

## God Willing: Promoting Healthy Family Planning Practices in Sudan

PMC was well aware of the challenges a traditional Muslim society like Khartoum State in northern Sudan might pose, and prepared accordingly. The in-depth research and focus group discussions provided the scriptwriters and producer with the tools necessary to create a radio serial drama that is sensitive to the myriad cultural and religious issues that might arise.

Reflective of the society in Khartoum, approximately 99 percent of the respondents to PMC's formative research were Muslim. An overarching belief by Muslims is that God has control over everything. As a result, a common Muslim phrase is "God willing." Results from the formative research about the preferred number of children reflect this belief: approximately 25 percent of respondents said that the preferred number of children to have is "what God gives."

However, the Quran, or holy text of Islam, does not categorically state that couples should not control their fertility. In fact, the Quran is quite emphatic about birth spacing, stating that women "...should wait approximately two years between successive pregnancies for the health of both the mother and child." Additionally, the Quran states that parents should only have as many children as they can financially support. These Quranic teachings thus do not negate the use of family planning, as is sometimes proposed, but actually promote healthy family planning practices.

However, the Quran does have text which could be problematic for PMC's program. Sura 4:34 states: "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient." Clearly this creates problems for attaining gender equity in a traditional Muslim society like Khartoum State.

On the other hand, Sura 4:19 states: "Treat them (women) with kindness; for even if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike a thing which God has meant for your own abundant good." Accord-

ingly, Muslim men must acknowledge women's importance in all aspects of life.

Contrary to some misconceptions about Islam, use of contraception by married couples is not prohibited by the teachings of the Quran. Thus, PMC can address this issue directly in the radio serial drama, and be assured of a high rate of acceptance and success, even by traditional religious leaders in the society.

In fact, results from the formative research reveal that respondents perceived mass media as having the most significant role in sex education (92.6 % of respondents said it had a major role in sex education), more so than health facilities (87.5%), schools (73.5%), and mosques (64.2%).

Mr. Qutubuddin Aziz is a world-traveled Muslim scholar who serves on PMC's program advisory board. Mr. Aziz's extensive experience dates back to the 1950s. He has authored 15 books, published thousands of articles in newspapers in Pakistan and abroad, and held a number of political positions in Pakistan,

among other notable accomplishments. He is recognized as a Quranic scholar.

Mr. Aziz says categorically that Islam is not opposed to family planning. In mail correspondence with PMC, Mr. Aziz writes, "Islam, the Quran and the Holy Prophet (Muhammad) of Islam laid the utmost emphasis on the health of the mother and child."

Mr. Aziz is sure that family planning can fit into the lives of Muslims, without contradicting the teachings of the Quran. In fact, he believes that strict adherence to Quranic teachings mandates use of contraception to space births.

Pilot episodes of the PMC radio serial drama are currently being pre-tested in Khartoum State in northern Sudan, to determine if the Sudanese population will enjoy PMC's program while embracing its inherent message promoting family planning.



Photo by Mark Pelletier. [www.markpelletierphotography.com](http://www.markpelletierphotography.com).

## President's Message

### About Population Media Center

Population Media Center (PMC) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization working worldwide with broadcast and print media to promote population stabilization by encouraging the use of family planning, safe sexual practices, and elevation of women's status. Population Media Center is headquartered in Shelburne, Vermont, and maintains branch offices in Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria and Sudan.

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I write this message following a trip to Sudan to oversee the beginning of the in-depth training workshop for Population Media Center's program in Khartoum State. There, scriptwriters and producers are busy learning the fundamentals of the Sabido methodology and writing the pilot episodes of the radio serial drama.

The pilot episodes were pre-tested in March, and the program will begin broadcasting in May.

Because of the many activities surrounding the Sudan project, this newsletter devotes much attention to that program. You will read about the formative research findings, take a sneak peek into the proceedings of the training workshop, and see the opinions of Qutubuddin Aziz, a lead Islamic scholar and PMC Program Advisory Board member.

