



## Social marketing for health and family planning Building on tradition and popular culture in Niger

### The Context

Landlocked on the Sahara and the Sahel to the desert's south, Niger has the world's fastest rate of natural population increase and is also one of the world's poorest countries. Its women have, on average, more than seven children during their child-bearing years and half of its children suffer from malnutrition and stunting. Meanwhile, its rate of HIV prevalence (0.8 percent) continues to grow. By 2006, the rate had reached 0.9 percent among the country's young men (23-24) but 2.2 percent among its young women (23-24).

In 1995, enraged marabouts (Muslim clerics) and their followers brought Niger's first attempt at social marketing to an end when they methodically destroyed billboards with ads for condoms, saying they were an outrageous attack on the culture and mores of a society that prides itself on adherence to a conservative Muslim code of conduct. Since then, there has been growing public recognition of the need to prevent the spread of HIV and reduce the rate of population growth.

### The Social Marketing Project and Animas-Sutura

Germany is committed to gender-sensitive, gender-transformative approaches to poverty reduction and HIV. One of the ways it expresses this commitment is by financing social marketing projects via KfW Entwicklungsbank (German Development Bank, KfW). Social Marketing uses commercial marketing methods (consumer research, market segmentation, targeting of messages at particular segments of the market, providing financial and incentives to producers and consumers) to increase knowledge, change attitudes and promote practices, including the use of low-cost, high quality products to improve public health.

In 2003, KfW agreed to finance a new Social Marketing Project in Niger, to support it with a consortium of consultants and to help it establish a national social marketing organization. The *Association Nigerienne de Marketing Social* (Animas-Sutura) was born in 2006. Animas-Sutura is now one of the main mechanisms through which Niger implements actions called for in its national strategic framework on STIs/HIV/AIDS, its 2006 law on reproductive health and its 2007 policy on population.

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In Kayan Zarma village, young women listen to the latest episode of *Aventures de Foula* about sexual harassment of school girls.

### German HIV Practice Collection

Publications in this Collection describe programmes supported by German Development Cooperation that have been assessed as "promising or good practice" by an editorial board of experts from German development organizations and by two international peer reviewers with renowned expertise in the particular field.

Each report tells the story – in plain language – of how a particular approach has been implemented in one or more countries, making it accessible to more than just experts in the field. Each one is published in a short (four-page) and full version, often with links to related tools and reading at [www.german-practice-collection.org](http://www.german-practice-collection.org).

The Collection aims to stimulate dialogue, so please visit this website and tell us what you think.

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Peer-reviewed

The new law recognizes women's rights to choose whom to marry and couples' rights to choose whether to have children and when, while the new policy calls for increased acceptance and use of modern family planning methods.

### The aims

Animas-Sutura aims for the day when affordable and reliable condoms and other family planning and health products (e.g., oral contraceptives, water purification tablets and mosquito nets) are available to everyone who needs them whenever they need them right across Niger.

Its ultimate aim, though, is not just to market products but to change behaviour. This will mean providing all Nigerien youth and adults with the information, education, skills, constant reminders, and access to supplies and services they need in order to make intelligent choices and avoid unwanted sex, unwanted marriage, unwanted pregnancy, and easily prevented infection and disease.

### The challenges

Niger ranks near the bottom on the UN's Gender-related Development Index (GDI) in large part because its adult literacy level is only 15.2 percent among women (>15 years old) compared to 42.9 percent among men. But even most of the literate men have little or no formal education beyond religious instruction.

Eighty-four percent of Niger's people live in rural areas and often in villages where there is no electricity. A 2007 study found that only 2 percent of people living in rural areas have regular access to television, so they rarely if ever see the television spots placed by Animas-Sutura. More than half have access to radio but, in rural areas, radios tend to be battery powered and owned and used exclusively by men. This means women and girls often have no access to mass communications of any kind.



Hair salons are among thousands of vendors that promote and sell Foula condoms.

### The methods

#### Careful branding and promotion

Keeping in mind how Niger's first attempt at social marketing was brought to an end, the project did its best to avoid a similar fate by turning to tradition and popular culture. For the name and symbol of its condoms, it chose a traditional foula hat, famous for the excellent protection it provides against the country's constant and searing sun. Careful testing found it was a popular choice for a brand name and that people could easily make the connection. Foula condoms protect against unwanted pregnancy and disease.

To introduce the new brand of condoms, it recruited Balla Harouna, Niger's three-time wrestling champion and one of its all-time great national heroes. His photo on the first poster advertising Foula condoms helped ensure it was prominently displayed throughout the country and, since then, the project has continued to use major figures in sports and entertainment to deliver its behaviour change messages in songs, television spots and radio sketches.

#### Targeting sexually active youth

In Niger, as in many other countries, the needs for family planning and health services tend to be greatest among the poorest and least educated people in rural areas. However, the needs for HIV prevention tend to be greatest among the richest and best educated people in urban areas. They may be better informed about HIV and how to prevent it but, still, they engage in more high-risk sexual activity (e.g., with non-cohabiting partners including sex workers) and, while they may know they should wear condoms, they fail to wear them often enough that they are at high risk of acquiring HIV.

