

A Participatory Assessment of *Ashreat Al Amal*, an Entertainment-Education  
Radio Soap Opera, in the Sudan

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**A Qualitative Assessment Report**

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## Executive Summary

The present report documents the results of a participatory assessment exercise, comprising of participatory sketching and participatory photography, conducted in the Sudan to gauge how avid listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal* ("Sails of Hope"), an entertainment-education radio soap opera, engaged with the radio program, deriving personal meanings from its plot, characters, and educational messages.

Three research questions guided the present study. These questions, and their respective answers -- gleaned from our participatory assessment, are provided below.

Research Question #1: *What is the radio drama Ashreat Al Amal about?*

Our respondents sketches and photos suggest that they (1) comprehended the various intersecting plotlines of *Ashreat Al Amal*, (2) could accurately describe the qualities of its main characters, and, in so doing, (3) could articulate its various educational messages: That is, a more empowered status for women, getting rid of harmful practices such as female circumcision, safe motherhood and childhood, how not to be infected with HIV, and staying away from vices such as drugs and alcohol.

Research Question #2: *As a female (or male) listener, which scene from Ashreat Al Amal was most meaningful to you and why?*

Our respondents' sketches suggest various degrees of emotional and personal resonance with the key plotlines and characterizations. The female circumcision scenes and their deadly consequences held the most personal meaning for both male and female respondents as it closely paralleled their lived realities. Many of our respondents freely and openly shared the debilitating consequences of large families, and called for more understanding, harmony, and support from their husbands. Many emphasized the importance of staying away from cigarettes, drugs, and criminal activities.

Research Question #3: *How has your life has changed as a result of listening to Ashreat Al Amal?*

Our respondents' sketches and photos, and their accompanying narratives, suggest that listening to *Ashreat Al Amal* affected their lives in various ways. Listeners emphasized that they learned about, or were reinforced in, the following: The importance of (1) abolishing female circumcision; (2) giving girls more control of their reproductive health, (3) having a small family, and (4) staying away from vices like drugs and alcohol.

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The present report documents the results of a participatory assessment exercise conducted in the Sudan to gauge how avid listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal* ("Sails of Hope"), an entertainment-education radio soap opera, engaged with the radio program, deriving personal meanings from its plot, characters, and educational messages.

The present report (1) describes the *Ashreat Al Amal* project, including the underlying theory and methodology behind the radio program's plot and character delineation, (2) lists the research questions guiding the present research, (3) discusses our participatory methods of data-collection, including the rationale for using participatory sketching and photography techniques, (4) presents our key results, and (5) raises implications for employing participatory methods in the assessment of entertainment-education programs.

## The *Ashreat Al Amal* Project

The *Ashreat Al Amal* radio project was implemented in Sudan by Population Media Center of Shelburne, Vermont, USA with financial support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

*Ashreat Al Amal* was a 144-episode entertainment-education radio soap opera, broadcast in Sudan from November 17, 2004 to June 30, 2006. Two episodes of the program, each 15 minutes in length, were broadcast each week on Radio Omdurman, a station whose signal covers the entire city of Khartoum, and surrounding areas.

*Ashreat Al Amal's* educational purposes, at the time of conception, were multi-fold: To promote (1) a more equal status for women, (2) family planning, (3) HIV/AIDS prevention, and (4) delayed marriage and pregnancy. During the development of the program, however, PMC-Sudan identified two additional issues as being vitally important: To promote (5) awareness about the dangers of *khitan* (female circumcision), and reduce the prevalence of this widespread practice, and (6) a healthy civic lifestyle free of substance (drug and alcohol) abuse, thievery, and domestic and street violence.

To achieve these educational goals, various intersecting storylines promoting the main educational themes were created. For each educational storyline, a set of positive, negative, and transitional role models were carefully delineated, drawing upon Albert Bandura's social learning and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986), and an accompanying methodology to operationalize it developed by Miguel Sabido, a Mexican writer-producer-director of entertainment-education *telenovelas* ("television novels") (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004).

## Positive, Negative, and Transitional Role Models

Drawing upon theories of Stanford University social psychologist, Albert Bandura, about how audience members learn from media role models, Miguel Sabido, a creative writer-director-producer at Televisa, the Mexican national television network, produced a series of seven entertainment-education *telenovelas* from the mid-1970s to early 1980s (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). In each of these *telenovelas*, Sabido incorporated Bandura's principles of role modeling in carefully delineating the key characters. Remarkably, each *telenovela* was popular with its audience, made a profit, and met its educational objectives (Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

In operationalizing the concept of modeling Sabido was well aware that the relationship between a media consumer and a media model goes beyond the cognitive domain to include the emotive and affective domains. Sabido, for instance, knew that audience members engage in *parasocial relationships* with media models, defined as the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships that can develop between a viewer and a mass media personality (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The media consumer forms a relationship with a performer that is analogous to the real interpersonal relationships. Thus, audience members tune in at a pre-appointed hour to welcome the media model into their homes. Incredibly, some audience members even talk to their favorite characters (that is, to their TV or radio set) as if the characters were real people (Papa et al., 2000; Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006). So, Sabido designed his entertainment-education *telenovelas* in ways that viewers could become affectively involved with the role models and learn socially desirable behaviors from them.