You will also read about another exciting project, one that will be implemented in the United States! In a new communication venture, PMC will use the media of cartoons and comic strips to generate public awareness of population issues.

PMC programs continue to use the Sabido methodology to address social issues in many other countries. In Ethiopia, PMC's Oromiffa language radio soap opera has become so popular that a mountain has been named Abbabulo Mountain after one of the lead characters. In Mali, key aspects of the formative research process are under way, including the literature review and qualitative studies. In Mexico, PMC is working with the Center for Adolescent Orientation (CORA) to expand its youth-run serial drama and radio magazine program Dimensiones Sexuales (Sexual Dimensions). In addition, we are developing exciting new projects in India, Rwanda, and Nigeria.

A heartfelt special thanks goes out to all of our generous donors for their ongoing support, which is making PMC's work possible.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Ryerson'.

William N. Ryerson



*Vice-President for International Programs Kriss Barker and Bill Ryerson met with representatives from YES FM in the Philippines to discuss the possibility of a nationwide serial drama.*



Bill Ryerson's snapshot of a mountain gorilla. During his stay in Rwanda, he climbed part way up the mountain where Dian Fossey did her research, where he stood among about a dozen gorillas.

## Bill Ryerson Meets Mountain Gorillas

In February 2004, PMC President Bill Ryerson traveled to Rwanda to meet with potential partners and funders of a possible radio serial drama program. This program would address the connection between population growth and environmental protection, particularly the endangered species of mountain gorillas living in the biodiverse forest spanning three neighboring countries: Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Mountain gorillas, or *Gorilla gorilla beringei*, number only about 670 total worldwide. The Rwandan human population grows at an average rate of 1.9% per year. At this rate, the population of this country will more than double from 8.3 million to 17.3 million by the year 2040. Growing numbers of human beings threaten both the lives and environ-

ment of mountain gorillas by destroying their habitat for farmland and fuel. Without aid in the near future, mountain gorillas may soon become extinct.

Population Media Center is planning two additional projects in Rwanda. One program would address issues of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. (Approximately 8.9% of the population is currently infected with HIV/AIDS). The other program includes the use of media in secondary school education.

Bill Ryerson had meetings with members of the various government ministries, representatives from UNFPA, WHO (World Health Organization), UNICEF, National Youth Council of Rwanda, UNDP (United Nations Development Program), ONAPO (National Office of

## National Population Cartoon Contest

Population Media Center launched the first annual Population Cartoon Contest in early February 2004. PMC seeks cartoons and comic strips from professional cartoonists published in quality publications around the country. PMC will give away \$9,000 in prizes to the cartoonists who can best portray the linkage between population growth and the quality of life. The grand-prize winner will receive \$7,000 as well as an all-expense paid trip to New York City to attend the awards event. The awards gala will take place in New York City on October 5, 2004.

PMC hopes that the cartoons, drawn by well-known cartoonists, will generate greater public awareness of the importance of population issues.

This contest revives the population cartoon contest held by the Population Institute in the 1970s under the leadership of David Poindexter and Beth Blossom. Both are now serving as consultants to this contest.

The contests held in 1974-1976 resulted in literally hundreds of entries of cartoons published in major magazines like *The New Yorker* and

in nationwide syndicated comic strips. The contest has not been repeated since the 1970s.

Major cartoonist associations, such as the National Cartoonists Society and the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists, will be publicizing the cartoon to their members. Daryl Cagle, editorial cartoonist on MSN's slate.com will also be publicizing this contest on the blogs on his website, [www.caglecartoons.com](http://www.caglecartoons.com). Mr. Cagle serves as an advisor to this project.

Cleverly drawn cartoons have the power to convey a message in direct, humorous ways. As expressed through the old adage, "pictures are worth a thousand words," PMC hopes that the cartoons will help bring population issues back into the consciousness of the American public.