With that in mind, the project has targeted sexually active youth right across Niger with television spots and songs featuring Mali Yaro, ZM and other popular entertainers.

The television spots are more likely to reach those in urban areas but the songs can be played on radio and reach at least some young adults in rural areas.

### Aventures de Foula series one

To reach sexually active youth (15-24) in both urban and rural areas with a broader range of messages they truly hear and act upon, the project developed a campaign around *Aventures de Foula*, a series of 15 five-minute radio sketches. Broadcast in early 2007, each episode was a mini-drama designed to inform and provoke thought about: risky sexual activity that can result in unwanted pregnancy or disease, when to use condoms, how to get your partner to agree, early marriage, forced marriage, and the spacing of births.

These episodes were broadcast in Niger's three most widely spoken languages (French, Djerma and Hausa) on 46 radio stations at the rate of one per week, three times per day every day of the week for a combined total of 8000 broadcasts. Every week, each radio station also broadcast a radio debate in which guests focussed on the issues raised in by that week's episode and, in some cases, listeners called in to participate.

Carefully organized and scheduled to go with the episodes, too, were 8100 discussions in young people's fadas (informal groups of friends) guided by trained animators who were, in turn, guided by discussion sheets. In addition, there were 1200 discussions in school classrooms. Altogether, more than 200,000 youth participated in discussions in fadas and classrooms.

### Post-broadcast studies

The project commissioned a post-broadcast assessment of the impacts of series one and also an extensive Knowledge Attitudes Practices (KAP) survey. Both concluded that it would be well worthwhile to develop a campaign around a second series. While targeting sexually active youth, the first series had also reached their parents and stimulated much discussion within families. However, the second series should make specific efforts to reach not only all youth but also all rural women, truck drivers, sex workers, and military recruits.



As this ad suggests, each episode of *Aventures de Foula* is a mini soap opera and this one is about infidelity.

During 2008, a pilot project looked for the best ways to use *Aventures de Foula* to educate rural women about all of the issues surrounding family planning and sexual and reproductive health. Results included a decision to train respected women from rural villages as *femmes relais* responsible for organizing and animating weekly discussions to go with each episode plus a decision to provide the *femmes relais* with solar radios to overcome the problems that radios and batteries are expensive and mostly controlled by men. Another pilot project looked for the best ways to use selected episodes in a five-week course for military recruits.

### Aventures de Foula series two

Launched in March 2009, *Aventures de Foula* series two had 24 five-minute episodes developed around these themes: women's rights, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual harassment and degradation, forced marriage and child marriage, sexual fidelity, early sexual relations, and stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. Compared to the first series, the second series was broadcast on more radio stations and was accompanied by more radio debates and more organized and synchronized discussions. Also, Animas-Sutura had taken steps to improve the quality of each episode and its discussion guide and to improve the training and supervision of radio hosts, animators and teachers and the monitoring and evaluation of their activities.

### Building a distribution system

As of this writing, there are 17 Anti-AIDS Kiosks run by truckers syndicates at major truck stops in Niger and they are among the 44 wholesalers of the project's Foula condoms and other products. Associated with each wholesaler is a salesperson whose job is to recruit retailers, keep them supplied with products and help them sell those





Selected episodes of *Aventures de Foula* are at the core of a joint UNFPA / Animas-Sutura course for new military recruits.

products with the help of animators, clowns and other performers provided by Animas-Sutura.

There are more than 3000 retailers and typical of these are small independent pharmacies and grocery stores, hair salons, bars, petrol stations and the countless stalls and walking vendors found throughout Niger's cities and towns. Walking vendors and motorcycle-taxi drivers comprise a significant part of the project's distribution network and they make condoms available in places where there are no shops, at all hours of day and night and in circumstances that guarantee anonymity.

During 2009, Animas-Sutura is adding oral contraceptives and water purification tablets to its product line, extending its distribution network into an additional six rural regions, and training *femmes relais* to demonstrate and sell its products. It is also testing a mobile unit to provide small rural villages with services similar to those provided by Anti-AIDS Kiosks.

## Peer Review

For a project to qualify for documentation in the German HIV Practice Collection, the editorial board and two external reviewers must agree that it meets most of the eight criteria that qualify it for "good practice." They have found that the Social Marketing Project meets all eight of those criteria. For **effectiveness**, the project is doing the right things in the right way and often enough that if positive impacts are possible, they will follow. For **transferability**, its methods and lessons are immediately applicable to other social marketing and behaviour change communications projects around the world. For **participatory and empowering** approach, it is doing a good job of attempting to reach out to the people whose lives it can change. For

**gender awareness**, the project has provided a platform for addressing gender issues where there was no platform before.

The **quality of monitoring and evaluation** in this project is a step above that found in most social marketing projects. For **innovation**, perhaps its greatest innovation is to focus on the basics of effective product distribution and communications. For **comparative cost-effectiveness**, information provided in the long version of this publication suggests that this project compares very favourably with other social marketing projects in Africa. For **sustainability**, it created a distribution system where none existed before and communications about controversial and sensitive subjects where few such communications existed. Now that these are established, they can be used to address a range of issues. In addition, it would appear to be engaging so many partners that a sense of national ownership may be emerging. There is every reason for optimism that it will be sustained for years to come.

## Would you like to know more?

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