Each of Sabido's entertainment-educational *telenovelas* has three types of characters: (1) those who support the educational value (positive role-models) (2) those who reject this value (negative role-models), and (3) those who sit somewhere in the middle (or on the negative side) and, as the storyline unfolds, gradually begin to adopt the positive behaviors (transitional characters). When a positive character models a behavior that is socially desirable, the character is rewarded. If a negative character emulated a socially undesirable behavior, he/she was punished. The transitional characters, designed to mirror the attitudes and beliefs of the target audience, carefully watch the consequences accruing to the positive and negative role models, and gradually move toward the positive end of the continuum.

### ***Ashreat Al Amal's* Storylines and Character Delineations**

As noted previously, the plot of *Ashreat Al Amal* was designed around several intersecting storylines, each centered on an educational purpose. Patterned after the Sabido methodology, storylines were delineated by a set of positive, negative, and transitional role models.

In Sudan, factors that severely limit a more equal status for women in society include the following practices: female circumcision; being excluded from educational opportunities; marriage at a young age; lack of say in choosing a marriage partner; risk of HIV infection (particularly if circumcised); not having access to, or information about, family planning and little free choice to practice it; and unequal job opportunities and pay as compared to men.

*Ashreat Al Amal* addressed many of these issues through the positive, negative and transitional female characters **Al Shoul** (negative), **Awatif** (transitional), and **Rugaia** (positive).

**Al Shoul**, a local midwife, is a negative character who makes her living circumcising young girls. When she and her husband **El Dai** have a baby girl, Al Shoul circumcises the baby who then dies of excessive bleeding. Al Shoul and El Dai divorce over this unfortunate event and she turns to the street, selling tea and alcohol. Selling alcohol is illegal in an Islamic Sudan. As the story unfolds, Al Shoul (re)marries **Hamid**, a supportive man, and becomes pregnant. While in labor, Al Shoul experiences birthing complications since she herself was circumcised, and requires a blood transfusion. When Hamid's blood is screened for transfusion, he is found to be HIV positive. In turn, Al Shoul learns that she is also HIV-infected. Her newborn baby girl is also HIV-positive, and dies of AIDS. Angry over the death of her child and her HIV-positive status, Al Shoul loses her mind. Toward the end of the program, listeners learn that Al Shoul's body is found floating in a river. Presumably she killed herself, but such is not explicitly clarified.

**Awatif** (a transitional character) is a sacrificing and hardworking wife and mother. She is exhausted by the burden of taking care of her six children. Without information about family planning, she seems destined to continue having more children that she cannot support. Awatif's husband, **Hassan**, refuses to assist Awatif in raising the children, and so she is forced to continue working far into each pregnancy, becoming physically weak and anemic as a result. Faulting Awatif for her weakness and constant exhaustion, Hassan takes a second, much younger wife, leaving Awatif all by herself to care of all of their children. When Hassan has second thoughts, and wants to return to Awatif, she demands that they start using family planning methods. After visiting a clinic together, and receiving sound advice from **Rugaia**, a local reproductive health educator, Hassan and Awatif become adopters of birth control.

**Rugaia** (a positive character) is a devoted community advocate and resource person for information about reproductive health and family planning. She does community outreach activities in rural areas, providing people with health information, and encouraging healthy practices, such as not circumcising baby girls, spacing births, and taking good nutrition during pregnancies. Rugaia is married to **Haider**, who owns a small butcher shop. Because Rugaia travels a lot in the countryside, Haider, upon the urging of his friend, takes a second wife -- a young tea seller named **Nawara**. Rather than becoming envious or vengeful, Rugaia takes young Nawara under her wing and teaches her about reproductive health and community development. When Nawara gives birth, Rugaia is ecstatic, as she herself has never been able to have children. She adopts Nawara's children as her own, seeing it as a great blessing.

Through the stories of these three women characters, listeners learn about the importance of (1) using family planning to space and limit births, (2) protecting the health of the mother and ensure greater opportunities for her children, (3) eliminating the harmful practice of female circumcision, (4) reaping the social and relational rewards associated with community service (in contrast to engaging in illegal activities such as selling alcohol). Listeners also are reinforced that negative actions produce negative outcomes, and positive actions result in positive outcomes.

For each of these female characters, *Ashreat Al Amal* had male counterparts, who illustrated men's roles in either promoting or denying women's reproductive and sexual health. The

male characters also performed other actions unhealthy for the youth and society. The primary male characters in the drama were **Jabir** (negative), **Hamid** (transitional), and **Ali** (positive).

**Jabir** (a negative character) moves from a rural area of Sudan into Khartoum, the capital city, and immediately acquires a lot of wealth. No one knows where his immediate wealth came from. He creates a posse of drug dealers, thieves, and wrong-doers, who add to his coffers. Using his money as bait, he attempts to lure local women away from their husbands and fiancé's, although without much success. Jabir hires **Hamid** (Al Shoul's husband) to be his henchman, and Hamid, inadvertently, gets wrapped up in a world of drugs and violence. When it comes to light that Jabir's original wealth came from killing a man and stealing his money, his posse, and the bereft son of the man Jabir had killed turn against him. Jabir is found murdered in his apartment.

**Hamid** (a transitional character) is a well-intentioned man who gets caught up in Jabir's dragnet because he is desperate to earn money. Jabir takes advantage of his innocence and forces him into a life of drugs and violence. Through his connections with Jabir, who knows the midwife Al Shoul, Hamid and Al Shoul get married. When Al Shoul has birth complications and needs a blood transfusion, as we noted previously, Hamid discovers that he is HIV positive, as are Al Shoul and their baby girl. This is a very sobering experience for Hamid, who changes his behavior completely, becoming an advocate for fighting the stigma that HIV patients face, and promoting reproductive health and HIV prevention. He even supports a successful women's rights activist, Nahla, in publishing a magazine about reproductive health and family planning.

