

Sesame Street in West Africa

A Feasibility Study



Prepared by:

Education Development Center (EDC)
Sesame Workshop

for

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
AIR	American Institutes for Research
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAS	Catholic Action for Street Children
CLAD	Dakar Center for Applied Linguistics
CTW	Children's Television Workshop
DSTV	Digital Satellite Television
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDC	Education Development Center
EFA	Education For All
ETV	Electronic Training Village
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
FRCN	Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
HPI	Human Poverty Index
IRI	Interactive Radio Instruction
LEAP	Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
MVU	Mobile Video Unit
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RFI	Radio France International
RFP	Request for Proposals
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. Executive Summary

Wishing to leverage its \$16 million investment in Egyptian and South African *Sesame Street* programs, USAID-Africa Bureau, via the EQUIP 1 Leader with Associates Award, commissioned this feasibility study. The primary goal of this study is to assess whether and how *Sesame Street*, possibly in conjunction with other complimentary media based interventions such as Education Development Center's Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) programs in Guinea and Nigeria, could serve the early childhood/early primary school education needs of the West African region.

Towards that end, in October 2003, American Institutes for Research awarded a subagreement to Education Development Center and Sesame Workshop to jointly produce a study that would respond to the following questions:

- Can the Sesame Workshop model and complementary educational media, such as Interactive Radio Instruction, have an impact on the needs of West Africa's children?
- Is there interest in and support for pursuing a broader West African adaptation of *Sesame Street*?
- Are the necessary conditions present for a successful *Sesame Street* initiative?
- Is *Sesame Street* in West Africa a sustainable endeavor?
- How can we sketch the broad contours of what such an initiative might consist (i.e., what combination of media and related activities would seem most appropriate)?

To this initial list, EDC and Sesame Workshop added:

- How can *Sesame Street* best respond to educational needs in West Africa?
- What language(s) should be used to present content?

Methodology

Over the course of the first half of 2004, joint teams comprising of education, research and media experts from EDC and Sesame Workshop conducted extensive research including a literature review that resulted in the production of six country profiles annexed to this report. These profiles were enriched with information gathered by EDC local research consultants in all six countries. Armed with the information from these profiles, carefully selected assessment teams next visited four of the six West African countries: Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. During these site visits, team members met with various stakeholders identified and contacted with the help and support of local coordinators and USAID missions. These stakeholders included representatives from Ministries of Education, Health and Communication. Other stakeholders encountered included media producers and broadcasters, educators, representatives from the corporate and private sector, NGO's (including health and education development organizations), donors and funding agencies.

The site visits were followed by two in-depth qualitative research studies in Nigeria and Senegal that were designed to determine the appeal and comprehension of mock programs among children, parents and educators alike.

We are pleased to report that all assessment teams were impressed with the favorable response of the numerous stakeholders, the children, parents, caregivers and educators,

who engaged the assessment teams in open and lively debates regarding the viability of such a program.

Findings

Can the Sesame Workshop model and complementary educational media, such as Interactive Radio Instruction, have an impact on the needs of West Africa's children?

Clearly, findings from the literature review, stakeholders meetings and field studies indicate that an integrated *Sesame Street* intervention has the potential to greatly benefit pre-primary and early primary education efforts throughout the region of West Africa. A comprehensive *Sesame Street* intervention, complete with complimentary educational outreach media support materials and with the support of key stakeholders including educators, broadcasters and sponsors, would make a significant contribution to education systems throughout a region where existing educational opportunities and media materials are limited.

Through the judicious use of the broadcast media (both television and radio), as well as related educational outreach materials, *Sesame Street* would have wide reach among the primary target group of West African pre-primary and early primary school-age children and their families. Concentration on regionally produced materials highlighting the West African cultures in all their beauty, complexity and diversity would meet the strong approval of stakeholders ever concerned by the dominance of Western values and images within the media today. As *Sesame Street* has demonstrated all over the world, productions can be carefully crafted not only to meet shared educational objectives but also to help foster self-esteem and an appreciation of children's own culture and environment in a context in which positive media images of young children and their families are rare.

Is there interest in and support for pursuing a broader West African adaptation of *Sesame Street*?

While the assessment teams encountered a variety of opinions, we can say with great confidence that, among stakeholders interviewed, the question became not whether a *Sesame Street* type intervention was needed, but rather when and how such a project could begin.

Broadcasters recognized that they had not met to their own satisfaction mandates requiring them to contribute to both formal and non-formal education. It was almost universally felt that a regionally produced *Sesame Street* production would help meet these mandates and also respond to their need and desire to broadcast locally produced materials for a target audience that merits and deserves additional attention.

Educators were impressed with the quality of the materials presented and felt that they would be met with excitement from both pre-school and early grade students. All recognized the dearth of appropriate and culturally relevant educational media materials that could be used by children both at school and home. Many expressed a desire that the materials would be made available to them for use in their classrooms but expressed a concern that many of their schools lacked the needed television monitors. Nonetheless, they felt confident that the television shows would indeed find their audience and that they would be well received by both children and parents alike.

Government officials including representatives of the Ministry of Education felt confident that the materials would not only help prepare children for a smooth integration into the school environment but could also be used as instructional materials within the school settings. Most expressed a desire to be involved in determining educational objectives to ensure relevance within their own programs.

Children who had the opportunity to view a mock television episode demonstrated a high degree of interest, a general understanding of the program's main themes and a desire to have more access to these types of shows.

The parents also felt that their children would well benefit from culturally appropriate children's programs and many expressed a desire in sharing the viewing and listening experience with their children.

Are the necessary conditions present for a successful *Sesame Street* initiative?

At first view, the task of developing a *Sesame Street* media initiative designed to meet the specific needs of each country within such a large and diverse region seems most daunting indeed. And yet, we have learned that the region and its member countries do indeed have much in common.

Surely there will be logistical issues that will need to be addressed. Care must be taken to ensure representation from throughout the region. Producers will have the added problem of producing materials in multiple languages. Inadequate studio facilities and production equipment may have to be reinforced. Participating media production specialists will need to be trained in the rigorous methodology employed by Sesame Workshop.

But, the demonstrated need for quality educational media targeting young children is great. There is a favorable broadcast policy environment and a strong indication that a project of this sort will help to achieve the broad goals and objectives of education policy makers throughout the region. The support and enthusiasm demonstrated by the various stakeholders involved in this study indicates that logistic and technical problems are both manageable and surmountable.

Is *Sesame Street* in West Africa a sustainable endeavor?

Given *Sesame Street*'s track record and demonstrated ability to attract a wide range of private and public donor support, there is little doubt that a sustainable initiative could be developed. A major initial five year investment by USAID that would lead to the implementation of a project described in the recommendations section would enable the project to leverage support from commercial partners and other sources. Based on preliminary conversations during the feasibility study in West Africa, potential funding sources for a West African *Sesame Street* program were identified. They include international and local organizations, government institutions, and private sector initiatives.

Through the formation of strategic partnerships and the development and implementation of a sustainability plan, we strongly feel that the initial five year investment as described in this report will yield substantial regional and country specific benefits long beyond the end of the proposed five year timeframe.

How can we sketch the broad contours of what such an initiative might consist (i.e., what combination of media and related activities would seem most appropriate)?

The final recommendation section of this report describes in some detail the nucleus of a five year project plan that has two distinct phases; a one year development phase followed by a four year implementation phase.

During the development phase, the team will identify partners, assess production capacity, develop key regional educational objectives and create production and broadcast plans for the project.

During the implementation phase the project will produce three seasons of a West African Sesame Street television series in both French and English and modeled after one of the formats described in section three of this report.

The implementation of pilot radio and outreach components and subsequent expansion of these initiatives will also take place during the implementation phase. Local language radio adaptations will be produced and tested in two pilot countries as will additional outreach materials including print.

How can *Sesame Street* best respond to educational needs in West Africa?

There is clearly a need to help pre-school children prepare, adapt and adjust to a formal school environment. Age appropriate materials are in short supply and young West African children understandably encounter great difficulties learning in languages other than their mother tongue.

Based on the findings of this study, we believe a *Sesame Street* initiative could best respond to the many educational needs by developing a multi-pronged media approach described in the recommendations section of this report. This multi-media approach would embrace a variety of media (television, radio, print and outreach). Content should offer children positive role models in a culturally appropriate manner. While recognizing the importance of the flagship regionally produced television series, we believe content should be reinforced through local radio and print adaptations that can more easily respond to the question and use of local languages.

What language(s) should be used to present content?

For both political and logistical reasons, the general consensus among stakeholders was that, if one language is to be chosen for a possible *Sesame Street* television program, it should be the official language. As there are two official languages in the region, this consensus means that parallel versions of core programming in English and French are necessary.

Reactions to the mock *Sesame Street* television episode confirmed that children had a generally good understanding of the main themes presented in the television program, although many of the children did not understand some of the details in the segments. Apparently the visual clues accompanying the audio messages helped to ensure a basic understanding of the program and its individual segments.

However, the radio elements as tested did not achieve the same levels of comprehension. We feel strongly that radio adaptations in local languages will be

needed to ensure a much higher degree of comprehension and address the problem of interest retention as described in the research section of this report.

Conclusion

Children of pre-school age in West Africa currently have limited access to early education and little opportunity to view locally-produced images of their peers. An educational media project with wide reach targeting this age group would make tremendous contributions to addressing these problems. Based on the results presented throughout this study, we strongly endorse and recommend that USAID invest in a project designed to produce and make available to countries throughout West Africa a wide range of new and innovative West African *Sesame Street* media content delivered through multiple channels. This would include a flagship regional West African television series coupled with pilot radio adaptations and multimedia outreach projects. In order to ensure sustainability and allow the project the needed time to build up partner and sponsorship support, we believe that it is important that USAID support a minimum 5-year initiative that would include two distinct phases: a one year development phase to be followed by a four year production and implementation phase. The project would work closely with educators, producers and broadcasters in participating West African countries to plan and then implement a *Sesame Street* project that will be uniquely tailored to the needs and interests of the children, educators and parents of West Africa.

II. Introduction

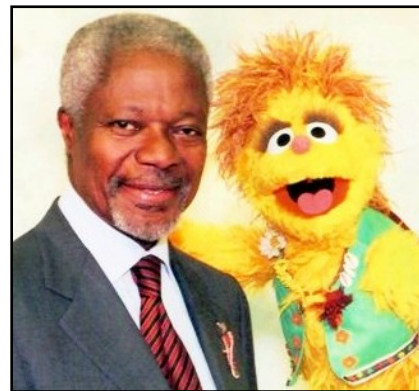
"All children deserve a chance to grow and learn. To be prepared for school. To better understand the world and each other. To think, dream and discover. To reach their highest potential."¹

For over thirty years now, *Sesame Street* has dedicated itself to ensuring that children around the world are given this chance. Today, in more than 120 countries children learn their words, numbers and more from *Sesame Street* productions, materials and characters. The over 30 years of applying a model that is grounded in research and consultation with local educational experts has yielded a great deal of valuable experience. One of the most important lessons learned is that children learn best when media content reflects their own culture and experience.

Sesame Street and various adaptations can be found in many forms and in a variety of media environments throughout the world. A flexible model of close collaboration among producers, educational content specialists, and researchers is applied in each area where *Sesame Street* is produced to determine production formats, local sets and characters, and the educational objectives the series will address. These decisions are informed as well by close consultation with local educational experts and input from a local production team that executes the project.

Unique local co-produced adaptations have been produced in over twenty countries ranging from Spain, China, Russia, Egypt and South Africa. One regional production in Israel, Palestine and Jordan is working hard to develop a culture of acceptance and understanding in a region torn by distrust and hatred. Other country adaptations concentrate on themes and issues of particular importance in those countries. For instance, in Egypt, the topic of girls' education and health and hygiene were identified as critical needs. In many other countries, such as Germany, Russia and Kosovo, the topic of mutual respect and understanding has been included as an area of focus.

In South Africa, local producers, educators, health professionals and decision makers decided that issues related to HIV and AIDS needed to be addressed and discussed even amongst the youngest of audiences. The series uses a multi-pronged approach, which includes the use of television, radio and outreach components to promote age-appropriate messages related to HIV and AIDS. As part of this effort, the team introduced an HIV-positive character into the cast in order to help address difficult subjects like illness, death and stigma in an age appropriate manner, as well as to reinforce key messages of care, support, understanding and self-confidence even when not directly dealing with HIV and AIDS. The very fact that the character actively participates with the other characters in a variety of settings and activities reinforces the central message that, HIV infected or not, we are all one people. We all have the same dreams, aspirations and hopes.



Sesame Workshop © 2004

¹ <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/aboutus/intro.php?>

Unfortunately we do not all have the same opportunities.

The 15 countries comprising the West African region are among the poorest in the world. The region, which includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, has a population of 245 million people. Over 60% live in rural areas. Average yearly income throughout the region is just \$309, well below the continent wide figure of \$470.²

The region's economic growth has averaged only 2.5 percent during the past three years while its population has been growing by 2.2 percent a year. It is estimated that economic growth of about 6-7 percent a year would be required to meet the goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015.³ Few people today believe this scenario likely given deplorable conditions including ethnic strife, regional disruptions, and continued lack of good governance.

Other disturbing statistics:

- Over 55 percent of West Africans live on less than \$1 a day;
- Life expectancy at birth is only 46 years;
- Secondary school enrollment is at 20 percent;
- Forty-two percent of adults are illiterate;
- Malnutrition affects 29 percent of children under the age of five.⁴

Over the past 15 years, nine of the 15 members of ECOWAS have experienced conflict ranging from high intensity civil wars to violence during elections.

Recent conflict in Ivory Coast has been particularly damaging for the region. Serving as a regional hub for landlocked countries, neighboring countries depend heavily on it for imports and exports. For example, 43 percent of Mali's exports and 77 percent of Burkina Faso's exports are shipped through Abidjan.⁵

Conflict, poverty, political instability and religious intolerance all have helped to erode traditional family life. Health care systems remain woefully inadequate and educational structures barely meet the most basic of needs even for those relatively well off.

Clearly much needs to be done, and while all recognize the important role to be played by future generations, sadly, children often seem to be only an afterthought. Typically, education budgets are derisively low and with more pressing immediate concerns including conflict resolution issues, emergency aid needs and HIV/AIDS taking center stage, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect that dramatic policy changes will soon occur.

For this reason cost effective strategies to address identified regional educational needs must be carefully developed and thought out. This study attempts to do just that.

Commissioned by USAID, this study hopes to leverage USAID's 16 million dollar investment in Egyptian and South African *Sesame Street* programs. Recognizing significant

²<http://www.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20179737~pagePK:34370~piPK:42768~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

³ibid.

⁴ibid.

⁵ibid.

achievements in both country productions, USAID hopes to achieve an economy of scale by incorporating lessons learned to expand programs to a broader Sub-Saharan region.

This study was conducted in two phases.

- Phase 1: Literature review and introduction of *Sesame Street* concept to stakeholders in the four of the six West African countries targeted by this study;
- Phase 2: A more in-depth study of the end users' socio-cultural context, beliefs about education and reaction to mock *Sesame Street* programs in two countries.

The study team comprising of education and media specialists endeavored to assess, at the stakeholder level, the need for, support for and sustainability of a regional *Sesame Street* project by seeking input to several broad questions:

- Can the Sesame Workshop model and complementary educational media, such as Interactive Radio Instruction, have an impact on the needs of West Africa's children?
- Is there interest in and support for pursuing a broader West African adaptation of *Sesame Street*?
- Are the necessary conditions present for a successful *Sesame Street* initiative?
- Is *Sesame Street* in West Africa a sustainable endeavor?
- How can we sketch the broad contours of what such an initiative might consist (i.e., what combination of media and related activities would seem most appropriate)?
- How can *Sesame Street* best respond to educational needs in West Africa?
- What language(s) should be used to present content?"

Towards that end six country profiles were produced (Guinea, Mali, Benin, Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria) and four countries visited (Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Benin).

The country profiles place the individual countries in context. They look at a variety of issues with emphasis on education and media policies and structures. Profiles are the result of an intensive in-house literature review, fleshed out by the site visits to 4 of the 6 countries. The site visits ranged from 7 to 15 days and afforded the study team the opportunity to talk to a wide range of stakeholders including educators, policy makers, communication experts, media and donors. The team visited both public and private schools in both rural and urban settings. Visits to media production and broadcast facilities allowed the team to better understand the potential of the media in contributing to the educational needs of West Africa.

Additionally, 2 qualitative research studies conducted in both rural and urban areas in Senegal and Nigeria has helped the team to determine accessibility and interest among prime target groups including children 4-8 years of age, parents, teachers and care givers. The results of these studies are discussed in Section VII while the complete studies can be found annexed to the report.

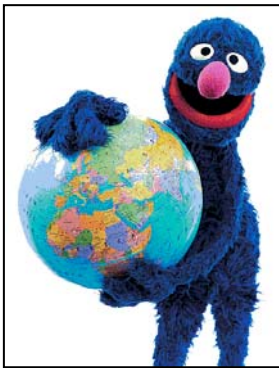
Lessons learned from the literature review, site visits, and interviews with numerous stakeholders and the qualitative studies all have informed this study.

III. *Sesame Street*

A. History of *Sesame Street*

Sesame Street is a shared experience for children throughout the world. With more than 120 million viewers in more than 130 countries, Sesame Workshop can be regarded as the single largest informal educator of young children in the world. Children's Television Workshop (CTW), now known as Sesame Workshop, was established in 1968 to advance the school readiness of 3 to 5 year olds in the United States. The company's first effort was *Sesame Street*, an experimental educational television series specifically designed to meet the needs of children from low-income and minority backgrounds. *Sesame Street* launched in 1969 as a national, daily series airing in the United States on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). It was greeted with critical and popular acclaim. *Sesame Street* is now in its 35th year and its Muppets have become the most famous "teachers" in the world.

B. *Sesame Street* Around the World



Sesame Workshop, © 2004

The globalization of *Sesame Street* began in 1970 shortly after the series' initial broadcast in the United States. Recognizing the educational value of *Sesame Street*, broadcasters from Brazil, Mexico, Canada and Germany approached Sesame Workshop (then CTW) and inquired how the program could specifically address the educational needs of children in their own countries. Since that time, Sesame Workshop has created more than 20 international adaptations of *Sesame Street* that are each tailored to meet the varying educational, economic and broadcast needs of individual countries or regions.

There are three ways *Sesame Street* travels internationally in adapted forms. The most basic of these is simply a dub of pre-packaged material from *Sesame Street's* international library of segments. The most elaborate is the local adaptation model which includes the greatest degree of local production involvement. The various models are described below and presented in order of complexity beginning with the least complicated approach:

- **Model A- Basic Model/ Pre-packaged Material from Sesame's International Library-** This is a basic model, based on the "magazine format" of the U.S. series that contains pre-packaged episodes for easy dubbing into the local language. Each episode is tightly themed around child-relevant topics, such as the weather, animals and sports, presented in the context of segments devoted to literacy, math and other curricular aims. Every episode follows a predictable and fixed format which contains Muppet segments, live action films and animations. This model does not allow for customization. A typical broadcast season using this model consists of 26-52 episodes.
- **Model B- Basic Model Plus Localized Material-** This is an expanded version of the basic model. Also adhering to a "magazine format," it is made up of a combination of material from Sesame Workshop's international library and locally-produced material. The local material includes local live-action film inserts that capture the unique character and customs of individual countries. The model is flexible in that the amount of original live action films that a local country

contributes varies based on the needs and resources of production. In addition, this model can be further customized to meet local needs by including a customized open and close for each episode that uses one or two of *Sesame Street*'s internationally renowned Muppets or a newly created puppet character. This model also provides the production team with the opportunity to create educational objectives for the program that are specifically tailored to address the local needs of individual countries and which can be addressed through the creation of original, local live-action film inserts.

