



RADIO PLAY LAB RESEARCH BRIEF

August 2023

BRAC’s Radio Play Labs deliver remote, playful learning experiences for children ages three to six in Uganda to support their development of critical cognitive and social skills. Based on BRAC’s flagship early childhood development (ECD) Play Lab model, the radio adaptation equips parents and caregivers with the tools and information to support their children through remote learning experiences, with a focus on interactive activities related to literacy and numeracy, storytelling, positive parenting, stimulation, and well-being, among other areas.

A recent study of BRAC’s Radio Play Lab model in Uganda has revealed that nudge-based interventions are an effective tool to increase listenership and caregiver engagement. This study represents the first RCT conducted to assess the effectiveness of nudge-based interventions in enhancing listenership of an ECD radio program in Uganda.

BRAC Radio Play Labs Model

BRAC developed the Play Lab model in 2015 to address a lack of comprehensive and well-equipped pre-primary education centers in low-resource and hard-to-reach areas. Since 2015, BRAC has engaged over 115,000 children in Bangladesh, Tanzania, and Uganda with its Play Labs.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused BRAC to pause its Play Lab operations in 2020 and considered opportunities to adapt the model for remote learning. Specifically, the pandemic exacerbated inequities in access to quality ECD services and highlighted the need to empower caregivers by enhancing their knowledge and skills on early learning opportunities and responsive caregiving at home.

In Uganda, radio is one of the most accessible media sources, with 87% of adults owning a radio and 78% of

the adult population reporting high listenership.¹ Radio programming presented itself as a potential modality for BRAC to deliver its programming to children safely and remotely. In addition, there is growing evidence that interactive radio instruction (IRI) has the potential to improve learning access and development outcomes, especially for ECD.²

BRAC developed the BRAC Radio Programme, which aired for 30 minutes every Saturday. During radio sessions, teachers led interactive, playful activities for literacy and numeracy, held storytelling sessions, and shared messages on child development, positive parenting, nutrition, stimulation, safety, and well-being. Parents and older siblings were actively encouraged to participate and help create a child-friendly and playful environment at home.

In partnership with CBS 89.2 FM, BRAC also launched tele-learning helplines to provide caregivers with more options to access information and guidance related to early childhood development. When caregivers called BRAC's ECD helplines, they could access Interactive Voice Response (IVR) messages, which are pre-recorded messages on various themes related to ECD, or connect with live helpline staff who were fluent in local languages. Female listenership of radio programmes is comparatively low, with about 69% reporting high listenership versus the national average of 78%, due in part to constraints on their time and limited access.³ This study aimed to improve listenership among women of the BRAC Radio Play Labs program by leveraging nudge-based interventions.

Study on Nudge-Based Intervention for Radio Play Labs

In 2022-2023, BRAC carried out a study to test how different nudge-based interventions might lead to an improved listenership of the BRAC Radio Programme among female caregivers. Nudge-based interventions have been demonstrated to be a cost-effective method that may help improve listenership.⁴ Importantly, this

study represents the first RCT conducted to assess the effectiveness of nudge-based interventions in enhancing the listenership of an ECD radio program in Uganda. The primary outcome of interest for the study was radio listenership measured by asking households if they knew about the BRAC Radio Programme, listened to it, and followed through with the program activities. In addition, the research team was interested in understanding any changes in caregivers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAPs) by listening to the program.

The study was conducted in three districts in Uganda (Wakiso, Luwero, and Masaka) among 1,500 households. Each household consisted of a female between the ages of 18 to 49 who had a child between the ages of three and six and had access to a radio.

The study was a cluster RCT in which villages were randomly assigned to different treatments to estimate the impacts of the nudge intervention on radio listenership. One hundred villages (with ten households in each village) were randomly assigned to receive one of two listenership

Host of the BRAC Radio Programme



¹ BBC Media Action. (2019). [Uganda media landscape report](#).

² Save the Children. (2017). [Study on Effect of Interactive Radio Instruction in Improving ECD](#).

³ Namata, B. (2021). [Strides in Radio as Canal of Information, a Public Good in Uganda](#). Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA).

⁴ Benartzi, S., Beshears, J., Milkman, K. L., Sunstein, C. R., Thaler, R. H., Shankar, M., Tucker-Ray, W., Congdon, W. J., & Galing, S. (2017). [Should Governments Invest More in Nudging?](#) *Psychological Science*, 28(8).

interventions, and 50 villages served as a control group. The two nudge interventions included a sticker intervention in which households were provided with a sticker during the baseline survey and asked to place it in a prominent place inside their home and a weekly phone call reminder each week one day prior to the airing of the program. The sticker and reminders provided details about the radio program, including the name of the program, the radio station, the timing and frequency, and the content of the program.

Research Results

The study recorded some notable positive outcomes from the nudge interventions, namely that these interventions effectively increased radio listenership, especially in intervention communities. The descriptive results indicate a significant increase in respondents who had ever listened to BRAC Radio Program by 68.4 percentage points in the control group, 81.2 percentage points in the sticker-based reminder group, and 83.4 percentage points in the phone call reminder group. Participants in the sticker group were, on average, 11.5% more likely to have ever listened to the BRAC Radio Program, and women in the phone call reminder group were 21.3% more likely to have ever listened, compared to the control group after adjusting for covariates. In addition, the study found that women who received phone call reminders were 13.3% more likely than those in the control group to share about the BRAC Radio Program with others.

Caregiver practices like playing with the child, telling stories to the child, taking the child out to play, singing songs to the child, teaching colors and shapes to the child, and reading books to the child improved significantly from

baseline to endline. Caregivers in the sticker reminder group were 9.6 percentage points more likely to engage in reading books or showing picture books with their children, and those in the phone call reminder group were 12.4 percentage points more likely to do so, compared to baseline. Improvements were observed in both treatment groups and the control group. Although this means there was an insignificant overall impact on caregiver practices of the treatment group compared to the control group, the substantial improvement in caregiver practices in both groups is still compelling. The fact that this improvement in caregiver practices correlates with increased listenership is also notable, but no causality can be attributed given that these changes took place in the control group as well as the treatment group.

Moving Forward

BRAC has long prioritized and promoted pre-primary education programs. With improved global health conditions, in-person schooling has returned in Uganda and BRAC has discontinued its Radio Play Labs operations as of February 2023. Despite the brief implementation of the Radio Play Lab model, BRAC believes this experience provided an opportunity to learn how to adapt and incorporate remote learning as a valuable modality in the contexts where BRAC works, whether in an emergency setting or not.

For questions regarding the research, please contact Garvin Kisaamo (garvin.kisaamo@brac.net) or Pallavi Prabhakar (PallaviPrabhakar07@gmail.com). For questions regarding the Play Lab model, please contact Rafiath Rashid Mithila (rafiath.ra@brac.net).



A caregiver teaches children counting using homemade toys