**Ali** (a positive character) is an upstanding citizen employed by a foreign company and is married to Mahasin. They have one child together. Ali supports his family financially and encourages his wife to make her own decisions, especially about her reproductive health. When Mahasin chooses to deliver in the rural area, rather than in Khartoum city, she has a difficult labor on account of her childhood circumcision, and requires emergency medical attention. While being rushed to the hospital, she experiences extensive bleeding. However, when she reaches the hospital, she receives the care she needs. This frightening event teaches both Mahasin and Ali the importance of accessing modern medical facilities during pregnancy, labor, and delivery.

These three male characters were created to spark reflection and conversations about (1) the negative personal and societal impact of engaging in drugs, alcohol, and violence, (2) men's responsibility in advocating for women's rights, their reproductive health, and their professional careers, (3) the positive role that HIV-positive people can play in society, (4) the need to improve the care and support of AIDS patients, (5) the need for trained medical personnel during delivery, and (6) the importance of accessing prenatal care for maternal and child health.

While these were the intended objectives of *Ashreat Al Amal*, we did not know how the listeners themselves had engaged with the radio program. Through our qualitative investigation, which included participatory sketching and photography exercises (described later in this report), it became evident that not only had listeners identified the intended learning objectives, but many had put the lessons learned into action in their own lives.

## Research Questions

In order to gauge the personal meanings that avid listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal* drew from its plot, characters, and educational messages, our participatory assessment exercise centered on asking the respondents the following three questions:

Research Question #1: *What is the radio drama Ashreat Al Amal about?* In essence, what is the nature and scope of its plot, its characters, and its educational themes?

Research Question #2: *As a female (or a male) listener, which scene from Ashreat Al Amal was most meaningful to you and why?*

Research Question #3: *How has your life has changed as a result of listening to Ashreat Al Amal?* In other words, what aspects of your life have been influenced, changed, or impacted by your engagement with the radio program?

## Participatory Assessment Methodology

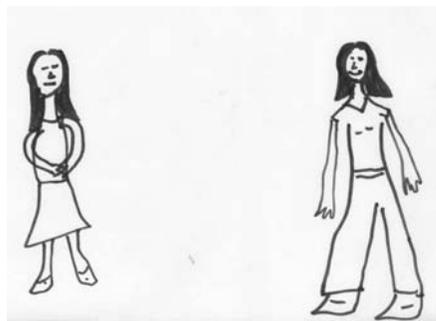
In recent years, participatory sketching and photography have emerged as novel, audience-centered, and low-cost qualitative methodologies for assessing the meanings that audience members of entertainment-education (E-E) programs derive from their engagement with the mass media text (Singhal & Devi, 2003; Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Singhal, Rattine-Flaherty, & Meyer, 2006). Such participatory methodologies offer a different perspective on audience engagement than, for instance, can be gathered through survey data<sup>2</sup>.

The inspiration for participatory sketching and photography comes from the work of noted Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. In 1973, while conducting a literacy project in a barrio of Lima, Peru, a team led by Freire (author of the seminal 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), asked people questions in Spanish, but requested the answers in photographs. When the question "What is exploitation?" was asked, some people took photos of a landlord, grocer, or a policeman (Boal, 1979, p. 123). One child took a photo of a nail on a wall. It made no sense to adults, but other children were in strong agreement. The ensuing discussions showed that many young boys of that neighborhood worked in the shoe-shine business. Their clients were mainly in the city, not in the barrio where they lived. As their shoe-shine boxes were too heavy for them to carry, these boys, rented a nail on a wall (usually in a shop), where they could hang their boxes for the night. To them, that nail on the wall represented "exploitation." The "nail on the wall" photograph spurred widespread discussions in the Peruvian barrio about other forms of institutionalized exploitation, including ways to overcome them.

Drawing upon Paulo Freire's work with participatory photography in Peru, researchers have employed participatory sketching as a method to obtain rich, nuanced narratives from audience members of E-E programs. For instance, one of the present authors employed the participatory sketching methodology to assess the effects of an entertainment-education radio soap opera initiative in the Philippines (Singhal, Rattine-Flaherty, & Meyer, 2006) and also to assess the effects of another radio initiative in the Peruvian Amazon, spearheaded by Minga Perú, a non-governmental organization that promotes gender equality and reproductive health (see (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). For over four years now, Minga Perú has broadcast – three times a week

-- a popular radio program, *Bienvenida Salud* (Welcome Health) in the Amazonas, and dove-tailed the E-E broadcasts with several community-based empowerment activities for local women (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). In 2005, using plain paper and colored markers, some 30 avid women listeners of *Bienvenida Salud* were asked to sketch out their perceptions of Minga Perú's contributions to reproductive health, gender equality, and social change. For instance, one of the questions posed was: "How has my life changed as a consequence of listening to *Bienvenida Salud* and participating in community-based activities of Minga Perú?" Participants were asked to draw two pictures – one to sketch how their life was some five years ago (i.e. *antes*, in the past), and how their life is today (i.e. *ahora*, now).

The *antes* and *ahora* sketches of Emira, a 21-year old, including her narrative, was highly revealing:



*Antes*

*Ahora*

Emira noted: "This is my early life. I didn't know how worthy I was; I was ashamed, I was sad. Now my personal life has changed, I feel myself as being capable of exerting a public function; I don't feel ashamed any more, I don't have fear. I am proud of my body -- my femininity. Before, I didn't want to cut my hair but when I went to live to the city, I cut them. With the trousers it was the same. Now I feel capable to wear trousers; previously I wore loose clothes. The same with the shoes, now I wear high heels."