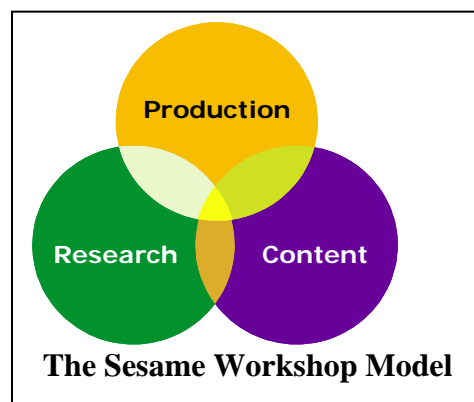
- **Model C – Local Adaptation-** This expanded co-production model includes locally-developed sets and characters. It comprises studio segments (that take place on a set with local human and puppet characters), animation segments, live action films, and “Muppet” segments from Sesame Workshop’s International Library, presented (as is true of models A and B) in a “magazine format.” The backbone of every series is the locally-created studio segments, which anchor the show in its own country, reflecting its own culture. Every episode, whether it is a half-hour or a fifteen-minute format, has the studio segments as its core around which the animation, live action and Muppet segments revolve. Approximately half of the material in an adaptation is chosen from the *Sesame Street* library comprising animation, live action and “Muppet” segments. The other half includes locally-produced studio, live action and animation segments. The end result is a series which is unique to each country. A typical, local adaptation consists of 52 episodes per season.

The type of model that is used in a given country is chosen based on the needs and local resources of a given country, as determined by local education and production teams in collaboration with Sesame Workshop.

Culturally-Relevant Productions

All Sesame productions in the United States and around the world are created using the “Sesame Workshop Model,” developed by *Sesame Street*'s creators more than 30 years ago. This Model is an innovative method of applying and integrating expertise in production, educational material, and research with children. It is based on a process in which local researchers, producers, educators and other child development experts participate in identifying the program’s educational objectives. These are subsequently developed into actual program concepts, which are then tested with the target audience for clarity and appeal.

Using this Model, Sesame Workshop has developed 20 local adaptations of *Sesame Street*, which have aired in countries around the world. Each adaptation of the program, produced in conjunction with local partners, is designed to meet the educational and cultural needs of the countries or regions where the program is developed. Each program is unique, reflecting the varying educational, social, and cultural aspects of the environments in which they were created. Though all of the international coproductions borrow some elements from the



series viewed in the United States, each has been created specifically to meet the needs of children of a given country or region. Research conducted prior to the launch of a series helps to guide the team on specific educational issues, such as language, gender equity and other educational content topics that are of specific concern to the children making up a given target audience. The culturally-specific nature of each series enables each production to integrate local languages, settings and issues that are uniquely relevant to that specific country or region.

The flexibility of the Sesame Workshop Model allows each project to achieve locally-specific educational results, making it very attractive to producers and educators around the world. Internationally, Sesame Workshop collaborates with local experts in child development and education to create culturally and socially relevant material, developed with local research and production teams. The production process begins with the creation of a *Statement of Educational Objectives* that guides the development of material for the series. Each segment that is produced is based on a single educational objective drawn from this list.

In addition to featuring materials that address general cognitive, emotional, physical and social issues, some *Sesame Street* adaptations also include areas of special focus that have relevance to children in a specific country or region. Examples include girl's education in Egypt, HIV and AIDS in South Africa and healthy lifestyles in the United States.

Television Formats and Content

The magazine format of *Sesame Street* traditionally includes a combination of animation, live action films, studio "street" segments and "Muppet" bits. The international programs evolve and change according to each country's creative plan and educational needs. The tradition of the Workshop has been to experiment and encourage partners to explore and test new ideas for formats, types of segments and program content.

In addition to including locally produced material, *Sesame Street's* international coproductions also use material that comes from the "The International *Sesame Street* Library." The library is a collection of segments, created for the US show and international adaptations of *Sesame Street*, which are made available to international partners. It includes animations, live action films and classic "Muppet bits," such as those featuring the characters Bert & Ernie. Only segments that are free of obvious American icons and symbols are included. Furthermore, many of the live action films contained in the library have been created by producers throughout the world and are purposely representative of a variety of cultures to provide viewers with a window into the lives of people from other communities and countries around the world.

The combination of newly produced, local material and dubbed library segments culminates in a series that has the look and feel of *Sesame Street*, while at the same time reflects and celebrates the unique flavor and features of the region in which it is created.

Other Media

In addition to developing television programs, local adaptations of the series have used a multi-media approach to provide wider reach and impact. In South Africa, for example, the *Takalani Sesame* radio series and an extensive outreach initiative are

integral aspects of the project that reach areas where access to television is limited. The radio series, which is reversioned into local languages and broadcast on local radio stations, uses a combination of Muppet conversations, music, sound effects and children's conversations to further the educational aims of the *Takalani Sesame* project. The outreach initiative, which is designed to expand upon the reach and impact of the series and to help to localize the content, includes training sessions for parents and caregivers, as well as hands-on materials such as posters, books and other educational materials for children and families, produced in multiple languages. In Egypt, an outreach initiative, launched in 2003, which included extensive parent/caregiver training sessions and outreach kits with a variety of materials for parents/caregivers and children, was designed to further messages of health, hygiene and nutrition that are addressed in the *Alam Simsim* television series. In other countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Israel and Palestine, producers have developed Web sites to help extend the series' themes.

The combination of media used for each project is something that is determined in collaboration with local production and education specialists, in order to assure that the program formats and media selected will maximize the reach and impact of the series and be appropriate for the country or region for which it is created.

Training

Sesame Workshop also provides expertise and training for local production companies to support the development of material for inclusion in localized versions of the series. The production training as well as close collaboration with the education advisors and outreach partners contributes to the development of skills and expertise in early child development that are useful beyond the life of a single project.

IV. Regional Approach



<http://www.nas.com/africa/Africamap.html>

In this segment of the report we present findings that indicate how and why a *Sesame Street* project developed for West Africa as a regional opportunity could be effective, responding to the striking similarities we found in different countries, while taking into account and reflecting the multiplicity of more localized cultural differences and issues that make for such a rich region. The success of such an approach would be dependent on using regional resources and expertise; employing regional approaches; and addressing common issues.

A. Convergence of Needs in a Diverse Region

For the purpose of this study, we define the region of West Africa as comprised of the member countries of the ECOWAS community. They include the six countries featured in this study: Benin; Ghana; Guinea; Mali; Nigeria; and Senegal, plus nine other countries including Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Togo. As a whole, the region has a population of roughly 245 million people.

At first view, developing a *Sesame Street* media initiative designed to meet the specific needs of each country within such a large and diverse region seems most daunting indeed. And yet, we have learned that the region and its member countries do indeed have much in common.

The 15 countries of ECOWAS are amongst the very poorest in the world with an average yearly income throughout the region of just \$309 per year. With such grinding poverty come similar region-wide problems including high illiteracy rates, poor infrastructure, inadequate school systems, and similar basic health problems that range from malnutrition to malaria to HIV/AIDS. With 55% of all West Africans living on less than \$1 per day, life expectancy is just 46 years and almost one third of all children under age 5 are malnourished. Over 42% of West Africans today are illiterate and secondary school enrolment throughout the region barely reaches 20%.⁶ Furthermore, there are limited educational opportunities for young children in the region, and a large percentage of children of pre-school and elementary age do not attend school or have access to age-appropriate educational programs or materials.⁷

So too, the peoples of West Africa share a common history. Each country, with the exception of Liberia, suffered the indignities of a colonial past whereby competing European parties arbitrarily divided up the land and created artificial boundaries that rarely respected natural ethnic divisions and interests. This colonial past featured the enslavement of large numbers of West Africans who were transported across both sea and desert.

⁶ *ibid.*, <http://www.worldbank.org>

⁷ See country case studies

Long controlled by foreign interests and administrators, West Africa today has become an interesting mix of western influence, often in competition with traditional culture and beliefs. A clear example of this phenomenon can be seen in the question of language, clearly an area of great importance and greatly commented on throughout the execution of this study. Each country today still debates, as they have done for decades, the merit of preserving their heritage and language while at the same time recognizing that an inability to master a major world language like English or French will forever condemn the region and its people to perpetual poverty.

A typical West African has many identities. He is, of course, a citizen of his country, a member of a family, a village, clan, ethnic group, chieftaincy and more. Learning where one fits in this world of ever changing identities and loyalties is a challenge for every West African. The members of this study team strongly believe that a *Sesame Street* initiative could play an important role in helping young West African children gain a stronger sense of self and a heightened appreciation for their own backgrounds and environments, as well as an increased knowledge and appreciation of other peoples who comprise the West African region. *Sesame Street* in other areas has used positive images of children across ethnic groups, socio-economic levels, and geographic regions to help children to see their own culture and traditions reflected on the screen in a positive light, as well as to foster a greater awareness and appreciation of the diversity of an area.

Throughout the region, stakeholders and parents expressed their concerns in remarkably similar manners. All expressed a desire to give their children every chance to succeed, to grow healthy and wise, and to be respectful of their culture, their elders and their heritage. All recognized that a better West Africa will only be possible if their children have been better prepared to take on a conscious and autonomous role within their communities and society. All believed that a solid education was the base for all future progress.

At the same time, the tremendous regional diversity of language, ethnicity, religion, culture, and geographical conditions presents a challenge in terms of selecting educational priorities, presenting images that represent the region, and forging a West African team that can work together to create appropriate educational regional content. The approach that Sesame Workshop uses to develop television projects will ensure that a range of experts in the region think carefully about how best to take into account these challenges. Using a mix of media channels, such as television, radio, and multimedia outreach materials including print, provides an opportunity to address issues felt at different levels -- regional, national, and local -- through different media.

B. ECOWAS

Though we visited diverse countries and indeed saw great diversity within individual countries, we were often struck by the similarity of needs. Not surprisingly, West Africans have long recognized the need to unite so as to better address their many common interests, face their common problems and pursue their common opportunities. In 1975, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded. Its stated overall objective is to promote cooperation and integration, with a view to establishing an economic and monetary union as a means of stimulating economic growth and development

Among ECOWAS's achievements has been the building of the West African Highway Network. This network is designed to facilitate movement of both peoples and goods throughout the region. To date, two major routes, the Nouakchott to Lagos and the Dakar to N'Djamena highways are both over 80 % complete. Additionally, over 5000 miles of interconnecting local roads have also been built.⁸

Perhaps one of ECOWAS's more significant achievements has been the universal adoption of a free movement program, which includes visa free travel, the right of residence and the right of establishment within member states.

West Africa has indeed been the scene of intense migratory movements. Among the areas of mobility in West Africa, the Abidjan-Lagos highway links five coastal countries of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. These five countries alone have a total population of almost 200 million. These migratory movements, primarily influenced by the level of economic development of the countries within the region, have played a major role in shaping the region. The flow of immigrants from the poorer Sahel countries to the relatively economically prosperous coastal countries like Ivory Coast and Nigeria continues today. In Ivory Coast for example, it is estimated that almost 40% of its population originates from other nearby countries.

Today, ECOWAS is working hard to address other important regional development issues. These issues include environmental, telecommunications, energy, and peace and security initiatives. Again, stakeholders throughout the region expressed the belief that a regional television program like *Sesame Street* would be of great interest in helping to explain the importance of regional cooperation and indeed help to address and to place in context the pressing common issues currently being worked on within ECOWAS.

C. A Regional *Sesame Street*

Over the course of our travels and studies we have learned that West Africa is indeed a recognizable entity with similar hopes, dreams, desires and problems. Repeatedly, the entire team was moved, not by the differences which define the 15 states, but by the common desire to celebrate those differences within the context of what it means to be a West African.

A West African *Sesame Street* program could benefit children in this context of a region of many similarities and differences – of similar values, needs, and problems but different ethnic groups, religions, languages, geographical conditions and climates, and histories. The Sesame Workshop model used to create media content would establish a mechanism for putting in place a team that reflects the diversity of the region. This team would have the skills and expertise needed to think through the best way to create material that responds to these similarities and differences as they impact *Sesame Street's* target group. Where few educational opportunities for pre-school children exist, *Sesame Street* could address unmet educational and developmental needs in a manner that is both age-appropriate and culturally relevant.

Engaging, educational television material would provide an opportunity to address issues common across West Africa and to help children celebrate their own cultural context. The medium of television could also open windows for children to people and places in the region they may not otherwise see –both children with different backgrounds and

⁸ Lansana Koyate, Executive Secretary, ECOWAS: ECOWAS General Presentation, p. 21.

children who share cultural reference points such as language or religion but live in other countries. At the same time, outreach and radio activities may provide the opportunity to address educational needs on a local level.

In succeeding sections, we highlight in greater detail the many recurring themes, problems and opportunities that were stressed by the various stakeholders and participants of this study. We were pleased to note that the subject, like the television show itself, elicited an excitement and enthusiasm not unlike that of the many young children who fixedly gazed in delight and wonderment at the images and sounds of the test programs shown during the focus group studies described in the research section.

V. The Socio-Cultural Landscape

In this section we paint a broad picture of the issues and concerns that will both condition and drive the creation of a possible West African *Sesame Street* intervention. The different elements of that picture have emerged from our study of relevant documentation concerning the region and from what was learned from the assessment teams' in-depth conversations with diverse stakeholder groups and relevant individuals active in or affiliated with such areas and issues as:

- Education
- Communication
- General broadcasting
- Community radio
- Materials, message and campaign design and development
- Public health
- Nutrition
- International development
- Malaria
- Sanitation
- Educational research and development
- HIV/AIDS and reproductive health
- Children in difficult situations
- Religion
- Language issues

By giving a clear description of circumstances, perceived needs, and worries presented by West African stakeholders, we hope to create clarity about the problems, concerns and opportunities to which a proposed *Sesame Street* media intervention could be responsive. This process was further informed by our review of literature on the education and media landscape of the six countries targeted in the present study; findings are presented in Annex 2 of this report. This section provides a general overview of issues. Interested readers are referred to the country profiles for additional information illustrating these issues.

A. Education

In large parts of West Africa, access to school is limited due to a variety of factors. As a typical example, in Benin only about half of the children complete primary school and the majority of those who do are boys.⁹ Similar statistics apply to other West African countries. The reasons why this is so have to do with aspects such as:

- lack of physical infrastructure, i.e. the existence of an insufficient number of school buildings, often combined with poor quality thereof;
- lack of teachers (in terms of their numbers) as well as lack of teacher quality and of motivating conditions that provide incentives for the high level of dedication required of a good teacher;
- lack of schoolbooks and other didactic material;
- crowded classrooms and elevated student-teacher ratios;



Elementary school, Kano, Nigeria

⁹ See Benin Country Profile

- lack of financial resources in the family, prohibiting parents and caregivers to send their children to school, often resulting in a diminished conviction among parents that education of their children, particularly the girls, is essential for the children's personal growth, the well-being of their families and the development of their communities and society and thus justifies the opportunity cost involved.

To the extent that children do attend school, they frequently don't benefit as much as they could, often resulting in class repetition and early dropouts. The average value of the Education Index (a composite measure computed on the basis of the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio) for 14 of the 15 ECOWAS Member States stands at 0.44. These average values are far below the average of 0.70 for all the world's Developing Countries and below the average of 0.50 for the Least Developed Countries.

Literacy and enrolment data for six West African countries studied. Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2003 (<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/>)

Country	2001 adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	2001 youth literacy rate (% age 15-24)	Net primary enrolment ratio (%) 2000-01	Percentage of children entering school that reaches grade 5
Ghana	72.7	91.6	58	66
Nigeria	65.4	87.8	..	..
Senegal	38.3	51.8	63	72
Guinea	..	..	47	84
Benin	38.6	54.3	70	84
Mali	26.4	37.1	43	95

Understandably, the issue of schooling, and particularly that of preparing children for a smooth integration into the school environment, was given particular attention by Ministry of Education officials contacted by the various assessment teams. There is no doubt that *Sesame Street's* traditional emphasis on school readiness is also relevant in West Africa. In pursuing this aim, efforts should focus on what *Sesame Street* is good at: preparing for literacy and numeracy in addition to developing critical thinking skills. Moreover, there is a need to develop positive attitudes towards the importance of schooling and *Sesame Street's* approach of valuing education and specifically promoting girls' education is relevant in this context.

Sesame Street was seen by our stakeholders as an important opportunity to enhance school learning and to promote early school preparation. Many of them referred to *Sesame Street* as a tool to teach children literacy and numeracy skills and to develop a culture of reading. In informal conversations, preschool to 2nd grade educators in Senegal described many ways they could use a *Sesame Street* program in their classrooms. In addition to literacy and numeracy, these educators insisted too that *Sesame Street* would also teach children many other skills including socialization, health and hygiene. They furthermore emphasized the need for supporting didactic materials to accompany the TV and radio broadcasts to be used in the schools and to help alleviate the lack of teaching and learning materials.

However, as already mentioned, many children do not go to school. A focus on promoting schooling and the development of school-readiness obviously aims at correcting this situation. Given the myriad of problems cited above, it is perhaps unreasonable to think that all children will have access to quality education anytime soon. For this reason, there is an additional need for intended *Sesame Street* programs for the West Africa region to focus on learning outside and beyond the formal schooling

context. Such a focus may also help to promote the perception that learning is not limited to the school and that in a lifelong learning perspective one must learn to learn in different environments.

It is of interest in the above context to take a closer look at the issue of literacy. In mainstream educational practice and thinking, literacy is a tool—or a toolkit of competencies—used to gain access to other areas of knowledge. In this regard, literacy is often defined in the narrow sense of being able to read and write. To the extent that schooling is currently a viable option for a considerable number of young children in West Africa it is relevant to retain this narrow focus on literacy. However, despite formal political commitments to concepts like Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), it seems realistic to assume that high levels of illiteracy will remain a significant aspect of West African life for many more years. Similarly, it is also realistic to assume that building human and physical school infrastructure to cater for universal primary education will require many more years of concerted effort and expense. While a *Sesame Street* intervention will not be able to address the problem of a lack of physical school infrastructure mentioned above, it could potentially play a role in creating support print material, such as wall hangings, number charts, comic books etc., which could be used in outreach programs.

Taking these factors into account brings urgency to developing an additional focus on introducing the new generation to the world of learning beyond the need to first become literate. *Sesame Street* episodes and live segments could be created to show positive examples of learning.