*The cartoon below is the winning strip from the Population Cartoon Contest held in 1974, by cartoonist Steve Brodner. Mr. Brodner has been a satirical illustrator for the past 27 years. His work has appeared in publications such as the National Lampoon, Sports Illustrated, Playboy, and the New Yorker. Winning the cartoon contest in 1974 helped launch his career as an illustrator and cartoonist, the story of which can be found in detail in his autobiographical book [Freedom Fries](#) which comes out this May.*

Population), World Bank, the European Union, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and CNLS (Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le SIDA).

PMC's proposed projects were met with enthusiasm for their unique approach, and PMC hopes to begin work in Rwanda in the near future.





## PMC is growing!

### **Dorothy Bocian, Chief Financial Officer**

Dorothy has over 15 years of experience working for nonprofits in administration, education, and financial management. As an artist and musician, Dorothy feels that PMC's success in appealing to target audiences through the use of media is a demonstration of how important as a teaching tool the arts are to humanity. Dorothy was particularly drawn to PMC by what she calls PMC's "jaw-dropping efficacy of using positive role-modeling as a way of changing behavior".

### **NaHyun Cho, Program Assistant**

NaHyun is a recent graduate of Yale University, who majored in History with a concentration in pre-med. She has extensive research and editing skills as well as program planning, photography, and film production experience. She is currently directing the cartoon contest.



## Formative Research Results Point to Promising Future for PMC Program in Sudan

**1,028** Sudanese citizens from Khartoum State, 97% of which are in the reproductive age (15-49), responded to a number of questions designed to facilitate the development of the most effective program possible. Focus groups were conducted with an additional 230 men and women to further elucidate the information provided by the survey. The research focused on learning about the socio-cultural practices of the Sudanese, their radio habits and their knowledge of reproductive health issues.

Although the scriptwriters of the PMC program are all from Sudan, the depth of insight into Sudanese culture and society provided by this qualitative research will enable them to develop a program that is culturally relevant to Sudanese from all walks of life. Furthermore, the entertainment approach to education about reproductive health and other issues will also appeal to many people. This is the first time a Sabido-style entertainment-education program is being implemented in Sudan.

The program will be broadcast in Khartoum State, which has a population of over 5.3 million inhabitants, comprising 15% of the total population of Sudan. PMC's formative research shows that close to 90% of the population owns

radio sets, so the program has the potential to reach many listeners within the target population.

Radio is the medium of choice in Sudan for a number of reasons;



*Scriptwriters and producers look over sample scripts at the in-depth training workshop in Sudan.*

among these are its affordability and portability. Also, since radio does not require literacy, the 75% of the population that cannot read will still benefit from the pro-social theme in the program.

More than half of the respondents (54.1%) in the PMC survey said radio is their preferred source for reproductive health information.

The subtle incorporation of positive role models in an entertainment format, as practiced

in the Sabido methodology, will enable PMC to reach people who might otherwise be opposed to overt "preachy" messages about gender equality, use of modern contraceptive methods and female circumcision – issues that are embroiled in religious and cultural controversy in this conservative

condom. Of those that had not used a condom, 95% said the reason for this was that they never thought of it.

There are also many misconceptions regarding HIV/AIDS. For example, more than half (52.3%) of the respondents to the PMC survey do not perceive they are at any risk for contracting HIV/AIDS. Additionally, many of the responses to the survey reveal a common misconception that HIV is highly contagious, and can be transmitted through casual contact. This belief has led to many stigmas surrounding the disease.

PMC will have to work hard not to overstep cultural boundaries. However, PMC's program is intended to have a lasting impact on Sudanese society, one that will ultimately make it a healthier, happier place to live.

Muslim country. This controversy means that these issues are seldom discussed, even among spouses or between parents and children – which leads to many myths and misconceptions surrounding these topics.

For instance, condoms are a controversial form of protection in Sudan, and the results of the PMC research reflect this. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents had never used a condom before, and 54.6% had never even seen a

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Population Media Center  
P.O. Box 547  
Shelburne, VT 05482-0547 U.S.A.  
Telephone: (802) 985-8156  
Fax: (802) 985-8119  
Email: [pmc@populationmedia.org](mailto:pmc@populationmedia.org)  
Web: [www.populationmedia.org](http://www.populationmedia.org)