Emira's sketch and its accompanying narrative provided a highly rich, highly poignant, and highly textured/nuanced insight on the long-term effects of E-E initiatives on certain audience members. As noted previously, such insights are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain through structured personal interview surveys.

As both the Peruvian examples of participatory photography and sketching demonstrate, in privileging visual forms of expression, E-E researchers position themselves to question the dominant hegemony of textocentrism that legitimizes the lettered, literate, and text-based ways of knowing (Conquergood, 2002). Participatory sketching and photography both validate other non-textual ways of knowing by privileging the performative dimensions of sketches and photographs.

Inspired by this Freirean technique and Conquergood's (2002) call for incorporating more visual, performative methods, our assessment of *Ashreat Al Amal* in the Sudan included both participatory sketching and participatory photography.

## Participatory Data-Collection for *Ashreat Al Amal*

Our participatory data collection activities in the Sudan, conducted over three full days, comprised of a total respondent pool of 55 avid listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal*, all of whom hailed from the Khartoum capital region. Of these 43 of our respondents were women, and 12 were men. Among the women, most were married and between the age group of 18 to 40 years old, and coming from the lower to middle socio-economic strata. Such an audience profile of married stay-at-home mothers is fairly consistent with the audience profile of daytime radio soaps in most countries.

### *Participatory Sketching.*

As part of the participatory sketching exercise, we asked our respondents, either as individuals or in pairs, to answer the three questions that guide our present research study: (1) *What is the radio drama Ashreat Al Amal about?* (2) *As a female (or a male) listener, which scene from Ashreat Al Amal was most meaningful to you and why?* And, (3) *How has your life has changed as a result of listening to Ashreat Al Amal?* However, rather than having them respond orally to our query, we asked them instead to sketch their responses on white cardstock using colored pencils (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Women Sketching Their Responses.

The participants were encouraged to draw whatever they wanted, regardless of their drawing ability, and no rigid time limits were set in order to not rush them. This participatory sketching activity with 55 respondents yielded a total of 73 drawings (as noted previously, some of these sketches were constructed in pairs, especially the drawings in response to the first question). After the sketches were completed, individuals (or pairs) responsible for the drawing narrated what the sketch was about, including how it answered the posed questions, in front of the entire group (Figure 2). These narrations were audio-recorded while translators simultaneously translated the participants' narratives from Arabic to English for the present researchers, providing opportunities to seek clarification and/or ask follow-up questions. The audiotapes were then translated and transcribed into English-language transcripts by bi-lingual speakers fluent in both languages.



Figure 2. Respondents Narrating their Sketch.

***Participatory Photography.*** To further assess the effects of *Ashreat Al Amal*, 14 of our 55 respondents took part in a participatory photography exercise. To them, only one question was posed, similar to the third question posed in the sketching exercise: That is, *How has your life changed, or what aspects of your life have been affected, by listening to Ashreat Al Amal?* Once again, rather than having the respondents provide an answer in oral or written form, we asked them to provide answers through photographs. The participants were given the freedom to interpret the question as they wished, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers.

The 14 participants who took part in the participatory photography exercise received disposable cameras, including a brief training on how to correctly operate them. They learned about framing through the viewfinder, when and how to use the flash button, how to press the shutter, and how to advance the film to take the next picture. Given each disposable camera yielded 27 exposures, we requested each participant to take about 8 to ten pictures to answer the question we had posed, and the remaining pictures could be of their friends and family members. The participants were given a time-frame of about 24 hours to take their pictures. All participants got the process under way by two to three practice shots as soon as they received the training.

A day after the cameras were handed out, our respondents either returned the cameras to us, or we made arrangements to have them collected from their homes. After we got the pictures developed, the respondents returned the next day to narrate – in front of the group -- what each picture was about, what it meant to them, why did they take it, and how it answered the posed question. All 14 people returned the cameras, but only 13 could return at the appointed time to review and narrate their photographs. Of these 9 were women and 4 were men. Interestingly, most of the women (5 out of 9) and some of the men had never operated a camera before.

Of the 8 to 10 photographs that our 13 participants took to answer the posed question, we asked them to select their top four or five photos that they believed best answered the question and were most meaningful to their lives. Interestingly, some of our respondents chose to narrate only 3-4 photos, while some others narrated up to 8 photos. A total of 74 photos were narrated by our 13 participants in front of their respective groups, while willingly and knowingly being audio-recorded. Translators aided the process by translating the participants' photo narratives from Arabic to English to ensure concurrent opportunities for seeking clarification or asking follow-up questions. The audiotapes were then translated and transcribed into English-language transcripts by bi-lingual speakers fluent in both languages.

### **Audience Interpretations of *Ashreat Al Amal***

To gauge the personal meanings that avid listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal* drew from its plot, characters, and educational messages, we organize our results around the three guiding research questions. Also, given the understandable overlap in the thematic content of our respondents' narratives across the three questions, for both the participatory sketching and participatory photography exercises, we draw upon the sketching and photo narratives interchangeably.

Before we get to the research questions, let's say something about the listening context as narrated by our respondents. Several respondents commented on the process of group listening to the soap opera, and some even sketched them out (Figure 3). For instance, Waleed Mustafa (20 years) noted: "I drew two students after they came from school and they are listening to the radio, but they are interrupted by there little brothers, so they go into a room and lock the door so they can listen quietly. Those two students are me and my friend." Listening with others creates opportunities for conversations, representing one of the ways in which such entertainment-education programs achieve their effects.



