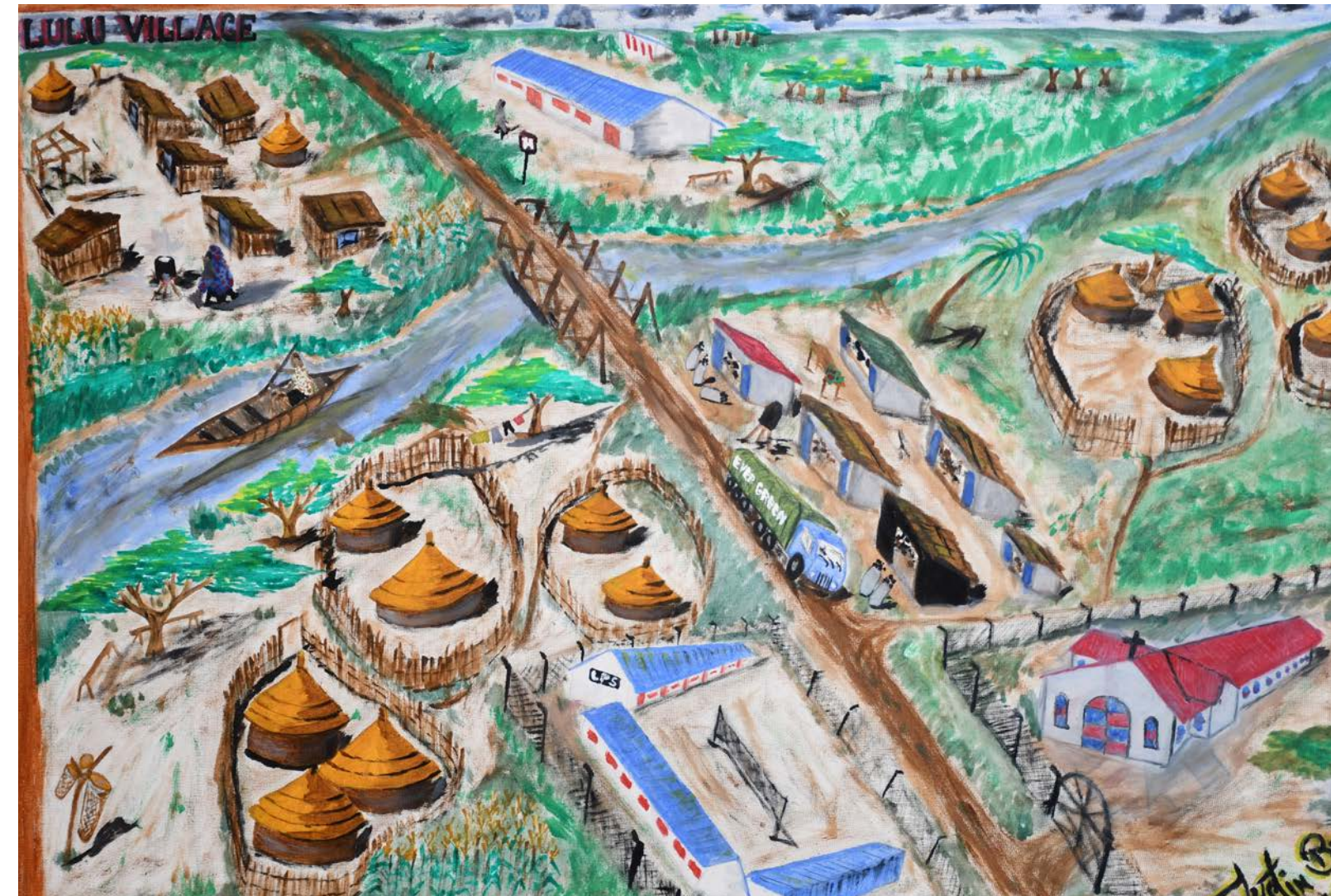
highly engaged listeners

51% of highly engaged female listeners ‘strongly agree’ ‘I feel confident that I can use a non-violent way to resolve a conflict or dispute in my community’ compared to 33% of female non-listeners.



non-listeners

Actors record during a recording session in the studio



Artist's impression of Lulu village

While over half of female listeners taking action is a positive result, examples of action taken by female listeners interviewed as part of qualitative research were mostly related to disputes in domestic settings. Where action is taken at the community level, this is typically done as a group and is often enabled by influential men.

For example, a group of female *Life in Lulu* listening club members in Wau took action after they were inspired by the women’s group in the drama, which was actively involved in resolving community issues. In their own community, they identified stealing and crime as common issues that require police attention, but there was no police presence in their area so they went as a group to the town mayor to share the issue. The mayor responded by creating a police centre in their area.

“So, we presented the issue to the mayor, and they allocated us one police centre.”

Female listening club participant, Wau

Another example shows how some men support women to take action in their community. John, a community leader in Bor, said that storylines about fighting at the borehole in Lulu reminded him of disagreements that happen at the borehole in his own community. *Life in Lulu* taught him that to avoid fighting, people should wait in line and not argue. Because of this, John recently appointed a female leader (pictured) to contain and solve issues at the borehole.

Mary and her neighbours pumping water at the borehole she was appointed to oversee



For women to play a bigger role in community decision-making processes and dispute resolution, they often need the support of influential men. However, as mentioned previously, *Life in Lulu* seems to have had less impact on male listeners' attitudes about the role of women in decision-making and dispute resolution. Until there is a broader shift in male attitudes, it will be challenging for women to take more widespread action at the community level.

Conclusion

There is evidence that *Life in Lulu* had a strong impact on women's attitudes and inspired female listeners to resolve conflicts non-violently and encourage others to do the same. This seems to be driven by having characters that are engaging to women and storylines that challenge traditional gender roles and model more balanced power dynamics between men and women. However, the drama had less impact on shifting the attitudes of men in relation to the role of women in decision-making and conflict resolution. Gender norms related to decision-making within and outside the home are particularly 'sticky' and difficult to change. Examples from Uganda and Nepal show that in times of economic and political crisis, progress in shifting gender norms can even be reversed.⁴ Even where women's status in society has been enhanced through increased access to education and work opportunities previously reserved for men, within the household men may still treat women as subservient and as their property. In the political space, increasing female representation in governance structures still does not guarantee that women will be listened to and respected by their male colleagues. It is therefore key to engage men and boys in the process of transforming gender norms.

While addressing gender norms is challenging, radio drama can contribute by:

- Trialling different characters and storylines that **engage and inspire the whole community, including both women and men.**
- **Role modelling deviations from the norm** by depicting alternative yet familiar realities in which highly relatable male and female characters do not behave as expected.
- **Giving visibility to positive masculinity** by showcasing men and boys who support and collaborate with women and girls in the process of gender norm transformation and demonstrate the benefits of this.
- Featuring **characters that represent influential people** whom the target audience trusts, respects and listens to, and who speak and act in support of gender norm transformation.
- **Creating safe spaces for discussion and dialogue** (e.g. through call-in discussion programmes or listening clubs) where women and men can reflect on the appropriateness and negative impacts of existing norms or associated behaviours and re-negotiate them.

⁴ ODI ALIGN (2020) *Stories of change and persistence: Shifting gender norms in Uganda and Nepal* https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/lessons_learned_uganda_and_nepal.pdf [accessed 29/07/2020].

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