

DRAMATIC DELIVERY

How soap-opera-style videos are helping educate couples in northern Nigeria about maternal and child health

POSTED BY ALANNA MITCHELL ON JUNE 20, 2018

The peppy music starts, and all of a sudden we get a glimpse of life in a northern Nigerian village. Three women are sitting cross-legged in the shade against a wall, heads covered with colourful scarves. One strips leaves from a branch; the other two are preparing food in large shallow dishes. Behind them, two men in long tunics and matching loose pants are standing, energetically tearing branches into lengths. You can almost feel the heat.

Slowly, a fourth woman enters the frame. She is heavily pregnant, struggling under the weight of a bowl on her head. The other women eye her carefully, and then one begins to talk to her. The men eventually get into the act, gesturing animatedly to each other. Finally, the scene shifts to the village chief, resplendent in a turquoise tunic and light head covering, white scarf trailing over his left shoulder. He looks directly at the audience, explaining earnestly, one arm resting on a wall as the music fades.

The scene being played out is neither from a documentary nor an ad. Rather, it's a four-and-a-half-minute video on possible pregnancy complications resulting from heavy physical work, and it's just one part of an innovative five-year, \$943,000 pilot **project** aimed at forestalling problems during pregnancy by educating couples in their own homes in the Toro region of the northern Nigerian state of Bauchi. The project, which began in 2015, is part of the seven-year, \$36-million Innovating for Maternal and Child Health in Africa initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the International Development Research Centre.

Nigeria's maternal death rate is one of the highest in the world, with about 58,000 deaths per year, says [Anne Cockcroft](#), an associate professor in the department of family medicine at McGill University in Montreal who works with the NGO [Community Information and Epidemiological Technologies](#) and is one of the project's leaders.

The impact of that number of deaths cascades through Nigerian society, says Nafssatou Diop, a senior program specialist in the maternal and child health program at the International Development Research Centre who helps oversee the project and manages the Innovating for Maternal and Child Health in Africa initiative. "The whole community suffers if the mother is not there," she says.

The videos are perhaps the most inventive element of the project, which takes a different tack than the traditional aim of increasing access to formal obstetric care. Each video is modelled after the soap operas that are so popular among Nigerians. That means not only do they have a cheerful soundtrack, but also a recurring cast of characters.



Two women share maternal and child health information during a home visit in Bauchi state, Nigeria. (Photo: Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria)

Rather than lecture on such subjects as vaccination and domestic abuse, the characters act out scenarios in which both men and women in the village discover health facts. The village chief, a respected leader, appears at the end of each video to present evidence about the video's topic.

The project has other novel elements, too. It focuses on both men and women rather than on women alone, with male members of the project team conducting home visits to speak to husbands and female members visiting mothers-to-be. It's during these house calls that couples watch the videos on the visitor's smartphone. Multiple visits are made to each home during each pregnancy, which reinforces how couples can make a big difference in their own households to the fate of mothers and babies. This partner-focused approach will be provided to every pregnant couple in the six wards in the Toro region where the pilot project is taking place. By December 2017, the program had already reached nearly 18,000 pregnant couples, says Yagana Mohammed Gidado, branch president of the Bauchi state chapter of the Federation of Muslim Women in Nigeria and leader of the project on the ground.

Gidado says that the program is helping husbands and wives communicate better. One 58-year-old father of 12 told researchers that the program had encouraged him to listen to this wife, who felt more comfortable sharing ideas and sitting with him whenever she wanted.

Meanwhile, early findings on the project's impact on the health of mothers and babies are encouraging, says Cockcroft. Nigerian state governments are examining the results to see whether the pilot project could be expanded — something Gidado believes there is a demand for. "People are begging us to come and do it in their wards," she says.

