

Broadcasts that Save Lives: Retired Nurse in Nigeria Reaches Thousands Through Radio

When retired health worker Grace Akpegi heard that residents of Ichakobe community in Benue State were taking old radio sets for repair because they wanted to listen to her health program, she realized that she had more influence on people's behavior than she thought. After retiring as a primary health care director in Benue State in 2018, Grace began working as an anchor for a health program called "Community Doctor" on private radio station Choice FM. Grace used her radio show to promote positive behaviors that protect people from malaria.



Grace Akpegi ready to give her broadcast that promotes healthy behaviors. Photo credit: Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria

As a health worker, Grace could only attend to about 10 patients a day, but with her radio show, she reached as many as 500,000 people every day with crucial information to keep families safe and healthy. Radio is an effective way to reach large numbers of people with public health messages. But many media outlets and program producers do not have knowledge about health or the expertise in social and behavior change to make a real difference with their messaging.

To address this challenge, Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria worked with radio stations across 12 states in Nigeria, strengthening their ability to incorporate malaria-related messages into their health programming. Grace is one of the 69 radio producers who worked with Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria to produce health programs focused on priority behaviors and featuring health experts who can relay accurate information to the public. Each quarter, the project broadcast 3,000 malaria-themed radio spots and helped producers to incorporate key malaria messages into roughly 300 existing radio show broadcasts.



Shehu Muhammaed Lungui in Kebbi State listens to a health program on the radio. Credit: Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria

“The project has helped to position the station as an influential channel for behavior change messages on malaria and other health topics in the community,” said the General Manager of Choice FM, Ogbu Ego. “I am happy to provide this platform for the project to succeed,” he added.

Grace’s messages extended beyond malaria prevention and treatment to wider community health concerns. Grace said, “My work has contributed to the reduction of harmful practices such as self-medication, home birth, and female genital mutilation. Receiving a lot of positive feedback from community members gives me great satisfaction.”

According to a survey conducted by the project in March 2022, 77% of the approximately 4,000 respondents (around 2,000 male and 2,000 female) across eight project states had heard messages about malaria on radio. Many most likely heard these messages multiple times. Such frequent exposure among so many people increases the likelihood of wider adoption of life-saving behaviors such as seeking immediate care for fever, attending at least four antenatal care visits when pregnant, and sleeping inside an insecticide-treated net. When people hear the same messages from health providers during home visits, community meetings, and health facility visits, the likelihood of behavior change is even greater.

Grace finds her work as a radio anchor a fulfilling way to continue contributing to the health of her community. “This project has helped me to improve the way that I promote health messages through program analysis, development, and monitoring,” she said.

Breakthrough ACTION is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. President’s Malaria Initiative under the terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-17-00017.