To conclude this subsection, it is necessary to mention a few words about quality. For those children who do go to school, the relevance and quality of what is being offered is often limited. Curricula favor urban settings as far as ‘situating’ learning, thus alienating children who live in rural areas. Moreover, testing and examination practices encourage rote learning and the acquisition of declarative knowledge (knowing that something is the case) to the detriment of procedural knowledge (knowing how to do something). The bias towards declarative knowledge and rote learning is also reflected in the pedagogical models the assessment teams observed in many of the schools. Children are mostly listening and teachers are mostly talking, interaction being limited to the children’s providing solicited responses, which are easily classifiable as right or wrong. For most kinds of programming, watching television suggests passive consumption rather than active participation, i.e. behavior that resembles what happens in the classroom settings described above. Thus, for a *Sesame Street* intervention to contribute to changing attitudes among its young audience it is important to include active learning strategies and prompts that appeal to their curiosity and spirit of inquiry. This can be done through references to or modeling of explorations in which children may engage outside the broadcast periods. Extension programs, directed at parents and caregivers, may be used to reinforce this element.

Pedagogical practice in most schools ignores the tendency for children to explore the world and ask questions, and often outright discourages children’s explorations beyond what is foreseen in the curriculum. Again, this is an area in which *Sesame Street* can be influential in provoking change by promoting curiosity, questioning, exploration and discovery.

Girls' Education



Children in the rural town of Ada, Ghana

Of particular interest and concern on the part of many stakeholders was the inequity between educational opportunity for boys and girls, a problem that becomes even more serious at higher grade levels. When one sees one girl for every two or three boys in a classroom it is clear that something is wrong. Statistics like those presented in Table 2 for the six countries studied further highlight the difference in opportunities experienced by males and females in West African society.

Underlying this problem are deeply rooted cultural patterns of social and individual behavior and role expectations. Such patterns are hard to change. However, if anywhere there is a fruitful entry point to provoke change it is within the age bracket of the target audience suggested for a possible *Sesame Street* intervention. Children's expectations about themselves and their roles and prospects in life take shape early in life and they are naturally influenced by what is culturally transmitted to them. Thus, the importance of presenting alternatives at an early age cannot be overestimated.

Literacy and enrolment data for six West African countries studied discriminated for female and male members of the population. Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2003 (<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/>)

Country	2001 adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)		Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%) 2000-01	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
Ghana	64.5	81.1	42	49
Nigeria	57.7	73.3	41	49
Senegal	28.7	48.1	34	41
Guinea	..	..	26	41
Benin	24.6	53.5	38	60
Mali	16.6	36.7	26	38

Should an outside intervention like the one proposed interfere with established cultural patterns? Considering cultural sensitivities, stakeholders were of the opinion that great care must be taken to ensure that programs will be culturally relevant and appropriate. According to stakeholders, the best way to work towards that goal is to ensure that high quality local expertise and rigorous research is used throughout the development and production process.

Stakeholders concurred that the essential issue to work on is change of attitudes and perceptions. Attention should be paid to developing girls' perceptions about their opportunities in life. In addition, girls-boys relationships and perceptions of girls and boys about each other, each other's rights and obligations, and each other's outlook on life should be important foci for *Sesame Street* programs. Outreach programs, targeting parents and caregivers, should address attitudes and perceptions of the older generation as well as those of children.

B. Developing the mind

It is important in any educational context not only to consider the task at hand in terms of specific learning objectives but also to contemplate how, through a particular

educational opportunity, one contributes to building the whole person. This holds true not only for the formal schooling context but also for a media-based intervention like *Sesame Street*. What someone does is not only determined by the competencies that person has. It is also driven by how that person sees the world. Allowing a young person to start painting a picture of the world for her or himself, and providing a context for dialogue while the process takes place, is thus of key importance. In this subsection we wish to highlight particularly two major concerns raised by the stakeholder groups with whom the research teams interacted.

The Scientific Mind

The desire to explore the world, to follow one's curiosity, to try things out, is forcefully present in all children. On the other hand, the propensity to engage in such explorations in a *methodical* way is an acquired attitude with related skills that develop over time. It allows people who have such a scientific mindset to view the world as comprehensible in the perspective of simple, overriding scientific concepts and theoretical frameworks. It also allows them to share those views with likeminded people across cultures and belief systems that may otherwise vary.

Stakeholders see children in West Africa as lacking in the ability to interpret their world and act within it in accordance with the above referred mindset. More specifically, we were told, children are not being introduced to technology soon enough. For instance, a child may be at a loss when asked to turn a nut so as to tighten it. As to their insights into how nature works in general, children will unlikely interpret the threat of catching a disease in terms of the action of microorganisms. A potential *Sesame Street* program was thus seen as a possible opportunity to develop in children a feel for technology and science at the level of the environment in which they operate. This would at the same time be an opportunity to attend to perceptions about different gender roles in the interaction with technology and science. Attention to developing the scientific mind early on would also have a beneficial effect on children's preparedness for learning about technology and the workings of nature beyond the age bracket targeted by *Sesame Street*.

The Moral Mind

The need to focus on the development of attitudes and to help children get clarity, through autonomous judgment and via dialogue, on what values to live by and expect of others came up consistently and almost universally in our conversations with stakeholders. The issue was raised both as a concern in its own right and in relation to other problems, such as the need to improve the quality of family life. A particularly important underlying anxiety had to do with people's fear that insufficient attention was being paid to ensuring community growth. Specific issues suggested by stakeholders to be developed are:

- "fellow feeling" (the sense that the other person deserves to be considered as equal and potentially worth associating with);
- care for one's body;
- care for one's environment;
- humility (as for instance demonstrated in one's use of language, the ability to listen and to enter into constructive dialogue);
- mutual respect;
- tolerance and understanding;

- balanced sense of secure identity within one's communities as a basis for the exercise of civic responsibility (i.e. self-esteem in the context of esteem of others and otherness—learning to be);
- a view of the world as something beautiful and comprehensible (i.e. what was previously referred to as a scientific mindset);
- an awareness of self as being part of a world larger than oneself, which inspires awe and is not necessarily approached as comprehensible (i.e. a spiritual mindset).

C. Social fabric

In this subsection we touch upon questions of identity, self-image, self-confidence and self-efficacy; relationships with others; respect and mutual understanding; and family life. An associated issue is how these various matters relate to the phenomenon of increased urbanization and that of the impact of poverty, particularly as regards to the emergence of large groups of children in adverse circumstances.

Diversity and Identity

There exists a general feeling among the populations of West Africa of uneasiness about how their world seems to be moving. Adults ask themselves questions on how to reconcile the values they grew up with and those that apparently are being adopted by—some believe inculcated in—their children. The role of the media, often referred to as “western media,” is frequently cited in the latter context.

Immediately following independence, there was generally a strong focus on creating a sense of national unity among the various populations of West Africa. Gradually this emphasis has diminished as people developed a growing need to identify with local and ethnic interests and issues. In addition, and more recently, people also see that their interests and those of their communities are entwined with what happens on a global scale. Those who grew up with the more exclusive focus on national concerns do not necessarily see the growth of local and global identities as a negative development. However, if such a development results in the disappearance of national or regional identity they see this as a loss. Thus, the need was stressed to develop the young person's mind to be able to live with diversity while seeing oneself as simultaneously embedded in local situations and as being part of larger contexts of national, regional and global import.

Self-confidence

Another common complaint among stakeholders was their perception that West African children often lack self confidence. They don't see themselves as having an autonomous say in shaping the role they will play in their world. *Sesame Street* could help address this problem by helping to develop children's capacity to think and act autonomously. Examples of specific issues to be addressed within this context are:

- developing a sense of who and what one will be when growing up, i.e. developing a sense of one's meaningful presence in the world;
- developing the capacity in children to express themselves and to do so on the basis of clear thinking and critical participation in dialogue with others, feeling secure, proud of where they come from, and having an identity within their community;

- combating what some called “corruption of the mind.” Children corrupt each other’s thinking and feeling through processes like bullying. In addition, they are at risk of being corrupted by messages they receive through the media. Respondents mentioned various forms of peer and media pressure. To the extent that the media impacts on this issue, developing of children’s media literacy, particularly their ability to interpret information received through the media, is an issue of considerable importance. The issue is also closely related to another area of great concern among West African stakeholders, namely the need to develop civic and moral education.

The Family

“There are no parents,” claimed a stakeholder. Indeed, the region is facing a crisis in parenting. Opinions about the causes of the crisis, which gradually developed over the past several decades, vary. Rapid urbanization, poverty, HIV & AIDS and displacement due to civil strife and conflict were all cited as causes contributing to the general feeling of family breakdown. Stakeholders referred to the fact that too often many males decline responsibility for their progeny, leaving that responsibility to the women, who are often young girls incapable of coping with the additional burden of being mothers. Programs such as *Sesame Street*, which have children and parents as an audience, can model desired parenting roles. Presenting such models will also provide a context for dialogue among children and their parents concerning parenting and family life.

Notwithstanding the above concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the decline of the family in its narrow sense, it should also be recognized that the role of the family in African society remains crucial in its sense as an extended framework. This extended framework, including much more than parents and children, provides a source of social security and mutual support to its members.

In general, the research teams found great concern among stakeholders about the decline of values. One looks at a possible *Sesame Street* intervention as an opportunity to reinvigorate the discussion about values and particularly to reinstate the family as a prime environment in which that discussion should flourish. In addition to the family, one also sees the local community as another propitious environment for such a discussion.

The Impact of Poverty

West Africa is among the poorest regions of the world. UNDP’s Human Development Report¹⁰, in its 2004 edition, lists the large majority of the 15 West African countries in the bottom category of “Low Human Development.” Table 3 below provides an overview of relevant human development and poverty indicators.

¹⁰ UNDP Human Development Report 2004, <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/>

Human development and poverty indicators for 14 ECOWAS Member States (no data available for Liberia; highlighted countries are those specifically attended to in the present study). Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2004 (<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/>).

ECOWAS Member State	Human Development Index (HDI) rank (out of 175)	Human Development Index value (2001)	Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) rank	Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) value
Cape Verde	105	0.717	40	19.7
Ghana	131	0.568	46	26.0
Togo	143	0.495	65	38.0
Gambia	155	0.452	81	45.8
Nigeria	151	0.466	57	35.1
Senegal	157	0.437	77	44.1
Guinea	160	0.425	..	..
Benin	161	0.421	80	45.7
Côte d'Ivoire	163	0.399	79	45.0
Guinea-Bissau	172	0.350	86	48.0
Mali	174	0.326	93	58.9
Burkina Faso	175	0.302	95	65.5
Niger	176	0.292	94	61.4
Sierra Leone	177	0.273	..	..

The levels of poverty expressed in the table above must be taken into account when appreciating the deeper causes of abandonment by parents of their responsibilities. Parents don't leave children alone out of deliberate neglect. The major cause of the current abuse is the deteriorating economic situation highlighted above. Some of those with whom the researchers spoke referred to this problem as a matter of survival. The issue must therefore be handled with great caution, care, and sensitivity towards creating understanding of a complex set of causes.

Children in Difficult Situations

Poverty is but one of the reasons why increasing numbers of children grow up in adverse circumstances. Other factors, such as rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, the deterioration of the family environment, alienation from traditional value systems, and the forced recruitment of children for participation in violent conflict equally contribute to this phenomenon. This category includes children who, for different reasons, left the home and ended up living on the street. It also includes children with abnormal histories that affect their chances in life, including those who have fallen victim to the practice of child trafficking. According to one source¹¹ some 1.2 million children across the globe fall victim to child trafficking every year, 200 000 of who can be found in West Africa. In addition to the above two groups, there are, like in any other country or region, children who have special needs because their physical or mental abilities differ from those of mainstream children. In the latter case, poverty affects the well-being of such children as local economies have only limited capacity to provide for their specific needs.



UNICEF - Benin child labor advocacy poster

Organizations such as UNICEF, Plan International, Care, Save the Children, and Terre des Hommes have ongoing programs to combat child trafficking and to address the needs

¹¹ Undated brochure on "Le trafic d'enfants" brought out by UNICEF Belgium. Judging by the dates of references in the brochure it must have been published in 2002 or later.

of traumatized child soldiers, internally displaced and refugee children attempting to reintegrate into today's society.

The existence of street children in West Africa is equally significant. According to one of our stakeholders, associated with the Catholic Action for Street children (CAS) in Ghana, no less than 22,000 children live on the streets of Accra alone. But one finds them in equally large numbers on the streets of Dakar as well as other West African cities. Statistics collected by CAS indicate that 86 % of the street children in Accra left their home because of family problems including divorce, abuse, and poverty. In addition to these children losing out on opportunities for schooling, they also tend to be stigmatized and perceived as dangerous, which complicates the (re)integration of these children. *Sesame Street* could serve this audience as an educational tool through centers such as those run by CAS and other organizations. It could also play an important role in de-stigmatizing these children in the eyes of other children who are fortunate enough to live relatively normal lives.

Adverse child behavior

Concern was expressed regarding a number of areas of negative child behavior. In some of these areas, adverse child behavior causes harm to others and themselves. For instance, premature sexual activity can lead to child/teenage pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, child delinquency and indiscipline may cause undue stress in the social, living, learning and work environments of which the children are part or with which they interact. In yet other areas of concern, children are at the receiving end of misfortune caused by others, adults or children, such as when they become the victims of rape, are forced into marriage at a premature age, or when their rights are being violated in other respects. In all these cases children must know how to behave to best avoid causing harm or being harmed themselves. To develop appropriate behavior, children should acquire a sense of what is right and wrong; be able to consciously situate themselves in their context; be aware of their rights and be empowered to claim these rights.

D. Language and other means of communication and expression

West Africa is highly diverse in mother tongues that are widely spoken in addition to the countries' official languages, English and French. In fact, the variety of local languages is so great that it will not be logistically feasible to produce TV programs in all. In this subsection we will thus explore the topics of language and communication, and question how they may influence the production of a West African *Sesame Street*.

The Language Question

The general consensus among stakeholders is that, if one language is to be chosen for a possible *Sesame Street* television program, it should be the official language. As there are two official languages in the region, this consensus means that parallel versions of core programming in English and French are necessary. If *Sesame Street* chooses to adapt a multi-media approach, the effort could be enhanced using a combination of official and local languages.

During the study team's visits, stakeholders mentioned that many children in West Africa have limited comprehension of their country's official language. As one of our respondents pointed out, "people grow up as foreigners in their own country." Some

children enter school only knowing their mother tongue and find it challenging to be immersed in a school environment which requires the mastery of another language. Consequently, children comprehend poorly. Since cultural values are often disseminated through storytelling and idiomatic expressions in local languages, some of the stakeholders cited the de-emphasis of local languages in formal institutions as one of the causes of the disappearance of cultural values in society.

Stakeholders felt that a Sesame initiative could help foster and deepen an appreciation for linguistic diversity and change perceptions that speaking one's mother tongue qualifies one as non-educated by presenting positive uses of local language. Stakeholders suggested exploring opportunities to inject local languages through songs, key phrases, or idiomatic expressions into programs that are otherwise either in French or in English. Additionally, to reach out to parents, caregivers and teachers, diversified delivery of messages should be considered. This could include use of local and community radio stations and outreach material. These media—in contrast to TV—present excellent opportunities to diffuse, at little cost, key messages in a wide variety of languages.

Other Ways for Communication and Expression

In addition to formal verbal communication, focusing on the transmission and exchange of explicitly formulated messages, West Africa has a rich cultural tradition of communicating implicit messages embedded in stories and folktales. They often include the use of animal characters, such as Anansi the Spider, to transmit, and make discussable, different morality issues. In addition to stories and fables, there is an equally strong cultural practice of musical expression and dance. Additionally, puppetry, a mainstay of *Sesame Street*, is also an important art form throughout West Africa. Stakeholders frequently affirmed the need for a prospective *Sesame Street* intervention to build on culturally embedded traditions such as the ones mentioned above.



Puppets used for the TV Africa program, Accra, Ghana

E. Regional Health Issues

In this subsection we will address the common health concerns raised by various stakeholders. Throughout the region, the study team noted that health needs and problems were nearly identical. The most pressing of health issues such as universally high malnutrition rates, gastro-intestinal and diarrheal problems, reproductive health problems, hygiene issues and a worrying expansion of malaria were all high on every country's list of problems.

Regional Health Statistics

	HIV/AIDS Prevalence Rates (%)	Reported Malaria / 100,000	Infant Mortality Rate / 1000	Life Expectancy at Birth	Intestinal Death Rate (%)
Benin	3.6	10,697	88.5	51.1	31.38
Ghana	3.7	15,344	55.6	56.5	23.99
Nigeria	5.8	N/A	72.49	51.0	33.72
Guinea	1.5	75,386	127.08	50.9	35.81
Senegal	1.4	N/A	55.41	56.4	30.1
Mali	1.7	4,088	119.6	45.4	36.18

Source: www.nationmaster.com, last accessed 8/12/04.

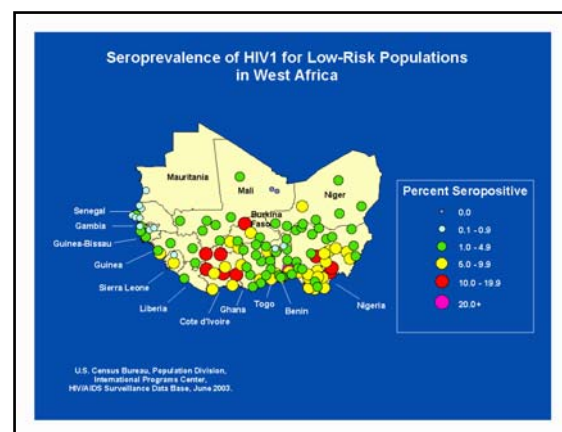
Stakeholders across the region all noted that, while poverty was the driving force behind these serious health problems, simple messages targeted towards children and their caregivers could help to mitigate many of them. Medical professionals working directly on these health problems cited the following as health education needs for the region:

- convincing mothers to get their children immunized;
- providing mothers with information about healthy, balanced, nutrition, including micronutrients such as Vitamin A and Iodine;
- providing information about infections with worms, how to avoid and how to cure them (in one rural area of Ghana we were told that some 50 % of school-going children have one or another parasite);
- learning about personal hygiene;
- developing the notion of prevention and instill preventive behaviors in regard of diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, and AIDS;
- introducing issues of reproductive health;
- learning about diseases that are prevalent in the region, including HIV and AIDS;
- developing sound behaviors of sanitation and maintenance of the environment, including the disposal of garbage and hand washing;
- develop an integrative framework of values in which all of the above concerns can be embedded;
- developing a scientific mindset that helps understand the above phenomena and conceive of human action to deal with them in terms of unifying principles and cause-effect relationships.

HIV and AIDS

Perhaps, more than any other occurrence over the last few years, the spread of HIV and AIDS throughout the region has had a role in forcing West Africans to re-think many ingrained cultural attitudes. Coordinated HIV/AIDS programs have developed strategies and campaigns designed to significantly change behavior and attitudes that are often rooted in tradition and culture.

Due to the, at times, quite explicit nature of many of these campaigns, some stakeholders expressed concern that HIV/AIDS-related messages might not be appropriate to a



younger audience. This view, however, was not shared by all and certainly not by medical professionals who confirmed that, in fact, very few campaigns have addressed the needs of this important and impressionable age group. Besides, although media campaigns are often associated with prevention messages, other messages, including those about care and support, stigmatization, better coping with the needs of the infected and affected all have great relevance to *Sesame Street's* intended primary audience.

F. Cultural Values

During the study team's visits to Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, stakeholders mentioned various values that seem to be prevalent throughout the region. Some of these values include: the importance of family, hospitality, perseverance, self-esteem, courtesy, patience, gratitude, religion, respect personal dignity and modesty. Regardless of nationality, few West Africans would object to this list.