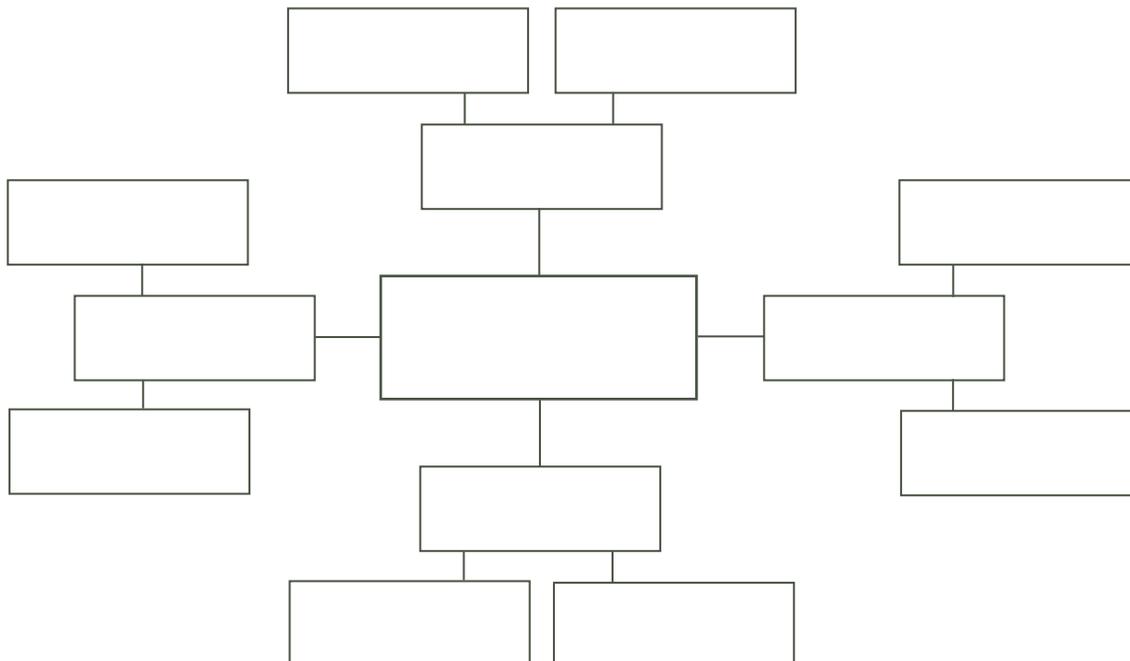
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READING AS THINKING

- Before you read the entire article, think about the heading, “Dramatic delivery.” Discuss the links between this title and the article.

- A mind map starts with a central idea. From this idea, we note the important details in the branches and use the sub-branches to further demonstrate understanding. On the map below, use a combination of pictures and words to create a mind map that shows your understanding of:
 - The main idea of the article
 - Important details
 - Questions that you have
 - Connections between content in the article and your own life



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3. What are some of the novel elements of this video project?

4. What might be some reasons for Nigeria's maternal death rate being one of the highest in the world?

5. How does having the village chief appear at the end of each video affect how the videos are received?

6. In the article, Nafissatou Diop says, "The whole community suffers if the mother is not there." Explain what she means by this.

7. Based on what you have read, and using the anecdote about the 58-year-old father of 12 for inspiration, invent an everyday scenario involving a wife and husband living in Bauchi state. Compare and contrast the interaction with what you have observed in your own community during a similar scenario.

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8. A) Who is affected by the project?
- B) How are they affected?
- C) Evaluate the impact of the project.

Think-Pair-Share

Think

1. Choose a few countries and explore certain issues that they may be facing (natural disasters, famine, high cancer rates, etc.). Fill in the table below.

Country	Issues

Pair

2. Compare your answers with a partner. Together, choose a country and a particular issue, then create a short skit to educate citizens about the problem and how they can help. The skit can be in any style (soap opera, musical, etc.).