Figure 3

Waleed Mustafa also took the following photograph (Figure 4) and provided the following narration: "On the right of this photo is nine -year old Nour-al-din, who listened to the program regularly. He even listened when I wasn't there; he would just come into my house and get the radio and get started. He got many other people interested in listening to the program, including his mother and other siblings. This is an example of a family that was totally committed to the program. Their house was a place of gathering, where lots of conversations happened after the broadcast was over. The program, by bringing many people together over a period of time, created new energized relationships not just between family members, but also among neighbors."

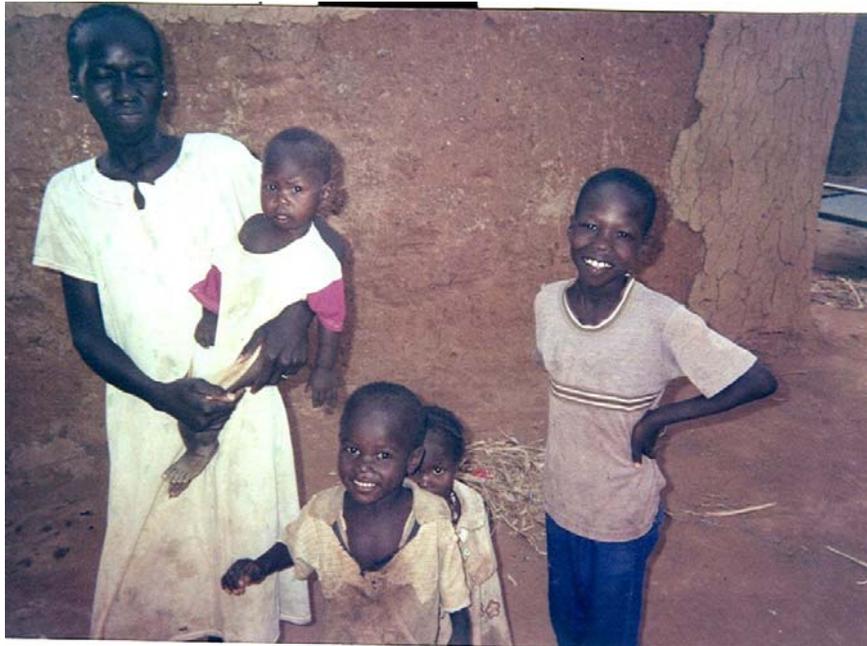


Figure 4.

### Grasp of Intersecting Plots, Characters, and Educational Messages

**Research Question #1 asked:** *What is the radio drama Ashreat Al Amal about?* In essence, what is the nature and scope of its plot, its characters, and its educational themes?

In response to above question, Ahmed Mohammed (M, 23 years) and Ahmed Abdullah (M, 24 years) collaboratively drew the following sketch (Figure 5), and related to the program's intersecting storylines:

"I [Ahmed Mohammed] listened to some of the episodes of the program but I also used to listen to what the family said about it. Specifically, I drew something about which we argued a lot, which is the pheronic circumcision. Personally, I care about this issue; we suffer from this a lot. All

my sisters are circumcised, and my grandmother used to circumcise girls. I wanted this drawing to be very clear and transparent. This is the girl who was circumcised in the radio program, I can't really remember her name, but Al Shoul circumcised her. Al Shoul is an ugly woman carrying scissors. This program was useful because your grandmothers could be listening to the problems of circumcison. This serial program was broadcast at the same time when there was conflict between religious philosophers about whether to circumcise the girls or not.



Figure 5

Ahmed Abdullah, who collaborated with Ahmed Mohammed on this sketch, noted: I also heard some of the episodes, and my drawing [in the lower half] is complementary to Ahmed's drawing. It is about reproductive health, and how if we made use of family planning, or learned from the problems of pheronic circumcison, then we could have a healthy family. The drawing shows all the social problems that the program addresses."

Ahmed Abdullah also took a photo to talk about female circumcison in a symbolic manner (Figure 6). He noted: This old woman has scars on her cheeks. She is an old woman who represents tradition. She reminds me of Al Shoul and is representative of all *habobas* (grandmothers) and all stubborn traditions. Once the face has scars it is difficult to change it. Likewise with tradition – it is not easy to change."



Figure 6

Many listeners, both in their sketches and photos, focused on the female circumcision storylines of *Ashreat Al Amal*. For instance, Nafisa's (F, 34 years) photo was about a recent circumcision (Figure 7). She noted: "The girl's family told me that the girl's face must not appear in the photo. This is the room of the already circumcised girl. She was circumcised in this room a week ago. The girl is fine now, but if any complication did not appear now, they will appear later. The girl is eight or nine years old. These are sweets which are given to the circumcised girl [pointing to the box]. Girls are usually given money and presents to encourage them to carry out the operation. They often do not know what they are going to experience."

From the above photo and narrative, one obtains a strong account of the conditions that little girls are circumcised in. The room clearly is not suitable for any type of surgery, particularly one with such a high risk of infection and complications. It also demonstrates that there is a shift in cultural norms, as there is some shame, or resistance to having the girls face be shown.