A consistent complaint throughout the region was that today's media offerings, especially television programming, did not reflect the cultural values of West Africa. West African parents expressed great concern that important cultural values were being lost, in large part, due to the influence of the media and the lack of appropriate local productions.

Parents want their children to be able to function in the modern world and to speak an international language, but not at the expense of a loss in their understanding of who they are and where they come from.

So too, a West African version of *Sesame Street* could count on the support and talents of a rich base of musicians, storytellers, griots, actors, artists, writers, directors and technicians. In fact, a regional production team comprised of artists from across the region would help ensure a unique and vibrant production; one that all of Africa could be proud to say is indeed their own. Perhaps the desire and need to have African regional material presented by authentic representatives from within the region can best be expressed by an old West African proverb which states, "only when lions have historians will hunters cease to be heroes."

VI. Media Landscape

A. Media in West Africa

Once strictly controlled by states, over the last 20 years, media in West Africa have seen a rapid transition towards liberalization, democratization and decentralization. This opening up of the airwaves coupled with a renewed emphasis on press freedom has resulted in a rapidly changing media landscape. Today, most West African countries have opted for a three tier broadcasting range; public broadcasting (typically via large national television and radio broadcast facilities); private/commercial broadcasting; and community broadcasting. The recent advent of satellite transmission has also increased broadcast choice, though this option remains limited primarily to an urban elite.

The recent explosion of media outlets can be seen in every country we visited. In Ghana today there are 5 TV stations, 128 radio stations and over 60 publications (though few have significant circulation figures). Senegal has two national television networks, one cable outlet, three radio networks with nationwide coverage and 6 regionally based radio stations. In Nigeria, while there are two national TV stations, each of Nigeria's 36 states have both a nationally syndicated station and a separate State-run one. Additionally, there are large numbers of private commercial stations, mainly located in the Lagos area. The radio situation in Nigeria follows a similar pattern. Last year, the Nigeria Broadcast Authority processed and approved licenses for over 2000 community radio stations. Meanwhile Benin, with a population of only seven million, counts three TV stations and over 60 radio stations ranging from the parastatal national stations to rural, commercial public, private and religious ones.¹²

Clearly, a vibrant new media is growing throughout the region. Those best able to understand individual country media landscapes and to develop multi-media strategies stand the best chance of successfully influencing target audiences. Over the course of our study and travels to four West African countries, we witnessed both important differences and remarkable similarities regarding the media, its reach and potential for developing and delivering educational children's programming to young children and caregivers alike.

B. Access to Television

Sesame Street is of course best known for their inventive children's television programming. And so, the first question we looked into was if a West African television program would reach significant numbers of the intended targets.

While television has in the past been considered a medium for the elite in Africa, with each passing year more and more West Africans are able to access television, especially those living in electrified areas. Television viewing habits however differ significantly from country to country. In Mali regular television viewership is estimated at only 5% while in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal viewership rates range from 38% to 50%.

Potential Viewership

Country	No. TV Sets	Est. Viewership	Ongoing	% Access	Population
Benin	120,000	720,000		10%	
Ghana	1,730,000	10,380,000		50%	
Guinee	125,000	750,000		10%	
Mali	95,000	570,000		5%	
Nigeria	10,000,000	60,000,000		44%	
Senegal	678,000	4,068,000		38%	
Total	12,748,000	76,488,000		38%	

Source: TV Africa: *Reaching Africa with TV Africa*, Johannesburg (2003)

Our studies indicate clearly that in some West African countries including Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal, a significant percentage of the general population, both rich and poor, do have access and are indeed regular television viewers. This is especially so of urban West Africa. But, many rural areas too have developed mechanisms to ensure television access. Throughout the region, private commercial video centers have in large part replaced cinemas. In Nigeria, state and locally supported free public viewing centers provide viewing access to many Nigerians in rural areas. Often operating with small generators, these centers broadcast national and state television programming on a daily basis.

Many small private commercial centers have hooked up to satellite TV services thus offering a much larger viewing choice. One such center described their most popular programming as being international soccer matches broadcast every Saturday

In many countries, access to video has been further extended through the use of mobile video units (MVU). These units, run by both local NGO's and private direct marketing firms like Group Africa, are an additional tool in extending reach to rural communities with no access to broadcast television. In recent years, MVU units have been particularly effective in bringing health messages including HIV/AIDS prevention messages to rural areas throughout the region.

The three countries mentioned above (Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal), with a population in excess of 150 million, represent more than half of the total population in the region. Other countries including Mali, Benin, and Guinea share far less television viewing opportunities. In Mali, a scant 5% of the population enjoys regular television access. Any regional *Sesame Street* type intervention would necessarily have to carefully take into account these disparities.

C. Access to Radio

Despite rapid growth in television access, radio remains by far the most cost-effective medium for bridging the gap between high illiteracy and ineffective communication networks. Taking advantage of low cost technology, broad reach and the strong oral traditions in West Africa radio offers an attractive alternative for projects wishing to reach rich and poor / rural and urban.

Once dominated by large State run services, many States like Mali, have opted to support community development and empowerment through the active promotion and establishment of low cost, low range community radio stations. In Mali today there are

over 100 small FM community radio stations, most of which have been set up as non-profit organizations.¹² Communication, through these local radio stations, focus on the development of a community through news, information and entertainment, all with an emphasis on community participation.

Parallel to the growth in local radio has been the substantial expansion of international radio by FM through satellite relays. For example, RFI has recently established FM stations in 18 major cities in Francophone West Africa and BBC World Service has FM broadcast services in seven cities. However, because they do not broadcast in local languages, the reach of international radio is still far less than national radio.¹³

To reach the more than 50 % that do not have regular access to television in the high access countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal) and most emphatically for those countries with little access (Mali, Guinea, Benin, Niger and Liberia), it would seem that a radio component would have to be developed. In all countries in the region, media access is almost universally assured by radio. Even the most remote areas receive local news and information via radio. Today, it is estimated that regular radio listeners throughout the region surpasses 80% of the population.

Besides sheer numbers, radio offers a number of advantages. Production costs are greatly reduced and so, radio can tackle some of the many problems linked to culture, language and comprehension. *Sesame Street* has some experience developing educational radio programming based on characters, themes and educational objectives that have been developed for their television productions. For example, *Takalani Sesame* (the South African adaptation of *Sesame Street*) has developed a radio program that is created in English and then localized and adapted in four major local languages. All of the radio stations visited, whether in Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana or Benin, enthusiastically supported this concept. All recognized the need to supply interesting programming for young children and all expressed a strong desire to be included in any eventual educational media project like *Sesame Street*. Many stations mentioned that free and/or significantly reduced broadcast hours could be negotiated in exchange for training and help with production needs and costs.

While there is undoubtedly high radio access throughout the region, it is far less clear that *Sesame Street's* primary target audience, young children, enjoy such access. Conversations with stakeholders revealed that men primarily determine radio use. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that radio listening forms an important part in children's daily lives. Of course this may very well be due to the fact that there is almost no radio programming currently targeting young children. Stakeholders believed that a radio show targeting children could find an important audience but marketing, outreach and perhaps more formal listening mechanisms (school broadcasts and listening clubs) would necessarily need to accompany broadcasts.

D. Education and the Media

Policy guidelines throughout the region recognize the important role that media plays in the promotion of local language and cultures. In theory, all media are expected to contribute to both formal and non-formal education. To date, few countries in the region have been able to sustain long term educational media goals.

¹²usaid.gov/pubs/cbj2003/afr/ml/688-004.html

¹³ www.comminit.com/trends/ctsglobal/sld-2086html

Many countries in the region have had experience with educational broadcasting, either through distance learning programs or more formal educational broadcasts within the school. However, past experiences have rendered some countries more skeptical to the idea of a formal type of school broadcast project. In Senegal, the team was briefed on a rather ambitious 10-year CLAD project in vogue during the 70's and 80's. CLAD produced educational video programs in French and Wolof which were distributed to schools equipped with video players and televisions. CLAD was described as being extremely time and resource intensive and at its end, opinions on the worth and impact of the program were decidedly mixed. Of even more concern, when the funders priorities changed, CLAD ended, unable to sustain itself without continued donor support. While expressing great interest in a Sesame intervention, Senegalese stakeholders strongly encouraged the team to carefully consider the very real problem of sustainability.



Students in an IRI classroom in Lagos, Nigeria

In Nigeria, we learned that the National Radio Network, FRCN was in the process of re-introducing educational radio broadcasts that were popular, widespread and an important element in the government education strategy during the 70's and 80's. Despite its popularity, broadcasts ended due to the numerous political upheavals, economic downfall and governmental changes.

More recently, a number of countries throughout the region, including Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and now Ghana, have adopted EDC's Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) programs for use both within and outside of the formal school setting. In Nigeria, the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program (LEAP) has successfully negotiated broadcast contracts with four State run broadcasters. These broadcasters air carefully crafted IRI programs that have been designed to improve educational quality by addressing inadequate teacher training, poor student achievement and lack of resources. A visit to a participating IRI school in Lagos afforded the assessment team a chance to witness first hand the potential of radio learning in West Africa. Both teachers and students seemed genuinely engaged in the radio broadcast, closely following and acting upon the shows messages and instructions.

The idea of an IRI type *Sesame Street* is intriguing though not without difficulties. These difficulties would include the integration of the *Sesame Street* format into an IRI one that has its own well-developed methodology. Also, IRI programs are typically designed to follow a country specific curriculum, require local radio contracts, teacher buy in and training, as well as, in-country staff that provide ongoing supervision of teachers and oversight of the program. This may prove difficult to replicate on a regional scale. For instance, in Nigeria English language instruction begins at 3rd grade and so, presently, there are no IRI programs targeting earlier grade learners.

Despite these difficulties, the IRI models, clearly demonstrate the very real possibility of forming more formal *Sesame Street* broadcast partnerships with broadcasters and Educational Ministries throughout the region.

E. Children's Television

"The power of television to shape the minds and tastes of children has long been recognized in the developed world. Indeed, throughout much of the world, TV provides the second curriculum outside the classroom. TV plays a vital role in children's emotional and intellectual development. We, as adults, have a critical responsibility to meet and fulfill our children's right to receive TV programs that are age appropriate; diverse in content and that draws from their immediate culture."¹⁴

Despite the best of intentions, there are very few locally produced educational programs being made throughout the region. In fact, any educational children's programming, whether locally produced or not, rarely reach the eyes of the young West African child. This is not due to a lack of interest on the part of governments, media owners and producers. In every country we visited, broadcasting authorities have mandated that significant hours be reserved for children's broadcasting. Despite this mandate, none, with the possible exception of Ghana, have been capable of providing children's programming sufficient to meet national broadcast policy. What little children's programming there is tends to be internationally produced and of little educational value. In Senegal today, there are no locally produced children's programs aired on the national television station. In fact the only two regular children's shows are French cartoons being broadcast through an arrangement with Canal France International. Other countries in the region share similar experiences.

But filling airtime with "educational" programming is not enough. Uninteresting productions will neither elicit financial sponsorship nor will they achieve learning objectives. Television and mass media thrive on entertainment and unless children's productions can be produced in both an educative and entertaining manner, little progress will be made. Far too often in the past, educational programming has been driven and developed by educators with little media experience.

Today, "Edutainment" television programming, like South Africa's *Soul City* or West Africa's *Sida Dans la Cité*, have demonstrated that people often learn best while being entertained. These carefully crafted African productions received advice from local health and community development specialists but employed the very best of media professionals including dramatists, scriptwriters, artists and technicians to drive their productions.

Of course, *Sesame Street* children's productions have been employing these very same techniques now for over 30 years.

Excluding South Africa, just 300 hours of children's programming are produced in all of Anglophone Africa each year. The few shows that are produced tend to be low cost studio based productions. Judged by Western standards, quality of these productions would be very low indeed.¹⁵

Recognizing the need to address weaknesses in children's and educational broadcasting in Nigeria, the World Bank initiated a four-year Development Communication Pilot Project to promote early childhood development through the media. Despite a 10 million dollar investment in training and the construction and

¹⁴UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child

¹⁵Busvannah Communications: *Business Plan for an African Children's Programming Initiative*, Johannesburg (February 2003), Research Report, p. 18.

maintenance of a state of the art educational broadcasting center, few new local productions are currently being made. 13 episodes of the locally produced pre-school children's program, *Fun Bus*, modeled after *Sesame Street*, were completed in 2001 during the last year of World Bank funding. No new episodes of this popular children's program have been produced since, though plans are currently under way for the production of an additional 13 episodes this year.

The impressively equipped ETV studio complex (3 digital camera with auto cue studio, non-linear editing system, A/B editing system, computer graphics and animation workstation, independent audio facility, fully equipped OB van, 2 video cameras on pedestals) remains woefully underutilized producing just one educational weekly program series per quarter. The state of the art animation workstation remains unused due to the absence of qualified trained animators.



ETV studio set in Lagos, Nigeria

F. Production Capacity

Television

Despite a vibrant cultural and artistic environment, media production capacity in the region remains questionable. Local television production in all countries visited is very poor indeed. In a continent rich in oral tradition, visual arts and with internationally renowned musicians competing with the best in the world, one needs to ask, why this is so? Clearly, it is not for lack of talent.

While equipment shortfalls impact on program quality, the one overriding factor which determines technical quality and local production output lies more firmly in a severe lack of financial resources. Whereas in the past, national television and radio stations were fully subsidized by the State, today, states in the region have adopted a parastatal model. In this model, media facilities are expected to recover large portions of their recurring costs through production sponsorship and advertising revenue. But, advertising revenue has remained hard to come by and today, national broadcasters are also required to compete with a growing private sector industry. Typically most national and state stations just cannot meet payroll expenses to say nothing of upgrading station equipment. Well-equipped television studio and broadcast facilities in West Africa are indeed few and far between. For the most part, production and broadcast equipment is outdated and rarely well maintained. However, a typical national television and/or State station will have sufficiently large studio space with serviceable lighting grids and workshops for set construction and storage. Should Sesame Workshop decide to produce programming requiring the development of a regional set(s), any number of State and National stations could claim to meet at least some of the technical requirements necessary for a successful *Sesame Street* production. In the case of the Nigeria's ETV facility, it is likely that production equipment, editing suites and animation facilities would meet most of *Sesame Street's* international production equipment needs.

Working within a national structure like the ETV facility however would present a number of other difficulties including the presence of a poorly paid and unmotivated staff. Often,

the most talented production specialists inevitably supplement their income by privately contracting out their services to a growing private production industry. When working at a state facility, care must be taken to ensure that Sesame Workshop and their production partners assemble the best available technical talent and that they are fully engaged in the production process.

A second option would be to eschew a partnership with the state facility and work directly with the smaller private production houses. These facilities may not be able to provide Sesame Workshop with required studio space but could certainly identify and engage professional producers, writers, cameramen and editors. Many of these production and post-production facilities are also equipped with professional cameras, crews and editing suites that could effectively be used, and at reasonable costs, to gather live action sequences throughout the region.

Due to relatively high local production costs, all West African television stations typically fill their broadcast schedule with cheaply purchased foreign fare, which often consists of Western sitcoms and series. What little children's program there is follows this pattern. Children's airtime, typically after school and on Saturday mornings, is filled with old cartoons that can be purchased for next to nothing.

Today, parents, educators and broadcasters alike lament the state of local production. All worry too that today's children are far too heavily influenced by the Western dominated media. Broadcasters admit that they have not met the needs and aspirations of their public, but fear that they can do little else absent of more interesting funding and revenue opportunities.

Audio

Production of high quality audio elements, either for use in television or as separate radio programs, is certainly feasible in West Africa. A vibrant West African music industry has produced a number of talented audio arrangers, musicians and technicians. Recording capacity can be found in large private music studios, at smaller independent digital studios and also at selected state facilities like ETV in Lagos.

G. Culture and the Media

Almost all stakeholders recognized and stressed the importance of providing culturally relevant material via the media. This is especially true for impressionable young children who, they felt, needed to see, especially on television, more positive African role models.

Most expressed concern about negative Western influence and the preponderance of western images reflected in much of the media today. Many in fact blamed the media for the moral decline and degradation noted in today's youth and society. Stakeholders recognized that there has been a steady breakdown in values and insisted that children be taught, at the earliest ages, traditional African values including honesty, respect and pride.

While most agreed that the American version of *Sesame Street* would be popular and effective in helping children to learn numeracy and literacy skills, all stressed that a regional West African version would offer more opportunities to address specific local concerns and thus increase impact. A few even questioned whether a dubbed American version would be appropriate.

Television

Over the years, production capacity has declined rapidly at national television broadcast facilities. However, new independent and private local production facilities have recently begun to sprout, especially in Nigeria and Ghana. Taking advantage of new digital technologies and reduced costs, these small production facilities have helped to fill the demonstrated need for supplying culturally relevant materials to an African audience looking to their media for an affirmation of their culture and worth. Despite typically low budgets, the response to these productions has been nothing short of amazing. Recently, Africa Magic, a DSTV channel offered by the MNET was established. Africa Magic broadcasts locally produced African tele-films throughout Anglophone Africa. Over 80% of their daily film offerings are tele-films produced in Nigeria and Ghana. The introduction of a steady diet of African produced tele-films has hit a chord. In less than a year of broadcast, Africa Magic has vaulted to being one of the most watched television channels among all Anglophone African DSTV clients.

To meet audience demands, an estimated 50 video films are now being produced in Nigeria each week. Videotape copies, many pirated, can be found across the continent. While many criticize the poor quality of these films, there is evidence that quality is rapidly improving. With competition for limited broadcast opportunities, it is clear that skills will only get better, and quickly too.

The success of the West African tele-films is but one clear example of a society in search of culturally-relevant programming. Despite technical faults and derisively low budgets, when given a choice, often between a low quality budget African film and a multi-million dollar American film, Africans will, more often than not, choose a film with characters and themes more directly related to their everyday life.

Radio

As the growing number of new radio stations scramble for resources and audience, development projects are now faced with difficult decisions on how best to use this powerful medium to reach target audiences for maximum impact. For example, the growth of community radios in Mali and other West African States, affords us the opportunity to more effectively target select communities, tailoring programs to meet the express needs of individual communities in a more effective manner. Problems of language and culture are reduced due to the direct implication of knowledgeable radio staff intimately linked to their communities and audience.

With the tremendous growth of broadcast stations, broadcasters are scrambling to fill airtime. Unable to produce sufficient quantities of original broadcasts, many stations fill airtime with music. Development organizations that have been able to provide interesting productions, especially those with local relevance, have often successfully negotiated interesting community service broadcast deals. Community and local stations in particular are constantly looking for programming that can meet the needs and desires of their communities. A well produced and culturally relevant children's radio show would no doubt be welcomed with open arms, and might even be broadcast free of charge if effective distribution mechanisms could be developed.

H. Broadcast Options

There is little doubt that a regional *Sesame Street* media intervention would be able to tap into a myriad of broadcast opportunities. Clearly, to obtain maximum television reach, independent broadcast agreements will have to be reached with national broadcast television stations in interested countries. Strapped for funds, these stations will undoubtedly aggressively negotiate broadcast charges and rights, most especially if the shows have corporate sponsorship, as is the case of the South Africa production *Takalani Sesame*. However, regional *Sesame Street* would probably be considered as a local production and help stations to meet local production broadcast requirements. Even if the project were required to purchase air time from the stations, published broadcast rates are reasonable and there would seem to be enough interest on the part of potential sponsors to make this a relatively risk free broadcast scenario.