Share

3. Present your skit to the class. Discuss the similarities and differences among countries and their issues.

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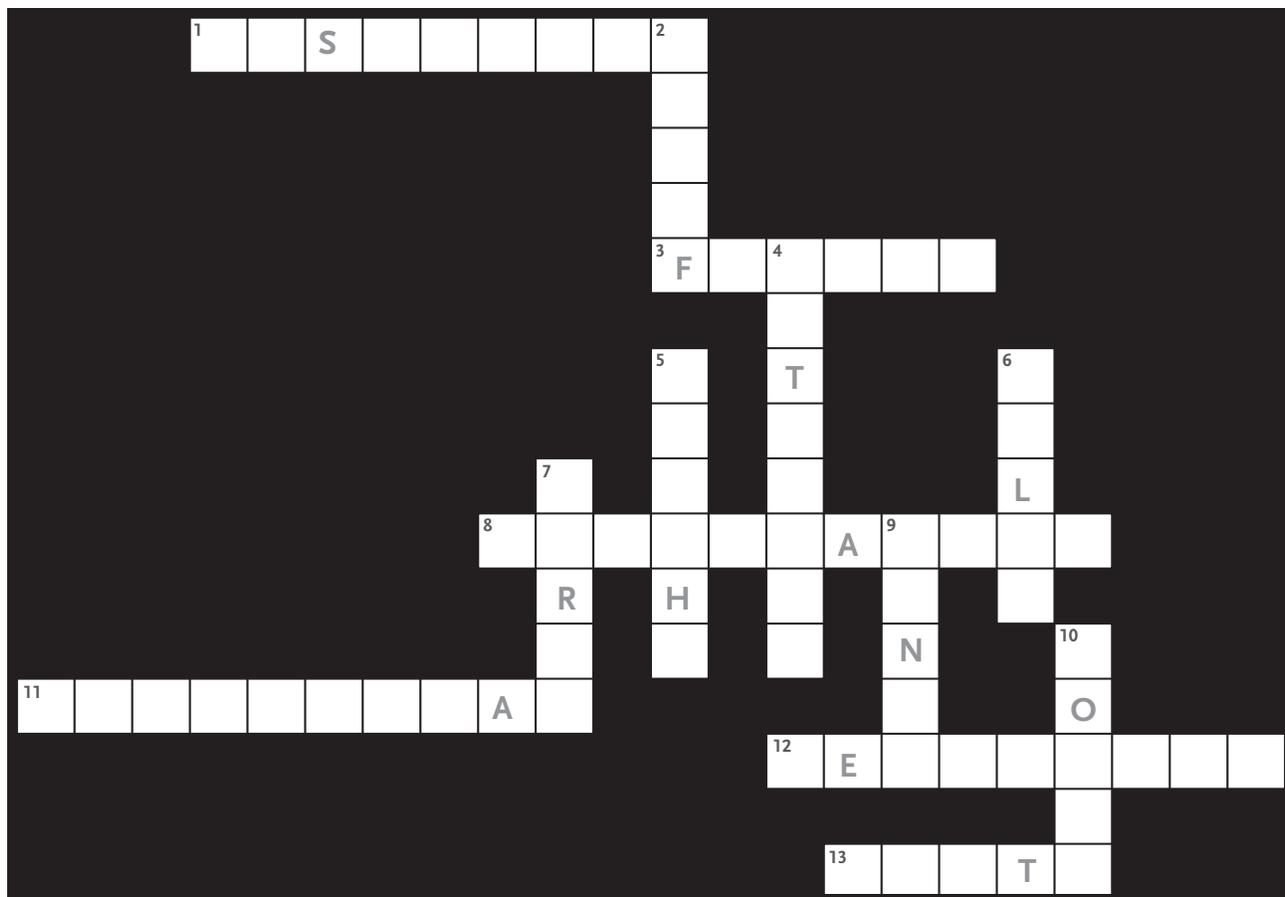
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ONLINE

1. Using [Google Maps](#), locate the Toro region of Nigeria's Bauchi state and explore nearby towns and cities by using Street View and the satellite and map modes. Using the quick facts section and other research tools find the following:
 - a. The population
 - b. The spoken languages
 - c. The major bodies of water
 - d. The distance between Toro region and the capital, Abuja
2. Learn more about maternal health around the world with these [World Health Organization infographics](#).
3. Read about the [creative solutions being applied in South Sudan, Uganda and northern Nigeria](#) to address maternal and child health.
4. What roles can men play with maternal health? Find out [here](#).
5. Research other international organizations, such as [CARE](#), supporting maternal health programs. What are their goals?

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CROSSWORD:

Across

1. Related to childbirth
3. Anne Cockcroft specializes in this type of medicine
8. Immunization
11. The videos of the project are modelled on these
12. The cast of characters in the soap-opera style videos is _____.
13. This type of rate in Nigeria is among the highest in the world

Down

2. The respected leader of the village
4. Nafissatou Diop is a program specialist for this type of health program
5. A state in Nigeria
6. A proposed project
7. Toro has six of these divisions
9. A man wears this in Nigeria
10. Toro region is situated in the _____