Figure 7

Rania Abdu's (F, 23 years) sketch, along with several others, noted that the radio program linked the issue of circumcision with transmission of disease (Figure 8). She noted: "Our sketch speaks about ways of transmitting HIV/AIDS through barbers' instruments. It is transmitted through unclean scissors and *moose* (blades) that are used from one person to another, mainly through blood drops. Here in the drawing are scissors and blades." So, in essence, listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal* learned about HIV-transmission through contaminated instruments.



Figure 8

Yaseen Hasan Ali's (M, 31 years) colorful sketch reinforced how the radio program linked female circumcision, HIV and disease transmission, and the need for healthy mother and child (Figure 9). He noted: "I have drawn three subjects, the first drawing is about drugs and I drew the smoke in a shape of devil. The second drawing is a tree and on one of its branches we see a baby, the tree is a sign of nature. I meant that; the natural environment is the best for health, without circumcision and such things. The green color is a sign of growth; we can say that the baby will grow healthy in a natural environment. The last one is about AIDS; it transmits through illegal relationships or by needles and goes through blood."

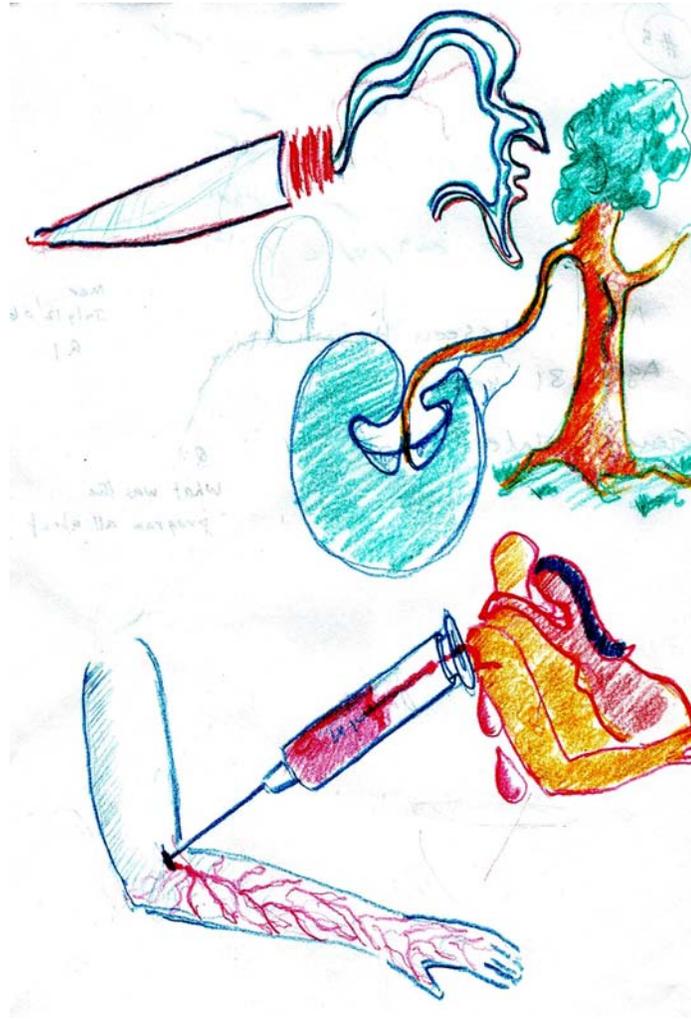


Figure 9

Many respondents noted that *Ashreat Al Amal* promoted a healthy lifestyle, free of vices. As Amal Saleh (M, 23 years) noted in his narration for Figure 10: "This is Jabir, and behind him are all the issues which the radio serial program tried to address like drugs, FGM, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, or even the lure of money that made Al Dai and Hamid to go in the wrong path. This person is facing the sun which is what *Ashreat Al Amal* was all about, and has left all the problems that he faced behind him."



Figure 10

Other listeners also talked about the hope that the program brought to their lives. For instance, Sara and Mastora took this photo (Figure 11) and noted: "This is of the sun – the sun is an indication of hope. We hope that future days will be much better."



Figure 11

In sum, our respondents sketches and photos suggest that they (1) comprehended the various intersecting plotlines of *Ashreat Al Amal*, (2) could accurately describe the qualities of its main characters, and, in so doing, (3) could articulate its various educational messages: That is, a more empowered status for women, getting rid of harmful practices such as female circumcision, safe motherhood and childhood, how not to be infected with HIV, and staying away from vices such as drugs and alcohol.

### Personal Resonance, Emotions, and Meanings

Research Question #2 asked: *As a female (or a male) listener, which scene from Ashreat Al Amal was most meaningful to you and why?*

Our respondents talked about several emotionally charged-scenes. For instance, Yaseen Hasan Ali (M, 31 years), in reflecting on the death of the girl child in the radio program (Figure 12), said:

“This is a bed on which the dead are carried – The *Alangaraib*. The little girl was a victim of circumcision and died. She was a little girl and her mother insisted that she must be circumcised. I think this scene is representing the whole idea of the program. I added the crescent on the forehead of the girl which is a symbol of circumcision in Sudan.”