While this seems to contradict earlier reports that broadcasters have had difficulty raising adequate advertising revenue, few local programs could compete with *Sesame Street* in terms of quality, reach and interest. Given Sesame Workshop's track record, advertising contacts, development objectives and potential reach, numerous stakeholders including broadcasters indicated that Sesame Workshop media products could indeed find significant sponsorship support to cover broadcast charges and, at least partial production costs.

Of course, potential sponsors would be interested in maximizing reach. Care should be given to avoid exclusive broadcast deals. In Nigeria for instance, one could envision daily television broadcasts on one of the national stations with follow up broadcasts at different hours also being assured by any number of State run broadcasters. One could also envision broadcast over one of the DSTV bouquets to ensure regional coverage, even in non-participating countries.

The researchers are under no illusion that operating across international borders in West Africa will be easy. Media environments and opportunities vary greatly and the only real way to become expert at a specific country's media environment is to live and work there. To take advantage of the numerous radio broadcast and outreach opportunities, it seems evident that local project representation will be needed. Radio adaptations in any number of local West African languages could be assured by local radio broadcasters, but separate deals will have to be worked out in each country. However, there are any number of potential local partners, including local NGO's, government agencies and private facilities ready to help extend reach, distribution and impact.

VII. Reactions to Mock Sesame Street Episodes in West Africa

Between February and July 2004, Phase Two of the feasibility study was conducted in Senegal and Nigeria to assess general appeal and comprehension of mock television and radio episodes among children. Additionally, research was conducted among parents and educators to obtain information regarding their views on the need for and desirability of a West African version of *Sesame Street*. The overall objectives of the studies were:

- to gather information about children's media habits;
- evaluate the reactions of children, parents/caregivers and educators to mock television and radio episodes of *Sesame Street*;
- to determine how educators and parents respond to *Sesame Street*; and
- and to gain educators' feedback on the value of *Sesame Street* as an educational tool.

The mock television episode for this research was compiled from segments in Sesame Workshop's video library and primarily included material that had been created for the American version of *Sesame Street*. The episode, which lasted approximately 15 minutes, included selections of Muppet, animation, and live action film segments. The two live action films in the episode were filmed in Sub-Saharan Africa. (See the following table for a list of segments). Television content was dubbed into French by Senegalese actors living in the United States and in turn dubbed into English by Nigerian actors in Cote d'Ivoire.

Table 1: Summary of Segments in Mock *Sesame Street* Television Episode

Note: All segments were developed originally for the US Sesame Street program unless noted differently in the table below.

Summary of Segments in Mock <i>Sesame Street</i> Television Episode				
Key: ANI= Animation; MUP= Muppet; LAF= Live Action Film				
Item	Title	Type	Goal	Synopsis
1	Opening	ANI		This opening animated sequence, features two Muppets, Bert and Ernie, flying on a paper airplane to different continents. This opening is accompanied by music and ends with the display of the Sesame Street logo.
2	Big Bird and Horse Toothbrush	MUP	Health Practices	Big Bird, a Muppet, wants to demonstrate how to brush teeth, but explains that he can't because birds don't have teeth. Big Bird asks his friend Horse to help him, since horses have teeth. Horse explains that horses don't usually clean their teeth with toothbrushes, but he is willing to help his friend out. Big Bird gets to show the kids how to brush teeth, by cleaning horse's teeth with a toothbrush and horse admits the cleaning was great.
3	Red Brushes Teeth	ANI	Dental Care	A red animated character is just getting out of bed and has not yet brushed its teeth. The character opens the window to greet the sunshine, yawns, and its flower collapses from the unclean breath. The character realizes that it must brush its teeth. After the character brushes its teeth, the flower perks up again. This segment has music but no dialogue.
4	Friendship with Elmo and Rosita	MUP	Friendship	Two Muppets, Elmo and Rosita, discuss what it means to be a friend. Rosita demonstrates how friends care for each other. She asks Elmo to pretend to sneeze so that she can say bless you and offer him a tissue. Elmo shows how friends share with each other and shares his box of raisins with Rosita. They both point out that friends do not have to always agree and they show this by arguing over which is better, bananas or mangos. Rosita states that bananas are better and Elmo states that mangos are better. They close the segment by saying that it is very important that friends have fun, and they move their bodies, shout and laugh to indicate this.
5	Beetles Take Turns on a Swing	ANI	Turn Taking	This animated segment features two wire beetles, one red and one blue that want to play on a swing. They first both attempt to sit on the swing together. However, when they get on the swing, it doesn't move. They get off the swing and the blue beetle paces back and forth, thinking of what to do. The red one decides that the best solution is to take turns on the swing, with one sitting, while the other pushes. This segment features music, but no dialogue.
6	Making Wire Cars	LAF	Cooperation	This is a live action film, developed for <i>Takalani Sesame</i> in South Africa, which features a young boy, Dakalo, learning how to make his own wire car, with the help of his older cousin, Willie. First, Dakalo collects wire. Then, Willie, along with some of the other older boys helps him fashion the wire into the frame and connect the wheels. Dakalo is very proud and pleased with his car.
7	Dancing Bridge I	MUP		Two tall, colorful, long-legged, lean Muppets dance against a plain background to rhythmic, percussive, music with an African flavor.
8	Alphabet Photo Booth	LAF	Alphabet, upper-case	This animation sequence, presents black and white photo booth images of children holding colorful upper-case letters on the alphabet, in order from A to Z. Children's voices can be heard shouting out each of the letters as they are shown. Colorful letters cover the screen before the next letter is revealed.
9	African School	LAF	Diversity	This is a live action segment, produced in West Africa for the U.S. version of <i>Sesame Street</i> , which shows an African girl, Alma, going to school. The actions are narrated by a voiceover of Alma describing the actions presented on the screen. At the beginning of the day, she is woken by her mother, washes herself with water from a metal bucket and brushes her teeth. Her mother gives her some lunch and Alma then walks to school, passing by her neighbors along the way. At school she and her classmates learn to read and write, as well as to jump. The students are excited to leave school and jump some more when they are dismissed.
10	Dance Bridge II	MUP		Two tall, colorful, long-legged, lean Muppets dance along with a shorter Muppet against a plain, black background to rhythmic, percussive, music with an African flavor.
11	Reading Changes Everything	ANI	Reading Format and Function	This animated sequence shows a boy reading his favorite book and being transported into the scenes of the story. As he reads, he flies on the wings of a bird into the sky, dives into the depths of the ocean, experiences sledding on a snowy winter day and observes fireworks on a warm summer night. At the end of the segment, the boy, curled up on his chair, explains that he loves this book because it takes him anywhere without having to ever leave his chair.
12	Zoe's Favorite Book	MUP	Reading Format and Function	Two Muppets (Zoe and Telly) are in the park, where Zoe sits reading a well-worn, tattered book. Zoe expresses how much she loves the book, and that it's her favorite. She even loves the way it smells! She tells Telly that it is about a princess and her pet elephant. Telly sees how excited Zoe is, and is encouraged to go home for his own book.
13	Closing	ANI		

The mock radio episode was dubbed into French and English with Senegalese and Nigerian actors in the United States. The episode is a modified version of a program that was originally produced in South Africa as part of the *Takalani Sesame* project, where it airs in local languages. A summary of this episode appears below.

Table 2: Summary of Mock Radio Episode¹⁶ (Length 7.03)

Note: The radio program began and ended with a musical (instrumental) opening and there were musical transitions between most of the segments.

Item	Title	Goal	Synopsis
1	Bananas and Eating Healthy I	Eating Healthy	A girl named Zuzu peels a banana and discusses how much she loves bananas and that she likes to eat them with breakfast, lunch and dinner. She mentions that her favorite way to eat the fruit is with her friends. She asks her friend Zikwe to eat the banana for her, as she has to go to the alphabet tree.
2	Alphabet Tree	The letter B	Zuzu meets her friend Moshe at the Alphabet Tree to see what today's letter is. They watch something fall from the tree to the ground. Moshe opens it, and reveals that today's letter is -B. They are both excited, and Moshe decides it would be a good idea to play the " <i>Takalani</i> First Letter of the Word Game!" Moshe and Zuzu think about the words that begin with the letter B. Moshe realizes that B is the first letter of baboon, and the sound of a baboon is featured in the background.
3	Cows being Milked	Numeracy/ 3	Moshe decides to count cows as he helps to milk them. He counts three cows.
4	Glass of Cheese	Nutrition	Zuzu and Zikwe are playing "restaurant, restaurant". Zuzu is a customer and Zikwe is a waiter. Zuzu request a glass of milk. Zikwe returns first with a piece of cheese and then with a dish of yogurt, but Zuzu insists that, although those items are made from milk, she wants a glass of fresh milk that she can drink. Zikwe returns with a cow to give Zuzu the freshest milk possible, and Zuzu laughs.
5	Bananas and Eating Healthy II	Eating Healthy	Zuzu asks Zikwe what he is doing. He explains, "I've broken up a banana and dropped it into this jar with some milk and...now I'm shaking it up." Zuzu is puzzled and asks why. Zikwe says that it's so he can make a banana milkshake. Zikwe laughs and says "yes, yes." Zikwe says goodbye to everyone.

A. Research Design

Participants

Research participants included samples of rural, semi-urban and urban children, parents/caregivers, and educators from two regions in both Nigeria and Senegal. Efforts were made to balance groups with respect to gender and income. Researchers made an effort to ensure that the sample included lower-income participants.

The study in Nigeria was conducted by Communication and Marketing Research Group Limited (CMRG) and included 116 children (77 viewed the mock TV episode and 39 listened to the radio program), 66 parents/caregivers, and 32 educators. Because the northern and southern parts of Nigeria are viewed as being very different culturally,

¹⁶ This is a modified version of Episode 12, from Season 2 of the *Takalani Sesame* radio program in South Africa.

participants were drawn from the North (the city of Kano and surrounding areas) and the South (Ibadan and surrounding areas).

The Senegal study was conducted by Forut Sénégal in the regions of Dakar and Diourbel. It included 88 children, 32 parents and 17 educators.

Table 1: Sample for Research conducted in Senegal

Respondents		Dakar			Diourbel			Total			
		Semi-urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Semi-urban	Total	Semi-urban	Rural	Urban	Total
Children	Ages 4-5	8	16	24	8	8	16	16	16	8	40
	Ages 7-8	16	8	24	16	8	24	24	8	16	48
	Total	24	24	48	24	16	40	40	24	24	88
Parents		8	8	16	8	8	16	16	8	8	32
Educators		0	9	9	0	8	8	8	9	0	17

Table 2: Sample for Research conducted in Nigeria

Respondents		Ibadan			Kano			Total		
		Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Children	Ages 4-5	20	17	37	2	6	8	22	23	45
	Ages 7-8	0	8	8	16	8	24	16	16	32
	Total	20	25	45	18	14	32	38	39	77¹⁷
Parents		16 (8M/ 8F)	16 (8M/ 8F)	32	16 (8M/ 8F)	16 (8M/ 8F)	32	32	32	64
Educators		8	8	16	8	8	16	16	16	32

Procedure

The two research firms conducted interviews and focus groups with parents and children in participants' first languages -- i.e., in Wolof in Senegal and in Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria.¹⁸ Interviews and discussions with educators were conducted in either local language or the country's official language as appropriate given the background of educators.

Children's Studies

All children participated in one-on-one interviews which focused on their media habits. The interviews were followed by either a viewing of the mock *Sesame Street* TV episode or a recording of the mock radio show.. During the viewing/listening sessions, researchers observed the children and recorded their general level of attention and behavioral

¹⁷ In addition to the 77 children listed here, who were exposed to the mock television program, an additional 39 children (ages 4-5 and 7-8) from the Ibadan and Kano areas were exposed to a mock radio episode.

¹⁸ There were a few instances in Senegal where interviews were conducted in French or Pular, based on the preference of the respondent.

patterns. Children's eyes on screen were noted and recorded at regular 10 second intervals. After the viewing session children were asked to draw what they had seen. This was followed by one-on-one post-viewing interviews, during which researchers asked questions to assess what the children had liked and understood in the program. The same procedure was employed for those children that had followed the radio program, though these children were not asked to provide drawings of the show.

Adult Studies

Both parent/caregivers and educators participated in one-on-one interviews which were followed by program viewing and listening sessions. These were then followed by focus group discussions to gauge their reactions to what they had seen and heard. During interviews, parents discussed their children's media habits as well as general use of media in their homes and their own habits and preferences. Educators also were asked to respond to questions on how they currently use media in the classroom.

The focus groups' discussions also elicited views on the usefulness of a West African *Sesame Street* initiative and the appropriate media channels such an initiative might exploit. Additionally, views on languages, target audience and possible themes were also sought. Parents/caregivers voiced their opinions on how they would feel about having this type of program available for their children, while educators discussed their use of, views about and needs for different types of educational media at school.

B. Findings: Children's Reactions to *Sesame Street* television

Appeal

In general, children had a very positive reaction to the mock *Sesame Street* television episodes in both Nigeria and Senegal. Eyes on screen also helped determine the children's attention level for each of the program segments. Results indicated that children in both countries were, on the whole, very attentive throughout the program.¹⁹

As indicated by Chart 1, in Nigeria the range of eyes on screen attention levels ranged from a high of nearly 100% (during the animated segment called "Red Brushes Teeth)," to an average low of 91% (during the last segment "Zoe's Favorite Book). Similar data from Senegal, provided in Chart 2, indicate that mean eyes-on-screen scores per segment ranged from an average high of 99% to a low of 80%. Broken down by age group, the proportion of four and five year old children in Senegal with their eyes on the screen remained above 80% at all times while the seven and eight year olds averaged 88% and above. We noted too that attention level among the older Senegalese children were especially higher towards the end of the episode.

¹⁹ Eyes-on-screen is a gross measurement of engagement that is most valuable when paired with behavioral observations (as was the case in this research. For more information, see pp. 163-164 in S.M. Fisch and R.T. Truglio (2001). *G is for Growing: Thirty Years of Research on Children and Sesame Street*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Also see B.N. Flagg (1990). *Formative Evaluation for Educational Technologies*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Chart 1: Percentage of Children with Eyes focused on the screen during Mock TV Episode (Nigeria)

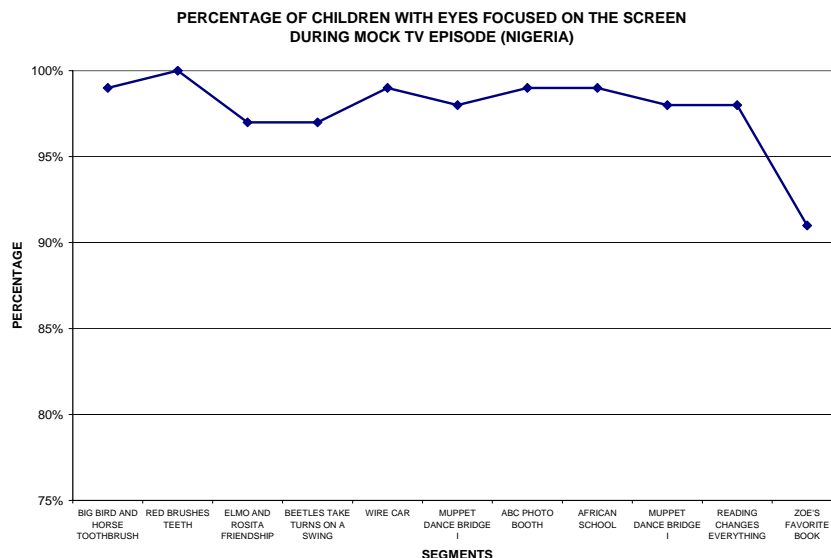
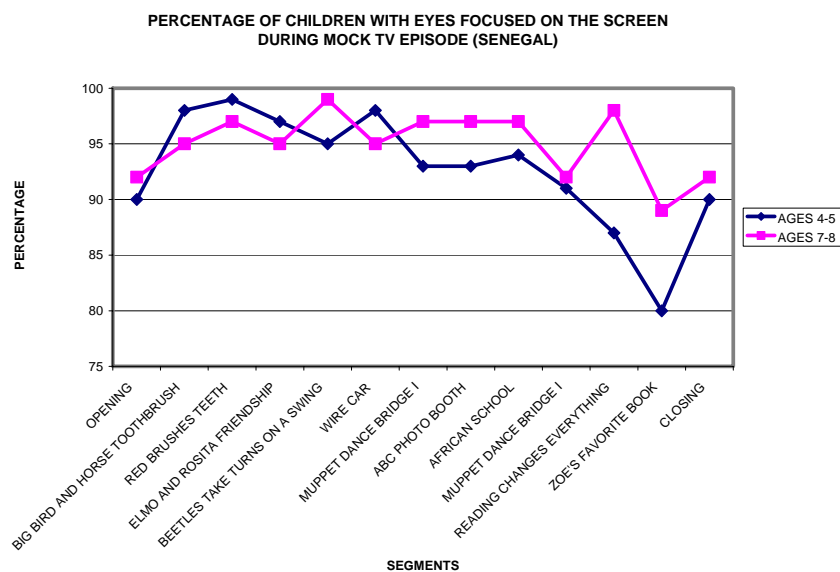


Chart 2: Percentage of Children with Eyes on the screen during Mock TV Episode (Senegal)

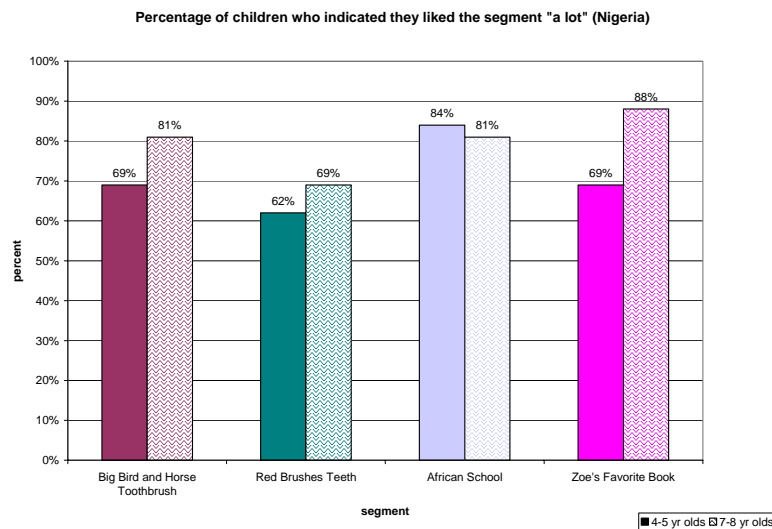


Researchers assessed children's interest in individual program segments in several ways. Children were asked specific questions about four selected segments -- two Muppet segments, one animation segment, and one live-action film that had been filmed in West Africa. Children also responded to open-ended questions about what they liked best in the show. Additionally, children's drawings helped to provide anecdotal insight about the salience of certain parts of the show.

