

# Life-saving radio campaign launches in Burkina Faso

March 6 2012

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Development Media International (DMI) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) are running a cluster randomised controlled trial of an innovative child survival intervention. The project is funded by the UK's leading science foundation, The Wellcome Trust, and the Planet Wheeler Foundation, set up by the founders of the Lonely Planet travel series.

On March 7th, DMI will launch a campaign which will run for 2.5 years and aims to save thousands of lives. The campaign involves the broadcast of health messages using radio spots (60-second adverts) and radio phone-in programmes. By broadcasting health messages that change the behaviours of pregnant women and new mothers, the project aims to reduce the large number of children dying before their fifth birthday in [Burkina Faso](#).

"The project is innovative in three ways", says Roy Head, CEO of DMI. "Firstly, we're broadcasting messages on the most important underlying causes of death, not just individual issues. Secondly, we're broadcasting very intensively: ten spots per day, and two hours of phone-in programming every night on every station. Thirdly, we'll be measuring the impact more rigorously than has ever been done before. We're hoping to prove that we can change behaviours on a scale large enough to save a lot of lives."

The first radio spots to be broadcast this month will promote exclusive breastfeeding – a behaviour which reduces the risk of a child dying from

diarrhoea or respiratory infections. The spots will be broadcast on seven community radio stations in Burkina Faso which have partnered with DMI to deliver the campaign.

DMI has worked with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to produce a mathematical model, based on the Lancet's Child Survival Series, which calculates the number of lives that can be saved by a comprehensive media campaign. The model predicts that a campaign can reduce childhood mortality by 15-20% per year, by the third year. It also predicts that its cost-effectiveness (at between \$2 and \$9 per 'disability-adjusted life year' or DALY) is better than any other currently available intervention, including bed nets for malaria and childhood immunisations. If the model's predictions are validated, it will be the cheapest way of saving children's lives that exists.

The study represents the first time that the impact of [mass media](#) on lives saved has been either modelled or measured. "We'll be measuring the impact using a robust scientific methodology: a cluster randomised controlled trial. It will be the largest, most rigorous evaluation ever conducted of a mass media intervention and it will be exciting to find out how many lives can be saved using this approach", says Professor Simon Cousens, of the London School of Hygiene & [Tropical Medicine](#) and the lead investigator.

The project relies on close partnerships within Burkina Faso. The evaluation of the intervention is managed in partnership with Centre Muraz, a biomedical research institute in Burkina Faso and the project is being delivered in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Burkina Faso.

The funding of the project represents a unique combination of interests. The Wellcome Trust – the UK's leading scientific foundation – are funding the evaluation, while the media elements are funded by the

Planet Wheeler Foundation, set up by Maureen and Tony Wheeler, the founders of the Lonely Planet travel series.

Dr Jimmy Whitworth, Head of International Activities at the Wellcome Trust, says: "This exciting study aims to answer the question 'Do Mass Media Campaigns Save Lives?'. This is a fundamental question for public health today, when television and radio are reaching more people around the world than ever before. While mass media campaigns are increasingly being used, they have never before been rigorously evaluated. The results of this study could dramatically change the way we approach mass communication for health in the future."

Tony Wheeler adds: "What interests us are the implications of this trial. If it shows that this is the cheapest way of saving lives ever devised, it could help to save millions of lives in the long term".

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Citation: Life-saving radio campaign launches in Burkina Faso (2012, March 6) retrieved 20 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-life-saving-radio-campaign-burkina-faso.html>

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