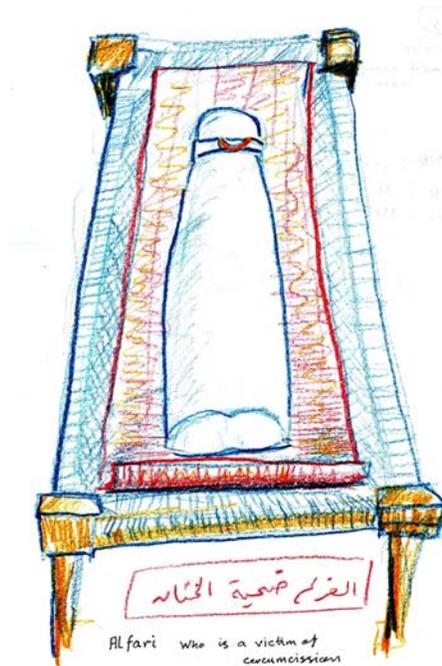


Figure 12

The sketch of Hanim Adam Hussein (M, 28 years) depicts a scene related to large family size and its harmful consequences (Figure 13). He noted: "Here are Awatif and Hassan Abu Sharara. Awatif is a physically weak woman and her husband marries a second time. The children faced a lot of problems -- drugs, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, children without any parental guidance and care -- which the serial program solves. So this sketch represent all the other scenes of the program; it has all the issues of the other scenes."

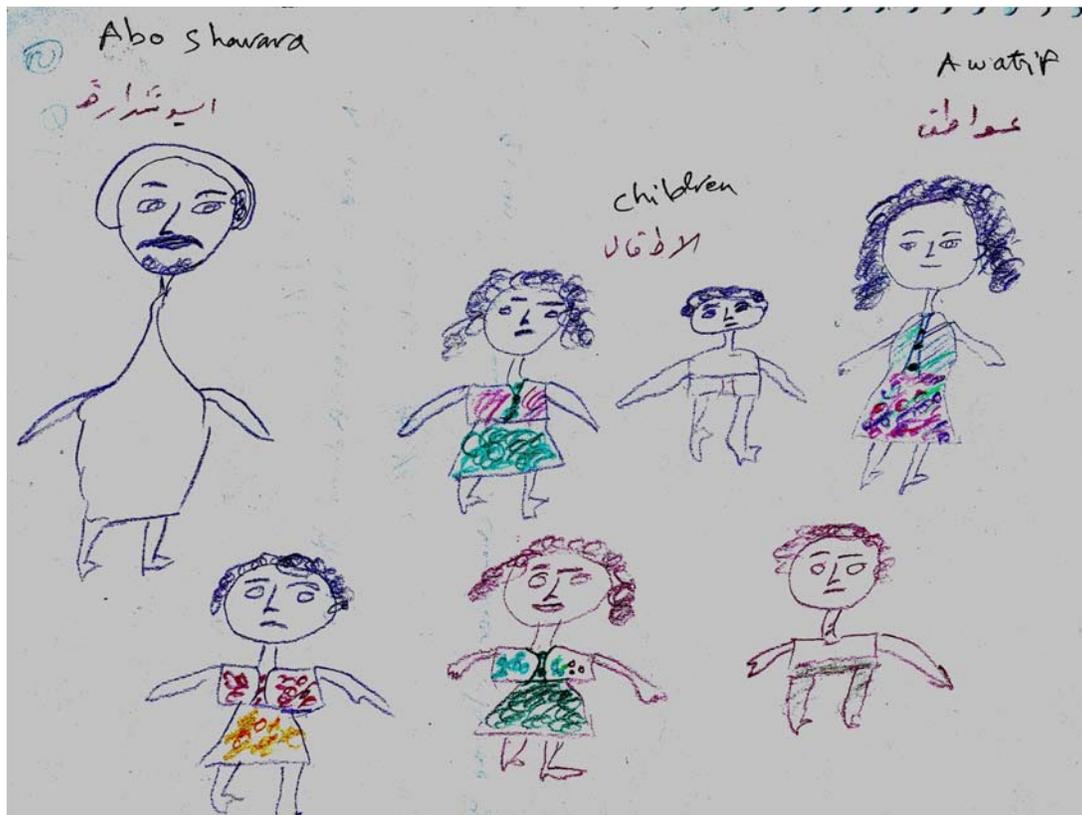


Figure 13

Several respondents talked about the treatment of disability in the radio program as being poignant. For instance, the sketch by Hanaa Abayazeed, Amna Ahmed, and Fathia Ahmed Dafallah (Figure 14) was narrated as follows: "We drew Nahla [extreme left], the handicapped girl, and the people that love her - Nahla solves her family's problems. Also we drew Nahla's father and her sister. Nahla is talking with them and they are negotiating their problems."

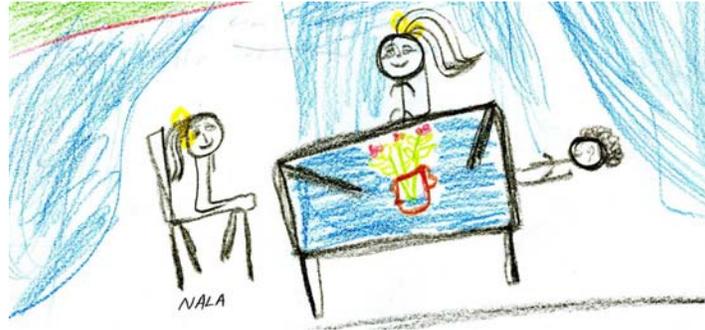


Figure 14

Hana Abayazeed in a separate sketch (Figure 15) reinforced this theme further: "I drew Nahla she is a handicapped girl. In spite of her handicap she continued her education and succeeded in education and in her social life. Also she is a popular person and she always helps solve her family's problems -- especially Jabir's problem (her brother.) She has an ideal personality for everybody - her father is always admiring her personality because she helps him in solving their family problems."