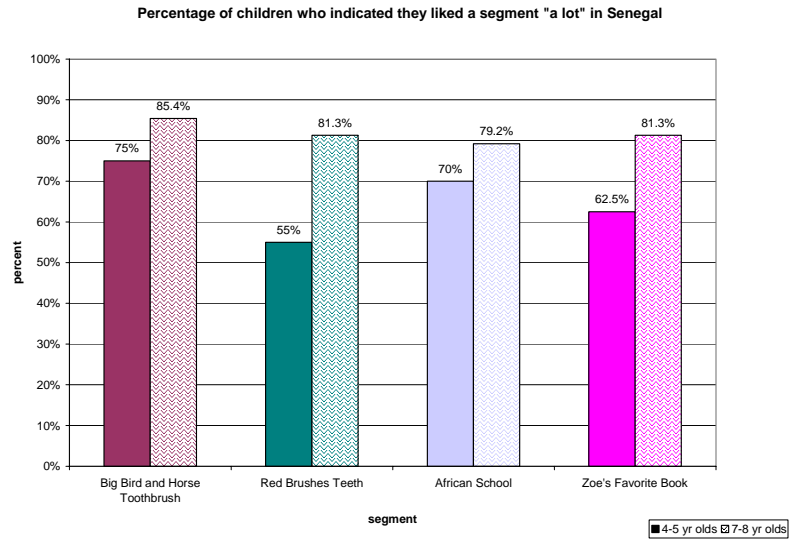
In order to assess the children’s reactions to specific segments, researchers used a three-point scale. The children were shown three picture cards, one with a smiling face, one with a neutral face and a third denoting a frowning face. These cards were used by the children to identify their feelings about the questioned segments.”²⁰

Responses to a series of questions soliciting general reactions to the program indicated that overall appreciation was high. For example, when asked how much they liked the program, a large majority of children in Nigeria reported liking it a lot (90%). Almost all of the children in the study said they would watch the program again (95% in Nigeria and 94% in Senegal).

The majority of children in both countries also consistently liked the four segments that were discussed in detail. In most cases there was not a great deal of variation in their reported liking of the different types of segments. Some differences in responses do however indicate that children may have preferred the live action and Muppet segments as described below. During post-viewing interviews in Senegal, the majority of children in the sample stated that they liked each of the four segments “a lot,” with the older children voicing a greater enthusiasm than the younger ones. At 55%, younger children in Senegal least liked the animated segment “Red Brushes Teeth”. Their most liked segment was the Big Bird muppet segment. In Nigeria, more than 60% of the sample stated that they liked each of the four segments “a lot”, indicating the highest preference for the “African school” segment and lowest preference for the animated “Red brushes teeth” segment. (Please see the charts below for more details about segment preferences.)

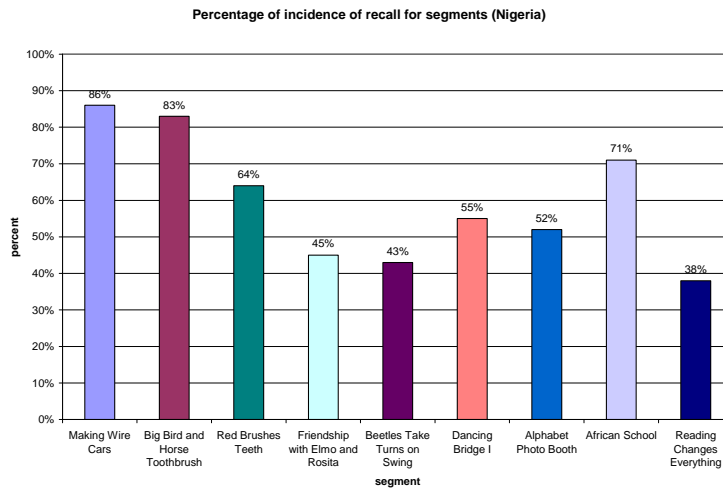


²⁰ Researchers conducting *Sesame Street* studies with young children around the world have experimented with multiple methods of soliciting feedback from children. One such method consists of using images of faces with different expressions to help children of varying levels of verbal proficiency to voice their opinions. It consists of having children point to a card with a smiley face (to indicate liking), a straight face (to indicate indifference), or a frowning face (to indicate dislike) as they answer questions related to their likes and dislikes. Researchers can then record verbal, as well as visual responses from children. As in past studies, researchers in West Africa tested the validity of this measure and familiarized the children with the cards by first introducing the cards during pre-exposure interviews. After verifying that children understood and benefited from using the cards by asking them questions about universally liked and disliked items (i.e., a sweet vs. a bitter herb), researchers used the face card measure for the entire study.



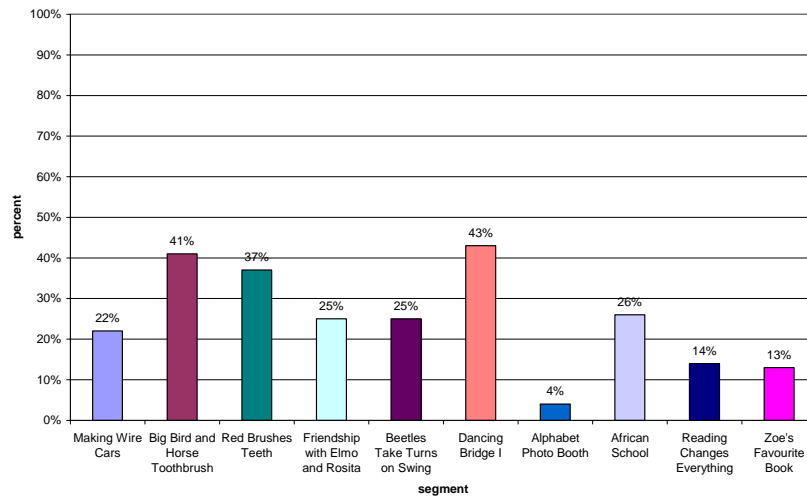
Responses to an open-ended question asking what children liked most did not reveal any important trends in liking of a particular format or segment.

When asked what they remembered most, Nigerian children most often mentioned the live action film from South Africa "Wire Car" and the Big Bird Muppet segment. The "African school" film was the third most often mentioned segment (see bar graph below).



In Senegal, fewer children were able to name specific segments in response to the same question. The three most commonly mentioned segments were two Muppet and one animated segment (see bar graph below).

Overall percentage of incidence of recall for segments (Senegal)



Taken together, these findings provide some indication that children in Nigeria may have found the segments featuring African content more salient. Although the difference in their reported liking of the segments is not large, the "African School" segment was most frequently cited as the segment that children "liked a lot." Additionally, images related to the African school segment were ones most featured in children's drawings in Nigeria, although a much larger number of children drew pictures that did not seem clearly tied to one specific segment. In Senegal the "African School" segment was well-liked - around 3/4ths of the children (70% of four to five year-olds and 72% of 7- to 8-year-olds) reported liking it "a lot." While this segment was not necessarily the most liked in Senegal, differences were small. Interestingly, the gap in liking between age groups was slightly smaller for this segment than others.

The appeal of the program was also evidenced by children's behaviors during the viewing session. For example, in the Nigeria study many children imitated actions on the screen, repeated letters presented during an alphabet segment and also smiled, laughed and danced at various points during the episode. These active behaviors that demonstrated enjoyment and engagement in the program were especially present during the two live action segments that highlighted African children, "Wire Car" and "African School," as well as during an animation segment that featured beetles made out of wire. Children in southern Nigeria also responded favorably to brief clips of Muppets doing African dancing, with some children getting up and dancing along with the Muppets.

Comprehension

Children's level of comprehension of both the television and radio episodes was assessed during one-on-one interviews that followed the viewing and listening sessions. Although some of the children in the sample were not able to fully understand the main messages of some of the segments, it seems that this limited comprehension did not greatly impact the general level of appeal and attentiveness. For example, in Nigeria although only 38% understood that the "Red brushes teeth" animation segment was about someone brushing teeth, this segment had a very high average "Eyes-on-Screen" score. In Senegal, although only 40% of the children in the four to five age group were able to correctly answer the question "what was Big Bird trying to teach?" 75% reported that they liked that segment a lot.

Children were asked specific questions to ascertain their comprehension level of four of the segments in the episode. In both Nigeria and Senegal, they exhibited the highest level of comprehension of “Big Bird and Horse,” the opening Muppet segment, and “African School.” Over 80% of children in Nigeria were able to identify the key themes for both of these segments.



Beninese boy drawing after having viewed a Sesame Street episode

Responses to some questions indicate that children in the older age group (age seven to eight) may have understood some of the segments better than the younger group (age 4-5). For example, older children in Senegal understood “Big Bird and Horse” and “Red Brushes Teeth” segments better than their younger counterparts. In Nigeria, 100% of the seven to eight year-olds understood that in the segment “Big Bird and Horse” Big Bird was teaching viewers about brushing teeth, as compared to 69% of the four to five year-olds.

In Senegal, the two age groups level of comprehension of this segment also differed. In the Senegalese sample, 60% of children ages seven to eight and 40% of children ages four to five understood the main point of this segment. This could be related to a number of factors including different language abilities or stages of development that may have affected their ability to answer the question or comprehend the segment.

There was also a difference in levels of comprehension between the different age groups in Senegal. For example, only 50% of the four to five year olds understood that the girl was going to school in the live action African school segment while 81% of the older children correctly responded to this question. In both countries children least understood the closing segment with the Muppets Zoe and Telly discussing Zoe’s favorite book. The reason for this low level of comprehension is not entirely clear, but it could be due to multiple factors, including the fact that it was placed at the end of the episode and was also the last segment on which the children were questioned.

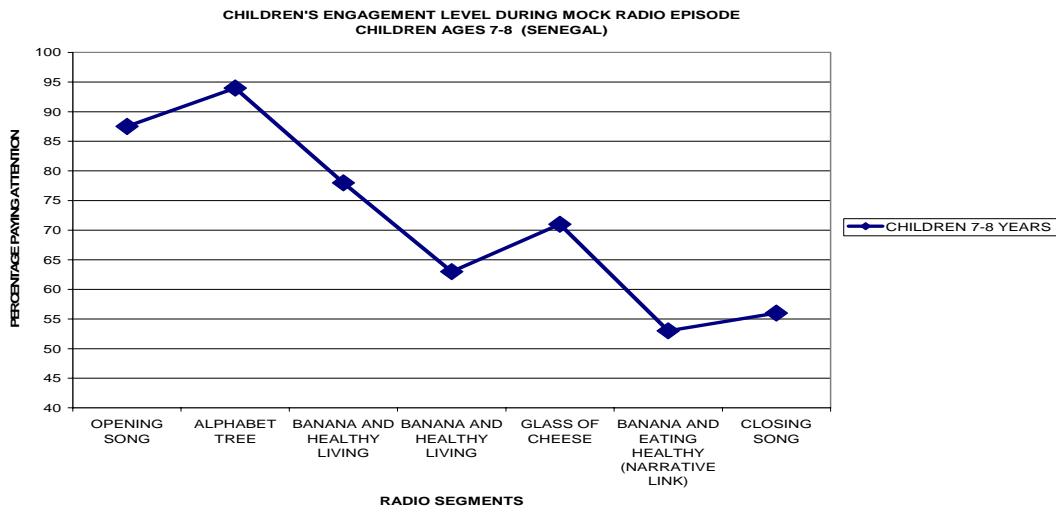
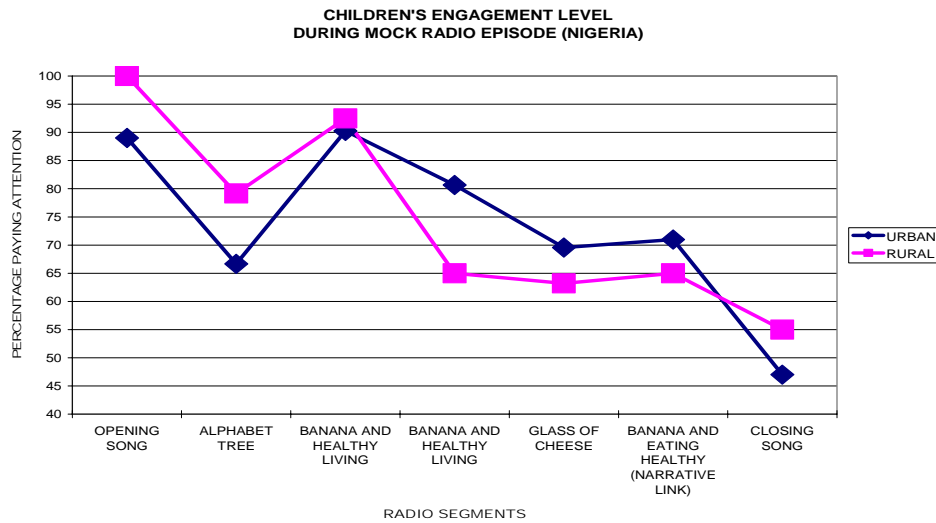


Drawing by a child in Benin after having viewed a Sesame Street episode featuring a schoolbag

The drawings that Beninese children made following an informal viewing session support interview findings regarding their level of comprehension, and the idea that the children understood the segments within their own contexts. For example, several children included a school bag in their drawings of the girl in the “African School” segment even though the girl did not have one. One possible explanation for the inclusion of a school bag in the drawings is that children understood that the girl was going to school and identified a school bag with going to school.

Children's Reactions to *Sesame Street* radio

Although the children's study was mainly designed to gauge children's reactions to a mock television program, some of the children in the sample (39 in Nigeria and 16 in Senegal) were exposed to a mock radio episode.²¹ Researchers measured children's engagement during the radio program by observing their behaviors (smiling, laughing, talking to friends, etc.), by checking to see whether or not they were focused on the program at ten second intervals and, after each segment, by rating the children's overall attention level during the segment from zero (not-at-all paying attention) to four (paying attention most of the time). In general, researchers observed that children seemed more distracted during the radio listening session than while watching the television episode.



²¹ The children who were exposed to the radio program in Senegal were also exposed to and interviewed about the television program, whereas in Nigeria the children who listened to the radio program did not view the television program.

As the preceding charts indicate, while attention levels of children were high at the outset of the radio episode, they tended to diminish as the program progressed. Researchers in Nigeria reported that the children were often very enthusiastic about the program initially but soon lost interest, most probably due to lack of understanding of the content which was presented in English. Clearly, without the visual clues presented in the video, children had a much more difficult time following and understanding the radio segment. Despite the perceptible drop in interest, the children's responses during post-listening interviews indicated that they liked the program.

As indicated above, children in both Senegal and Nigeria evidenced a much lower level of understanding of the radio episode. This could be due to the fact that the program was presented in the official language of the country (French in Senegal and English in Nigeria) and that there were no accompanying visual cues to help the children who had varying levels of proficiency in the language of the radio program.

C. Parents' and Caregivers' Reactions to *Sesame Street*:

Parents and caregivers in both Nigeria and Senegal who were exposed to the *Sesame Street* programs were, in general, very excited about the possibility of a West African *Sesame Street* program.

a. Reactions to Mock Television Episode:

"If children could be watching this type of program, we would have excellent children in our society.... They would gain a lot and our society will be better...." (Ibadan urban, Nigeria)

After viewing the TV program, parents²² in both Nigeria and Senegal praised its entertaining, educational and interesting nature. They especially liked the simple way in which educational content, such as the letters of the alphabet and information about brushing teeth, was presented. A few parents/caregivers did, however, have constructive criticism of the content especially in regard to cultural context. Nigeria, for example, some stressed the importance of including material that reflected their own values. A few parents in the Kano region of Nigeria noted that some elements, including the "shabby" appearance of the girl in the "African School" segment and the manner of dress of some of the other females in the program, were not in line with their Islamic values. In Senegal, some parents felt that the "Wire Car" segment was modeling unsafe practices by showing children collecting wire to make cars. Parents in Nigeria also stressed the importance of using local casts to "project the local culture and enhance language clarity." Overall, they expressed a preference for the segments that included African elements.

Further thoughts about what they viewed related to format issues. Some parents/caregivers in both Senegal and Nigeria felt that the length of each of the segments was too short and that the program moved too quickly from one topic to the next. Some parents in the Ibadan area of Nigeria mentioned that they felt that maximum impact of the program might not be achieved due to the fact that the amount of time devoted to addressing a given subject was too short.

²² The use of the term "parents" in this section of the document, refers to "parents", as well as, "caregivers" who were included in the parent/caregiver sample.

Overall, though, comments were positive. Parents in both countries mentioned that this is a program they think their children would like and some also expressed an interest in watching the program with their children. Parents in Senegal and Nigeria indicated that this program could help reinforce and/or broaden children's knowledge.

Language

"I prefer the program in French and on television. If [a child] watches the program in French on television, he could understand by the images and, at the same time, find a way to improve his level of French." (Mor Gaye, Dakar rural, Senegal)

Comments related to the appropriate language for a *Sesame Street* program were mixed. Some of the parents in Nigeria, especially in the North, expressed their view that the program should be in local language (Hausa) to improve children's understanding of the program content. Parents in Senegal, however, and in the southern part of Nigeria indicated that the use of the official language (French in Senegal and English in Nigeria) was important. In Senegal, these participants, many of whom had limited knowledge of French, believed it would be important to have a program in the official language in order to improve children's knowledge of it. Some parents in Nigeria voiced an objection to the strong Igbo accent of one of the characters in the episode and recommended that caution be taken to avoid featuring strong accents that reflect one particular ethnic group.

Target Age

The parents, in general, believed the program would be appropriate for children ages three to seven, with some mentioning that younger and older children could also benefit.

Maximizing Program Impact

"Buying it on cassette does not disturb the television program. The video cassette is meant to be watched at your own convenient time." (Ibadan urban, Nigeria)

Some parents in Nigeria (where there is a large home video production and sales industry) suggested putting the program on videocassette in order to expand the reach of the series. In addition, as mentioned above some parents/caregivers thought that the use of local languages could enhance reach and impact.

b. Reactions to the Mock Radio Episode

Researchers in Nigeria and Senegal found that parents' overall comprehension of the radio episode was low. Many expressed concern that children might not enjoy the program in its current form. However, some of the parents in Nigeria indicated that the program was both educational and interesting and that their children would enjoy listening to it. Parents in Nigeria also expressed an interest in listening to the program with their children.

Language

"They should have it in our Hausa language." (Kano urban)

Again, comments related to the ideal language for radio content were mixed. Many parents in Nigeria felt the radio program should be in local language. This was voiced especially strongly in the northern part of Nigeria, where parents thought it was important to develop the program in Hausa. While many respondents in the Ibadan area in Southern Nigeria felt that the use of Yoruba would increase the program's impact, some mentioned that the use of English would be acceptable if the diction were clearer. On the other hand, Senegalese parents indicated, as they did with television, that creating the series in French would help children improve their French abilities.

Use of Music

Parents in Nigeria reported enjoying the use of music in the show, though some didn't like the type of music used. A few parents in rural Nigeria (in both the North and the South) described the music as too "disco-like." A few parents in the Kano region objected to the music and felt it contradicted Quranic teachings. In Ibadan, parents objecting to the music felt it would distract the children.

Target Age

Many of the respondents indicated that the program would be most suitable for older children with parents in Nigeria suggesting a target age range of seven to twelve, and in Senegal, a target group of children who attend school and are age seven and older. In Senegal, parents mentioned the fact that the program was in French as a reason to gear the program for older children, since they would have a higher level of comprehension of French and could thus better follow the program.

c. Media Preferences

"All families do not have a television, but children will always manage to watch their favorite films elsewhere." (Fatou Ndiaye, Dakar rural, Senegal)

When asked to choose between having the program on television or on radio, most parents in Senegal voiced a preference for having it on television. In Nigeria, many parents in urban areas and in the south voiced a preference for television, while many in the north as well as parents in the rural areas indicated a preference for radio. The parents who preferred television believed the combination of visual and audio could have a heightened impact. Those who voiced a preference for radio did so because of its availability and the limited access to electricity and televisions.

D. Educators' Reactions to Sesame Street

a. Reactions to Mock Television Episode

"It is very clear, not difficult to understand. Any child that watches it will develop his talents fast" (Ibadan urban, Nigeria)

The overall reactions of educators in Nigeria and Senegal to the TV program were favorable. In both countries, they viewed the episode as being educational and one that their students would enjoy. Participants in Nigeria praised the way that the alphabet was taught and believed it would help children to identify the letters of the alphabet.

However, educators in Nigeria indicated that the program did not have enough local cultural content. Some in Ibadan did not like the way the girl in the "African School" segment was portrayed and felt that the fact that she was not well clothed and walked barefoot showed that her parents did not take proper care of her. Educators in Senegal said the program should be produced in Senegal.

Language

"I would want to say it depends on the kind of school... some (children) can hear when you speak English to them, but they can not communicate in English. There are some that can't even understand it, but they won't complain" (Ibadan, rural, Nigeria)

Educators in Nigeria believed using local language would help children better understand the main messages presented in the radio episode. Some suggested using a mixture of local languages and English to increase the program's impact. Educators in Senegal indicated French would be the best language for the program, as they felt it would help students improve their French abilities.

Target Age

"If it is below (three to seven years) they may not understand it and if it more (above 7 years) they may see it as a plaything" (Ibadan rural, Nigeria)

In Senegal, educators expressed the opinion that the TV series could be appropriate for children ages three to nine. In Nigeria, educators were divided on this issue, with some thinking that it would be best for children ages three and up and others saying that it would best for a younger audience (ages one to three).

Usefulness as Teaching Aid

"It is a program that ought to be in every class"

Educators in both countries expressed an interest in using the program as a teaching aid. However, some educators in Nigeria mentioned time constraints and the lack of TV sets in the schools as logistical obstacles to the program's use in classrooms. In Senegal, educators mentioned that they thought their students would like to watch the program. They also thought it would serve as a helpful educational resource and a means of introducing them to various educational themes.

Recommendations

"If we want to talk about this, we could see that white people's habits are so much in it. If we adapt it to our own culture, it would allow children to know of our culture. It should be more of Africa." Kano, urban

Recommendations made by educators centered on the degree of “localness” of content, themes that the series could address, the format and the approach to presenting topics. As indicated above, in both Nigeria and Senegal they suggested including more material reflecting local culture, including music, and dress. Ideas for program themes differed. In Senegal, they included the child’s environment, fishing, agriculture, raising animals, malaria, AIDS and other pandemic illnesses.²³ In Nigeria, participants highlighted issues that would positively impact on children’s growth, specifically citing themes such as cleanliness and “applying oneself.”

In terms of format and educational impact, educators in Nigeria recommended treating only one topic per episode, while in Senegal, it was suggested that segments be lengthened to give children more time to reflect on the content. Educators in Nigeria also recommended helping teachers to effectively use the program as an educational tool.

b. Reactions to Mock Radio Episode

*“The program will teach attentiveness and how to speak good English...”
(Ibadan rural, Nigeria)*

Educators in both Nigeria and Senegal thought it would be valuable to have an educational radio program to support children’s learning. In Nigeria, they pointed to the medium’s value due to expense and accessibility

Unlike parents, educators tended to agree that having the program in local language would enhance comprehension. In Senegal they particularly mentioned that the current French format would not be suitable for children under age seven

Target Age

Educators in Senegal felt that the radio program, in its current format in official language, would be best suited for children ages seven to nine. Educators in Nigeria were divided about the target age with some indicating that it should be for children above age seven, while others felt it would be appropriate for children ages three to seven. The preference for the older age could be due to the fact that the programs in this study were presented in French (in Senegal) and English (in Nigeria), languages of which many of the younger children have limited comprehension.

Usefulness as a teaching aid

“If a child listens to such a program, he will think he’s playing, not knowing that he is learning.” (Ibadan rural, Nigeria)

In both Nigeria and Senegal, educators expressed a positive view about using radio as a teaching tool because it could reinforce what they are teaching and stimulate children’s interest.

²³ These themes did not coincide with those identified by educators with whom the Sesame Workshop/EDC team met during meetings with stakeholders in a separate trip.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations of educators included making the program more interactive, reflecting the local culture and including songs. In Senegal, educators felt that the segments were too short and suggested that they last longer and be more spaced out.

c. Media Preferences

"We want both because anyone that can't afford TV would have a radio, so it's both." (Ibadan urban, Nigeria)

When asked to choose whether they would prefer a children's television program or a children's radio program, educators in Nigeria indicated a preference for the television program because they felt that the audio and visual combination would increase children's comprehension of the programs. Some educators voiced a preference for radio based on accessibility and lack of power in some places, which limits the use of television.

E. Current Media Habits

a. Television

During one-on-one interviews at the beginning of the sessions, researchers asked children and parents about their access to television, radio and other media, their media habits and media preferences. In Nigeria 87% of the children reported having TV at home with a higher percentage of urban (95%) than rural (78%). Interviews with parents/caregivers confirmed this with 93% reporting that they had a television at home. In Senegal less than half of the children's sample (45%) overall and (23%) in the semi-urban area of Diourbel reported having a television in their household.

Although the percentage of children who have access to television in their home varies, 100% of the children in both the Nigerian and Senegalese samples reported that they had viewed television programs in the past. When asked about the current viewing habits of their children, the large majority of the parents/caregivers in Nigeria (93%) reported that their children watch television.

Preferred Programs

Children in Nigeria (22%) reported cartoons as their favorite programs, while in Senegal films were listed as children's favorite types of programs (preferred by 29% or more across rural and urban categories in both sample regions).

Viewing Site

When asked where they watched television, most of the children in Nigeria (78%) reported watching in their home, while a small percentage stated that they watch at a friend's house (10%); at a relative's house (8%) or at school (4%). This information was supported by responses from parents about their children's habits, with the majority (89%) reporting that their children watch TV at home, as compared to watching at a relative's house (5%), friend's house (3%) or at school (7% urban; 0% rural).

Co-viewership

The majority of the children in Senegal and Nigeria reported that they watch television with their siblings (78% in Senegal and 55% in Nigeria). Children in both countries who mentioned family members were most likely to say they watched television with their mothers, followed by fathers. Friends and neighbors were also commonly cited, though less so than mothers.

When asked what activities they liked to do with their children, parents in Nigeria most often cited watching television (52%). In rural areas, the majority (54%) cited book reading as their favorite shared activity.

The majority of parents in both countries reported watching television with their children. In Nigeria, sixty percent (60%) of parents stated that they watched TV with their children (24% reported watching with spouse and children. In Senegal, the majority of parents (89.3%) reported watching television with their children either regularly (46.4% of the parents in the sample) or sometimes (42.9% of the parents in the sample). The large majority of parents (78.8% in Senegal) stated that they discuss what they watch on television with their children.

b. Radio

Almost all of the children in Nigeria (98%) reported that there is a radio in their home. The prevalence of the radio in the home was lower in Senegal with approximately 40% of the sample reporting that they had a radio at home (48% of the rural sample in Dakar, 50% of the semi urban in Dakar, 48% of the urban sample in Diourbel and 31% of the semi-urban sample in Diourbel).

In Nigeria, when asked whether or not they listen to the radio, 83% of the children reported listening, with no major differences between urban, rural, north and south. In Senegal 74% reported that they listen to the radio, with a higher percentage (85%) in the Dakar region than in the Diourbel region.

In Nigeria, the large majority of parents (92%) reported that they had a radio at home.

Place of listenership- Most of the children in Nigeria reported listening to the radio in their home (80%) with a small minority listening at a relative's house (9%), at a friend's house (6%) or at school (3%).

Co-Listenership- The majority of parents in Senegal indicated that they listen to the radio with their children either regularly (50%) or sometimes (33%) and less than half of the parents in Nigeria (35%) reported listening to the radio with their children.

Preferred programs

In both Nigeria and Senegal, children listed "music" (40% of Senegal sample; 31% of Nigeria sample) as one their favorite things to listen to on radio. In the northern part of Nigeria, 13% of the children also listed Hausa children's drama programs as their favorite radio programs.

When parents in Nigeria were asked what programs they like to watch with their children, parents in both the north and south mentioned dramas (25%) and cartoons (12%).

Parents in southern Nigeria were more likely to mention dramas (49%), while parents in northern Nigeria stated that they liked to watch “Wasan Hausa”, Hausa plays and drama programs (24%).

c. Media habits of educators

Almost all of the educators in Nigeria reported watching TV (97%) or listening to radio (97%), with all of the educators (100%) stating that they have a television and a radio in their home.

Use of media in the classroom

In Nigeria, educators cited books as the most commonly available tool for teaching in the classroom (used by 50% of educators), television as the second most used medium (used by 22% of the educators) and radio as the third (used by 13% of the sample).

In Senegal, all of the educators (100%) stated that they never watch television or listen to the radio with their students, primarily because they do not have access to these media at school. The educators mentioned that the media that they most often use in the classroom are books, pictures and other educational materials.

Of the educators in Nigeria who mentioned that they do not watch television with their students, the majority (67%) stated that this was because they had no television in their classroom. Educators also claimed that they did not watch television in their classrooms because they felt that there were no good programs available. In Nigeria, more educators in the urban area (60%) watch television with their students than educators in the rural area (44%).

Educators throughout Nigeria, when asked what TV programs they use in the classroom, stated that they show their students cartoons (shown by 32% of the sample). In the north, educators also reported showing their students Hausa dramas in the (18% of the educators in the north) and in the south, educators also reported showing quiz programs (20%) and cultural dance programs (20%). It is interesting to note that only the male teachers showed their children cartoons (50%) while none of the female teachers (0%) showed cartoons in the classroom.



Sesame Street viewing session in Benin

The large majority of educators in the Kano region (94%), when asked whether they listened to the radio with their students, reported doing so, while only one-third of the educators in the Ibadan region (33%) reported listening with their students. Of the educators that reported using the radio in their classroom, the majority (58%) stated that they use it to teach educational messages and more than two-thirds (70%) stated that they discuss the content of the radio programs with their students. However, none of the educators in Senegal reported using radio because they said they did not have them in their classrooms.

Use of Language in the Classroom

In Nigeria, the majority of teachers (53%) reported using English as the main language of instruction. Approximately half of the teachers in the north (50%) reported using Hausa in the classroom, while one-quarter of the teachers in the south (25%) reported using Yoruba in the classroom.

F. Implications of Research

In general, the findings of this research indicate strong interest among children, parents/caregivers, and educators in a regional *Sesame Street* project for West Africa. This was supported by responses demonstrated during viewing and listening sessions and by views expressed in interviews with children, parents/caregivers, and educators. At the same time, the research highlights a number of issues to take into account while developing content. They include challenges related to language, access and cultural relevance.

Children's engagement with the television episode was universally high as evidenced by eyes-on-screen data and supported by additional behavioral observation during viewing sessions. Children also reported liking the program and indicated a desire to watch it again. There were some indications that they were particularly attracted to the type of live action local content that the show would likely feature. Although these findings should be interpreted with caution, they lend support to the idea that more culturally relevant content is more salient for this target group. In addition, children apparently liked and remembered several segments featuring Muppets, which are the hallmark of *Sesame Street* productions around the world.

Although the scope of this study did not allow us to explore language issues in great detail it was clear that despite language barriers, children were able to enjoy the television content and, to some degree, comprehend story lines. There were indications that older children were better able to fully understand the different segments.

The radio episode did not elicit the same level of attention, recall, or comprehension as the television episode. These findings indicate that if radio is to be effective it will need to be produced in local languages. Educators supported the idea of doing so, while some parents (who may not themselves have spoken their national language) opposed it due to their overriding concern over exposing children to national language through radio.

In Nigeria children and parents/caregivers both reported much higher television ownership than did their counterparts in Senegal. In spite of our best efforts to reach disadvantaged populations, even those with no access to electricity, these findings could have been a function of a sample that is not representative of the entire country. Respondents in both countries universally reported that they have watched television before. Where television is available, it is probably the preferred medium, and it would clearly reach a large enough number of children and families. However, adults participating in the study (particularly educators) did make it clear that radio content could be valuable for reaching children who do not watch TV.

Both educators and parents/caregivers expressed enthusiasm after seeing and/or hearing the episodes for a *Sesame Street* project in West Africa and made various recommendations on how to make its content more relevant, appropriate, and accessible, in terms of format, medium, themes, and language of choice.

In terms of developing a future project, the research indicates the value of developing content that is as culturally relevant while taking into account both language barriers and media access barriers. Interesting discussions among adults related to discrepancies between the daily habits of a West African girl that featured in one of the segments and differing local customs in north and south Nigeria highlight the challenges in creating local content and the importance of formative testing as materials are being developed. It is clear that the three groups who participated in research would appreciate content delivered in any medium. If a project is developed and implemented, the team should be cognizant of rural-urban differences and continue to verify that material is reaching the maximum number possible through an appropriate combination of media channels. Testing of materials with children and adults as they are developed will ensure that content is useful, relevant, and educational.

VII. Partnerships and Sustainability

Creating a regional West African *Sesame Street* project represents a real challenge that demands a coherent approach covering a wide range of institutions working in education, health, media and community development. The design and implementation of a West Africa Sesame Street program necessitates the establishment of fundamental partnerships with local and international entities working in West Africa.

Following the flexible and adaptive Sesame Workshop's production model, the business models, funding approaches and revenue streams, that sustain the locally produced versions vary significantly with the economic and media landscapes as well as individual country needs and economic circumstances. Sesame Workshop employs multiple financial strategies to fulfill its mission and sustain long-term viability of *Sesame Street* and its co-productions. As the international media landscape becomes more crowded and complex, the magnitude of the financial commitment needed for these productions increasingly requires a financial investment by a coalition of partners (including bi-lateral and multi-lateral donor agencies, foundations and corporate sponsors), rather than just a single entity.

As part of the financial strategy, the Workshop assembles public and private funding to support a given project's educational initiatives. Over the years, the Workshop has formed funding alliances with a variety of government, broadcast, corporate and philanthropic partners to support initiatives in the United States and around the World. The number of funders and the roles of each have varied based on the specific needs and situations of the project. For example, in Bangladesh, a current initiative to develop a local *Sesame Street* adaptation is being funded in entirety by USAID, while for other projects there is a coalition of funders involved. The Sesame Stories initiative in Israel, Palestine and Jordan, for example, benefits from the support of 12 funding partners, which include the European Union, Dutch and Canadian governments, as well as major US-based and international foundations (Ford Foundation, The Revson Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, The Bernard van Leer Foundation and others).

Sesame Workshop has benefited from a wide variety of partnerships and collaborations in the US and internationally to help with the research, educational content development and production processes, as well as with training and implementation of outreach initiatives. In South Africa, for example, an ongoing partnership between the Department of Education, SABC, Sanlam Life, Ltd. (a private sector sponsor), USAID and Sesame Workshop, has enabled the *Takalani Sesame* project to develop and broadcast a national television series, a radio series (broadcast in local languages on local stations) and an extensive outreach initiative (which includes training sessions and developing educational materials for children and caregivers in many of the country's official languages). Based on the collaboration between the partners, the series has been able to address basic literacy, numeracy and life skills, as well as to promote educational goals related to HIV and AIDS through a multi-pronged, multimedia approach.

A major initial investment from USAID could enable the team to leverage support from commercial and other sources for the sustainability of the project. Based on preliminary conversations during the feasibility study in West Africa, potential funding sources for a West African *Sesame Street* program were identified. They include, but are not limited to:

1. International organizations such USAID, World Bank, DFID, UNICEF

2. Government institutions such as ministries of education and early childhood development, health, environment, culture, women's and children's affairs
3. Private sector businesses such as Nestlé, Bournvita, Cowbell, Unilever, The Laughing Cow, Peak, Fanmilk, Cadbury

A local West African co-production of *Sesame Street* will require funding partners as well implementation partners. Strong partnerships with international and local organizations (private and public) working in West Africa in media and education will be the cornerstone to a successful implementation a West African co-production of *Sesame Street*.

Implementation partners would first and foremost include production and broadcast houses. Partnerships with radio and television production houses, national, private and/or independent from the various participating countries will be critical for the production of local Live Action segments on the one hand, and to ensure the cultural and educational relevance of each program on the other.

Strong partnerships with broadcasting entities, mainly national television and radio networks, can ensure favorable broadcast rates and times as well as access to production facilities, and the widest national coverage. In addition, most national television broadcasters visited seem also be leaders in the production of local material as they usually own better equipment, more studio space, and staff the most trained personnel.



National Film and Television Institute,
Accra, Ghana

National broadcasters are under pressure to fill the required children's and education program quota. All stakeholders met with were very impressed by the focus and delivery of a *Sesame Street* program, and were especially taken by the production value such a program carries. Many explained that a *Sesame Street* production would raise the production bar; a challenge they are most eager to meet.

Additionally, partnerships with other private, state or community television and radio stations would increase broadcast opportunities thus increasing access to the program.

International organizations and local NGO's also present important partnership opportunities. Organizations such as UNICEF offer strong community based networks and programs in girls and early childhood education throughout the region. EDC's work in Nigeria, Ghana, Mali and Guinea offers direct access to large numbers of students, teachers and parents through teacher training programs, interactive radio instruction programs and PTA associations. A West African *Sesame Street* program would benefit tremendously by tapping into these existing networks, not only to promote *Sesame Street* materials but also to increase impact and awareness around the importance of early childhood education.

Collaboration with civil society groups with experience in advocacy and service delivery to disadvantaged communities would help promote dialogue with governments, local and national, on key issues such as girls' education and pre-primary education. The main goal of such partnerships would be the promotion of early childhood education by

creating links between the public and the private sectors in support of Education for All programs throughout the region.

Finally, constant dialogue with stakeholders will be indispensable to a successful West African *Sesame Street*. To that end, one may envision an advisory committee composed of representatives from all participating countries and from various sectors of activity. This multi-country, multi-sectoral committee would serve as the guiding force behind the design of programs by actively choosing appropriate and relevant themes, by elaborating culturally and linguistically appropriate methods of presentation and by acting as advocates for the West African *Sesame Street* program in discussions with funding and implementing partners. An advisory committee would allow for greater buy-in at the local level and would ensure that the program addresses local needs all the while retaining a distinctive West African flavor.

Through its funding alliances and partnerships with local broadcasters, public, private organizations and government entities, the Workshop strives to build local capacity in order to achieve long term project sustainability and to maximize the reach and impact of each initiative. One example of how this has been achieved is in Russia, where the *Ulitsa Sesam* program began in 1996 with financial support from USAID and the Soros Foundation/ Open Society Institute. Since that time, the program has been able to secure a corporate sponsor, Nestlé Food, who has helped the project to be self-sustaining and to further the scope, reach and impact of the series. Sesame Workshop is continually seeking new opportunities to develop new partnerships that will contribute to the creation of long-term sustainable educational programs that are engaging and culturally appropriate and that contribute to increased local capacity.