Figure 15

The bottom half of her sketch (see Figure 15) was all about Jabir. "She noted: "I drew Jabir.... he used to take drugs and he dealt with his wife in a negative manner, so his wife ended up to being divorced despite the fact that she has children from him. Jabir then got married to

Mayada and he used to take a lot of drugs until he died.” On the lower bottom of the sketch one sees Jabir’s grave.

In sum, our respondents’ sketches suggest various degrees of emotional and personal resonance with the key plotlines and characters. The female circumcision scenes and their deadly consequences held the most personal meaning for both male and female respondents as it closely paralleled their lived realities. Many of our respondents freely and openly shared the debilitating consequences of large families, and called for more understanding, harmony, and support from their husbands. Many emphasized the importance of staying away from cigarettes, drugs, and criminal activities.

## Learning and Impact

Research Question #3 asked: *How has your life has changed as a result of listening to Ashreat Al Amal?* In other words, what aspects of your life have been influenced, changed, or impacted by your engagement with the radio program?

Our respondents answered this question about the influence of *Ashreat Al Amal* on their lives in various ways.

Yaseen Hasan Ali’s sketch was most telling about the influence of radio (Figure 16). He noted: “I drew the midwife in a shape of devil- you can see the devils tail- and she is holding her bag because midwives always carry a bag here in Sudan, and on the bag you can see danger sign, the skull and bones. The other woman is an old woman and she is protecting her little granddaughter while she is striking the midwife with an antenna. I think that the radio is very important for old women, and programs like this are very good for them. Back to the drawing, we see the old woman fighting but not with a sword, she is fighting using a radio antenna, I meant that we couldn’t fight bad habits with a sword but we can do that through media like radio.”



Figure 16

Another compelling sketch (Figure 17) was put together by Ibtisam Mohammed Abd Rahman, who in a choking voice narrated: "I drew my two daughters one of them was circumcised before the radio program. She is always sad and depressed - also she bled a lot after the operation. But the other daughter was not circumcised, so she's always happy and has good health. I drew our village, the nature, the fields and our huts."



Figure 17

Nafisa Abu Hassan (F, 34 years) drew this colorful sketch (Figure 18): "I want to speak about reproductive health, through something that I personally experienced. My relative had a lot of children and every year, she is pregnant with one or carrying and breastfeeding a child. Before the radio program I felt her suffering, but I did not reflect it on myself. I became usually sad to have a new baby. But after the program, I stopped having children, but I already have three children. It is something wrong to have children one after the other, and there should be a gap [spacing] between one child and the other."



Figure 18

Several respondents including Mohammed Aba Yazeed drew a sketch (Figure 19) about stopping substance abuse, linking it closely to the radio program. He noted: "This is a man who used to smoke drugs, but after listening to the program he stopped. I know him personally, he is about 24 years old, and I drew him in green as a sign of a new beginning."



Figure 19

In sum, our respondents' sketches and photos, and their accompanying narratives, suggest that listening to *Ashreat Al Amal* affected their lives in various ways. Listeners emphasized that they learned about, or were reinforced in, the following: The importance of (1) abolishing female circumcision; (2) giving girls more control of their reproductive health, (3) having a small family, and (4) staying away from vices like drugs and alcohol.

### Summary and Conclusions

The present report documented the results of a participatory sketching and participatory photography exercise conducted in the Sudan to gauge how avid listeners of *Ashreat Al Amal* ("Sails of Hope") engaged with the radio program, deriving personal meanings from its plot, characters, and educational messages.

Our respondents' sketches and photos suggest that avid listeners of the program comprehended the various intersecting plotlines of *Ashreat Al Amal*; could accurately describe the qualities of its main characters, and, in so doing, could articulate its various educational messages: That is, a more empowered status for women, abolishing female circumcision, causes of family disharmony and how to overcome them, small family size, how not to be infected with HIV, and preserving youth health and responsibility.

Our respondents' sketches suggest various degrees of emotional and personal resonance with the key plotlines and characterizations. The female circumcision situations and their deadly outcomes (including severe bleeding, permanent injury, and even death) held the most personal meaning for both male and female respondents as it closely paralleled their lived realities. Many of our respondents freely and openly shared the debilitating consequences of large families, and called for more understanding, harmony, and support from their husbands. Many emphasized the importance of staying away from cigarettes, drugs, and criminal activities.

Our respondents emphasized that by listening to *Ashreat Al Amaal* they learned about, or were reinforced in, the following: The importance of opposing female circumcision, having a small family, respect for the physically disabled, maternal and child health, HIV prevention and care support for those who are positive, staying away from vices; and working hard to support and educate one's children.

What implications does our work with participatory sketching and photography have for researchers of entertainment-education initiatives? First, these participatory methods lie at the interface of theory, method, and praxis (see also Morphy & Banks, 1997). In taking stock of the sociology of visuals – whether in the form of sketches or photos – it is not difficult to discern the obvious conclusion: Almost all paintings, sketches, and photos are usually produced by “the powerful, the established, the male, the colonizer” to “portray the less powerful, less established, female, and colonized” (Harper, 1994, p. 408). Through participatory photography and sketching, E-E researchers hand over the means of visual production to the oppressed, the silent, and the muted. While recognizing that visuals allow the “oppressed” to make statements that are not possible by words, E-E researchers should remember that all sketches, paintings, and photographs are socially and technically constructed (Harper, 1994). Thus it is as important to foreground the absence of particular characters or scenes, as it is to explicate what is present.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Clearly, all methods of data-collection – whether quantitative or qualitative -- have their respective strengths and weaknesses.