VIII. Conclusions

According to feedback received from stakeholders, parents, educators and children, there is a strong interest in and a need for culturally-relevant, educationally-sound materials for children in the region. Stakeholders expressed an interest in collaborating on a *Sesame Street* initiative and representatives from the education sector felt that such an initiative will help to further the educational goals of the Education Ministries Representatives.

Research conducted among children, parents and educators in phase 2 of the study demonstrates the value and desirability of a *Sesame Street* project. Children in rural and urban communities participating in the research studies in Senegal and Nigeria reacted favorably to mock *Sesame Street* radio and television episodes. They showed great interest in the *Sesame Street* programs and were, for the most part, highly attentive during television viewing sessions. The overwhelming majority of the children expressed a strong liking for the program and indicated a desire to watch the show again. Preference for the program increased slightly with age, with more 7-8 year olds expressing that they liked the program a lot. Children also had a generally good understanding of the main themes presented in the television program, although many of the children did not understand some of the details in the segments. Although children's attention and comprehension levels were lower during the sample radio programs, most likely due to the lack of supporting visual clues and because the programs were presented entirely in the countries' official languages (English in Nigeria, French in Senegal), children seemed to enjoy the program and expressed a desire to listen to the show again. Parents and educators, who were exposed to the mock radio and television episodes, were also very receptive to the idea of having a television and a radio program developed for the children of West Africa and felt that a *Sesame Street* initiative would reinforce and expand upon educational messages that children are learning at home and in the classroom.

Through the judicious use of the broadcast media (both television and radio), as well as related educational outreach materials, *Sesame Street* would have wide reach among the primary target group of West African pre- and early school-age children as well as their families.

However, caution would need to be taken to make sure that content is relevant to and appropriate for children of West Africa. Also, based on feedback from stakeholders and the results of field research, children's varying levels of proficiency of their countries'



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official languages (English or French), would need to be taken into account when developing a *Sesame Street* initiative in order to assure maximum reach and impact. Concentration on regionally produced materials highlighting the West African culture in all its beauty, complexity and diversity would meet the strong approval of stakeholders ever concerned by the dominance of Western values and images within the media today. As *Sesame Street* has demonstrated all over the world, productions can be carefully crafted not only to meet shared educational objectives but also to help foster self-esteem and

an appreciation of children's own culture and environment in a context in which positive media images of young children and their families are rare.

West African *Sesame Street* productions should be used in a myriad of ways. The flagship television show will not only reach millions of young children on a daily basis, but also be seen by educators, parents and decision makers alike. Radio adaptations in local languages would extend reach and reinforce key messages from the television show. Additionally, the use of local languages, particularly in radio adaptations, would help to address language comprehension problems that we noted during phase two of this study.

Finally, multi-media outreach projects and training including a mix of appropriate channels needed to reach the audiences with limited access to television would add additional value and allow for local country adaptation and needs.

IX. Recommendations

We strongly endorse and recommend that USAID invest in a project designed to produce and make available to countries throughout the region a wide range of new and innovative West African *Sesame Street* material. This material would include a flagship regional West African television series coupled with pilot radio and multimedia outreach projects. Both pilot projects would be initially implemented in two countries, one Francophone and one Anglophone, and would include small-scale studies to gain information that would inform subsequent expansion of these initiatives, funding permitting. Outreach projects would entail the development of multimedia content that may include print, audiocassettes, or other materials, as well as training materials for educators and parents. In order to ensure sustainability and allow the project the needed time to build up partner and sponsorship support, we believe that it is important that USAID support a minimum 5-year initiative that would include two distinct phases: a one year development phase to be followed by a four year production and implementation phase. The project would work closely with educators, producers and broadcasters in participating West African countries to plan and then implement a *Sesame Street* project that will be uniquely tailored to the needs and interests of the children, educators and parents of West Africa.

During the development phase, the team will also identify partners, assess production capacity, develop key regional educational objectives and develop production and broadcast plans for the project.

During the implementation phase, the project will produce three seasons of a West African *Sesame Street* television series using a format like one or a combination of the various models in Section III. In this phase, the team will also finalize broadcast deals and launch the West African *Sesame Street* television series. The project would include formative research and small-scale studies related to radio and outreach projects. (Summative research to assess educational impact and reach are not currently part of the estimated budget presented under "implementation phase" below. And finally, this phase will allow the team to work with interested partners and expand radio and outreach pilot initiatives to reach additional countries with content in additional local languages. Radio would be developed drawing from previous experiences in the region with models such as *Takalani Sesame* Radio and EDC's classroom-based Interactive Radio Instruction. These pilot outreach programs should be coordinated with local partners and key stakeholders. Given the dearth of relevant and interesting materials available for both pre-school- and primary-school-age children, these pilot outreach programs should work to develop strategies and materials that could more effectively be used for both formal and non-formal education efforts. Both approaches are necessary to reach the target audience because of the limited or unavailable formal education opportunities for that age group. The radio and outreach components would also help to reinforce and expand the messages presented in the television program and to reach out to people who might not have access to the television broadcast.

The following details the proposed plan:

A. Development Phase

Given the complexity of a regional television intervention, we foresee a development phase of one year. During the first year of the project, the team would identify partners,

assess production capacity, and develop educational objectives for a *Sesame Street* initiative that will meet the needs of the children, parents and educators of West Africa. This phase will include fact-finding visits and meetings to explore opportunities to collaborate with educators, producers and partners. The team will engage in a process to define the scope of the project and the potential target audience, as well as to help determine where the material could be produced and broadcast. The following meetings and workshops will help establish a foundation to guide the development of the *Sesame Street* initiative through the activities and deliverables detailed below. The development phase is expected to cost approximately \$1.2 – 1.4 million.

Activities:

- 1) Meeting with Broadcasters and Ministries:** At the initial phase of the project, the team will convene a meeting of broadcasters and representatives from Ministries of Education and Information in various West African countries. The goals of the dialogue will include the following:
 - assess interest of individual countries in being involved in the production and broadcast;
 - identify potential broadcast partners;
 - assess regional needs and discuss an approach that will result in a truly regional project; and
 - gain support and endorsement from representatives from the broadcast and government sectors.

- 2) Production Assessment Trip:** Production staff from Sesame Workshop (which will include individuals with production, as well as research and curriculum expertise) will travel to West Africa to meet with individuals from the production industry and assess production capacity. This visit will also help the team to determine where the program could be produced (which country or countries; which studio(s), etc.), potential production personnel and broadcast outlets. Immediately afterwards, a Request for Proposals (RFP) will be issued to qualified production companies. (See deliverables section below for more details.) The production team will explore options for radio partners at this time as well. Outreach staff will also meet with educators and potential partners including NGOs to gather information that will inform the design of a pilot project in the implementation phase.

- 3) Regional Educational Content Seminar:** The team will convene a meeting of West African experts from a range of fields, including education, child development, health, literacy, science, math and other disciplines from West Africa. The purpose of this seminar will be to identify core educational issues to present in a West African version of *Sesame Street*. During the session, each of the experts will make a short presentation about what she or he sees as the most pressing educational needs facing children in the region. Following a discussion of these needs, participants will work in groups to identify culturally relevant, age-appropriate educational objectives, drawing as needed from a *Statement of Educational Objectives* used as a framework for developing educational goals for *Sesame Street* projects around the world.

Initial conversations that have taken place as part of the feasibility study indicate that important areas of focus include basic skills (including literacy and mathematics), critical thinking, respect and understanding, health, hygiene and nutrition and appropriate social interaction. Additionally educators, parents and

stakeholders all highlighted the great need for quality educational materials for pre-school-age and early elementary school-age children for use in both formal and non-formal settings. Qualitative research confirmed too that tested video and audio mock episodes of *Sesame Street* elicited high interest and appeal for children from the ages of four to eight. Building on this information, the team would hold discussions with experts during the development phase to further define the target audience for television content, and during the implementation phase, for radio and outreach material. Specifically, experts would address the question of whether the West African *Sesame Street* initiative should target pre-school age or early primary-school-age children or some combination of both.

Based on input from the participants at this meeting, West African educators will collaborate to develop a *Statement of Educational Objectives* for the series that will guide the production team in developing material for the program. A team of West African educators will also be hired to work as an integral part of the production team to coordinate and drive the development process and assist in creating material that meets the series' educational objectives.

Deliverables:

As a result of the development phase, the team will produce the following deliverables:

- 1) Selection of a production team:** During the Development Phase, the team will issue a Request for Proposals to potential production teams. Sesame Workshop will then review the proposals and select a production team to co-produce a West African version of *Sesame Street* that will include media content produced in different countries in West Africa. The project will be led by a team that draws from both Francophone and Anglophone experts in education, research, and production in more than one West African country.
- 2) Development of an educational content plan:** Following the regional educational content seminar, a team of West African educators will collaborate to develop a *Statement of Educational Objectives* that will provide a framework for the project. This document is essentially a list of skills across cognitive, physical, social and emotional domains that children should acquire when they are exposed to *Sesame Street*. It is tailored to reflect priorities and realities of the region and serves as a compass for writers and producers as they develop material for the production.
- 3) Development of an approach for collaborating across countries:** A key objective of the development phase will be to devise a strategy for bringing together producers, researchers, educators and others from across the region. The involvement of a multi-country team is essential in order to create a series that looks and feels West African and responds to the diversity of educational needs and cultural realities across the region. This strategy will entail creating mechanisms to facilitate this work in spite of logistical, communications, and language difficulties.
- 4) Establishment of a regional consortium of partners:** A primary outcome of the meeting with broadcasters and ministries will be to gain the consensus and endorsement of participants. In particular, the meeting will serve to strengthen relationships with broadcasters from different countries who see the project as offering value to their viewers. By the end of the development phase, the project will have obtained a commitment from these partners to support the project and air

television content. They will form the core of an ongoing consortium, which may also include educators and key creative partners that will drive the project. Such support and “ownership” of the project by local stakeholders is essential to its ultimate sustainability.

- 5) Development of project plan:** The team will develop a project plan that will outline the process for creating, implementing and evaluating a *Sesame Street* initiative. This plan will serve as a road map for the development and implementation of the *Sesame Street* project. The plan will contain:
- a description of activities related to the project’s educational content development and research;
 - information about the format of a series and the elements that will be locally produced;
 - a preliminary approach to the use of national and local languages in various content elements;
 - information about the administrative structure of the project;
 - a detailed timeline for the various elements of the project, including production deadlines, and the planning and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities;
 - the identification of potential funding partners to ensure long term financial sustainability of the project;
 - A timelines for roll-out of pilot outreach and radio pilots and information about the countries and specific local languages in which these pilots are likely to be implemented.

B. Implementation Phase

During the implementation phase, the *Sesame Street* initiative will be brought to life, building on the foundation created during the development phase of the project. The implementation phase will take place over the course of four years, beginning in the second year of the project, and will include the development of a television component of three seasons of production that can be broadcast over the final years of the project’s life. We strongly recommend that there be one English version of the television program that would be broadcast in Anglophone countries and a French language version that would air in Francophone countries.

The implementation of pilot radio and outreach components and subsequent expansion of these initiatives will also take place during the implementation phase. The finalized outreach pilot plan will detail educational focus, types of educational and training materials to be produced, target groups, a training plan, and means of dissemination. Both pilot projects will be launched in year two. Materials will be developed initially in French and English and then may be adapted in targeted areas in selected major local languages according to the outreach plan developed in consultation with local experts. The dissemination component of the outreach plan will specify which countries and regions will initially benefit from pilot outreach efforts. Funding permitting, initial outreach and radio pilot projects may be expanded throughout the life of the project to additional regions, beginning in year three. This phase will also include ongoing formative research, which will help guide the production of materials for the project, by providing feedback on the appeal and comprehension of materials in development. Depending upon availability of funds, the project will conduct impact research to evaluate the reach of the initiative and its educational impact on the target audience.

Estimated costs for the elements of this plan are as follows. A detailed budget with more precise numbers could be prepared at a later phase if the project goes forward.

- For production of three seasons of television, including educational content development and formative research (but not research to evaluate educational impact and reach): \$8-10 million
- For a pilot outreach project targeting two countries: \$350-500,000
- For a pilot radio project targeting two countries: \$350-500,000.

Expansion of both pilot projects would require separate funding.

The Implementation Phase will include the following activities:

1) Educational Content Development and Formative Research: As part of the production process, the team will engage in ongoing research, as well as educational content review to make sure that all materials developed for the series address the identified educational objectives and that they are culturally-relevant, engaging and easily understood by the target audience. This will include the following:

- **Content Review:** During the content review process, producers, writers and educational content experts collaborate to review scripts and other content in development to assure that the material is engaging, age appropriate, and culturally relevant. From an educational standpoint, the key goal of script review is to make sure each script promotes one of the educational objectives of the series. On an ongoing basis, educational content and research staff are available to answer questions from producers and writers about how children will respond to particular show elements, characters, and/or individual segments. Furthermore, as part of this process, educators on the team provide guidelines and reference material to help the team understand child development issues and the best ways to present various messages. The team will have access to Sesame Workshop's 30-year expertise in educational media and will benefit from the collective of training material developed over the years.
- **Formative Research:** Ongoing formative research will be conducted as the themes and materials for the project are being developed in order to help the team create materials that are culturally-rooted and that are understandable and engaging to the target audience. This research involves small-scale studies with groups of children to test specific materials in development, such as scripts, television segments, and later entire episodes. These studies assess the appeal and level of comprehension of the material. This type of formative research also provides information on such aspects of the show as the appeal of its characters and format, and whether its educational goals are being met. Formative research, which usually includes focus groups or small surveys, may be conducted among parents and educators as well to gauge their reactions to the program and to learn what types of images and activities they would like portrayed.

2) Commitment from Broadcast Partners: During the implementation phase, the team will work further with the regional consortium of broadcast partners to secure commitments to broadcast television content and to identify the most beneficial

times for the series to air. As part of the radio initiative, radio broadcast partners will be selected in year two in consultation with local experts.

3) Production and Broadcast of TV Episodes: This will involve the production and broadcast of an English version, as well as a French language version of a West African adaptation of *Sesame Street*. The shows will combine both material from Sesame Workshop's international video library with locally-produced material from West Africa that will contain themes and messages specifically designed to be relevant to the children of West Africa. The production of these episodes will begin in the first year of the production phase and continue over a two to three year period. Broadcast of these episodes will begin in the three year of the project.

4) Implementation of Radio and Outreach Pilot Components and Potential Expansion: On a pilot basis, the team will implement in at least two countries unique plans targeted toward two countries and specific regions or languages within those countries to expand the reach and impact of the series through radio and outreach initiatives. Outreach materials will include productions in local languages that are designed to promote the educational messages of the series. The team will begin launch of these initiatives in the second year of the production phase, and expansion would occur in subsequent years if funding were available. The pilot plan for radio and outreach components, and later implementation plans, will specify the following:

- The number of countries in which these activities will take place and regions within each country they will cover;
- the specific languages to be used for both radio and outreach;
- a description of an appropriate vehicle for radio content for the West Africa region drawing from the experience and expertise of Sesame Workshop in radio and EDC in Interactive Radio Instruction and lessons learned in implementing these two programs;
- the type of outreach materials to be produced;
- a mechanism for selecting and involving partner NGOs, radio producers, and broadcasters in the production and launch of these elements;
- a plan for research on both pilot projects to inform the development of expanded initiatives.

Outreach activities in the pilot phase would include:

- The development of an outreach plan detailing information mentioned above about language, regions, countries, types of materials, and target groups;
- the selection and training of a local team;
- the establishment of relationships with key stakeholders who would inform the selection and development of materials;
- the development of a prototype training model and materials;
- training; and
- research to test materials and a small-scale study to assess their benefit, in order to inform later outreach phases.

The pilot project as budgeted provides for the development, production, testing and limited distribution of materials as well as training of educators and caregivers in selected sites in two countries, one Francophone and one Anglophone. The purpose would be to gain an initial understanding of the value of these materials and how they are used, with the intent of replicating on a larger scale throughout the pilot countries and into

additional countries as funding becomes available. Please note, the current budget does not include funds for a large scale country wide roll-out of these pilot activities, nor does it include additional promotional activities that could be designed to raise broader awareness of the series and educational objectives.

5) Development of Monitoring and Evaluation Plan: Once local staff including West African researchers is in place, the team will develop a monitoring and evaluation plan and timelines for the *Sesame Street* project. The plan will specify indicators of project success and describe the monitoring systems and research studies that will be used to assess progress against these indicators. The following elements will be detailed in the plan:

- **Monitoring of the Project:** The monitoring process will track the implementation of different components of the project to determine whether they are being implemented according to the timeline outlined in the project plan and to assess whether distribution targets have been met. The following elements may be part of the project's monitoring system:
 - Outreach staff will record the amount and type of materials produced and distributed and the number and types of individuals receiving them.
 - Training records and training evaluation forms completed by participants will provide records of the number and type of individuals trained to conduct outreach activities as well as information about the quality of training.
 - An outside entity such as a marketing firm will be hired to monitor radio and television broadcasts to assure that the programs air at appropriate times, according to the project plan.

- **Evaluation of the Project**

The cost of the following studies is not currently included in the estimated range for television production provided above.

- **Reach studies:** The team will use a variety of approaches to assess the reach of the *Sesame Street* initiative. Ratings information, when available, will help provide information about the viewership of the television program. To supplement this information, studies will also be conducted with parents and children to gain more information about their viewing and listening habits and to get a better sense of who is watching the television program and listening to the radio program. Research will be conducted in urban, as well as rural areas to provide the team with a better understanding of the level of appeal of the programs, as well as the level of access to these programs. Such studies also help the team understand the target audience's media habits and help determine the level of viewership and listenership to the television and radio programs.

Studies will also be conducted to assess the reach of the outreach initiative. Overall, these studies will provide information about who is benefiting from the program's various components and the ways in which individuals access and interact with the program materials.

- o **Educational Impact Assessment:** Research will be conducted to determine the educational impact of the series on children who are exposed to it. Baseline and follow-up studies will assess the progress children make in the educational skills the program presents. In general, impact assessments of *Sesame Street* projects focus primarily on children’s learning of basic aspects of the project’s educational objectives, including, literacy, numeracy and social relations skills. The research team may also decide to conduct special studies related to the other educational themes, as deemed most important by the advisors and content experts who work on the series’ *Statement of Educational Objectives*.
- o **Additional studies:** In addition, the research team may decide to conduct qualitative or quantitative studies to explore other effects of the project on children, parents, educators and potentially other project stakeholders. Such studies will be determined when the Research Plan is developed at the commencement of the Implementation phase.

C. Timeline

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Development Phase				
	Development of Monitoring and Evaluation Plan			
	Educational Content Development and Review			
	Production of TV episodes			
	Implementation of pilot radio and outreach components			
		Broadcast of TV episodes		
		Potential expansion of radio and/or outreach components		
	Implementation of Monitoring and Evaluation Plan			

D. Concluding Remarks

The program described above, while ambitious, is both realistic and achievable. It offers not just a body of carefully crafted and professionally produced educational multi-media material developed in partnership with West African professionals, but also a strategy whereby this content materials can be tested, adapted and disseminated throughout the region in both a cost effective and successful manner. Through the formation of strategic partnerships and the development and implementation of a sustainability plan, we strongly feel that the initial five year investment recommended here will yield substantial regional and country specific benefits not just for the proposed five year timeframe but for many years beyond.