

**RE-THINKING KANO MARKET LITERATURE FOR EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION OF MATERNAL AND NEO-NATAL HEALTHCARE IN
NORTHERN NIGERIA: A MEDITATION ON SISTER IYAMI JALO'S 'RANAR
BAKIN CIKI'**

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Abstract

Popular literature consists of writings or literary pieces that have gained acceptance by a large spectrum of audience in the society. It includes those writings intended for the masses, and that can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. In Nigeria, discourse on popular literature often features the semi-literary texts of Hubert Ogunde's theatre in the South-West, the Onitsha Market Literature in the South-East, and the Kano Market Literature (also known in Hausa Language as *Adabin Kasuwar Kano* or *Litattafan Soyayya*) in Northern Nigeria. Kano Market Literature rose to prominence in the 80s and 90s, entertaining its readers with many titles mostly woven around fascinating love stories. Owing to the popularity of these books today, many have been adapted into films while some go to radio programmes where they are also read, mainly to reach out to unlettered audience across northern Nigeria. This paper meditates on the attempt by BBC Media Action Nigeria and Society for Family Health (SFH) to leverage the popularity of this literature in communicating maternal and neo-natal health care in Northern Nigeria, a region with the highest recorded cases of maternal and infant mortality in the country. Given the peculiarity of the region (patriarchal, largely conservative, with many unlettered people), the study seeks to answer questions such as: How can popular literature, whose readers are mostly women, engender desired behaviour change on maternal and neo-natal health care in Northern Nigeria where decisions in households are usually taken by men? Can this literature build the self-efficacy of women enough to adopt and sustain

desired behaviour and attitudes towards maternal and neo-natal health care? How can the waves (potentials/popularity) of Kano market literature be further harnessed for effective communication for development in Northern Nigeria? The illustration for the study is Sister Iyami Jalo's *Ranar Bakin Ciki*.

Introduction

At the centre of contemporary communication for development discourse is the desire to engage the people in a process of change, using the friendliest communication media and channels available and accessible to them. This makes popular culture a readily available resource to be tapped into. Popular culture can suggest the sum total of people's cultural modes of expression which has gained wider or mass appeal per time, or over a long period of time. It may also refer to individual artifacts (often treated as texts) such as a popular song or television programme, or to a group's lifestyle (and, thus, to the pattern of artifacts, practices and understandings that serve to establish the group's distinctive identity) (Mohammed, 2009:296). In Northern Nigeria, Kano Market Literature is one of the textual manifestations of popular culture. Also known as 'Adabin Kasuwar Kano' or 'Litattafan Soyayya' in Hausa. The term *Kano Market Literature* is used to refer to the gamut of story books, mostly romance, that came into the literary scene in Northern Nigeria in the late 1980s and 1990s. Today, the popularity of this literature has led to the adaptation of most of the books into film. Also, the books are being read in many radio stations across Northern Nigeria to reach out to people who cannot read, and those who can listen, while engaging in other works. This makes it a potent medium of communication for development. It is in this respect that BBC Media Action Nigeria and Society for Family Health (SFH), under the auspices of Maternal and Neo-Natal Health Care Project, adopted Kano Market Literature as a viable strategy for communicating maternal and neo-natal health care in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, this study looks at the strengths and limitations of such literature in communicating maternal and neonatal health care, using Sister Iyami Jalo's *Ranar Bakin Ciki* as illustration.

Popular Culture and Popular Literature: Conceptual Exploration

Traditionally, the idea of popular culture has referred to that which remains after the canon of high culture has been established and/or as the mass-produced commodity culture of consumer capitalism. Here, popular culture has been regarded as inferior both to the elevated cultures of art or classical music, on the one hand, and to an imagined authentic folk culture, on the other. Apologists for maintaining the distinction between high and popular culture do so on the grounds of alleged aesthetic quality arguing that high cultural forms are more subtle, complex, and adequate in their formal expression of content than those of popular

culture. Popular culture is accused of standardization and a leveling down that encourages and, indeed, demands, conformity.

However, the criteria that is used to police the boundaries of ‘good works’ are, from the standpoint of cultural studies, derived from an institutionalized and class-based hierarchy of cultural tastes. Equally, the argument that draws a contrast between popular and authentic non-commodity culture cannot be sustained since there is no longer, and probably never was, any authentic folk culture against which to measure the ‘inauthentic’ character of commodity culture. While contemporary popular culture is primarily a commercially-produced one, many writers in cultural studies have argued that audiences make their own meanings with the texts of a commodity culture. That is, readers or audiences of cultural texts bring to bear their own cultural competencies and discursive resources to the consumption of commodities. Thus, popular culture can be regarded as the meanings and practices produced by popular audiences at the moment of consumption.

Storey (2009:05-12) also agrees that popular culture is what remains after we have decided what high culture is, and it is also a mass culture (i.e., it is hopelessly commercial culture which is mass-produced for mass consumption). He further contends that popular culture originates from ‘the people’. This position takes issue with any approach that suggests that it is something imposed on ‘the people’ from above. It also sees popular culture as folk-culture: a culture of the people for the people. However, a key question to raise here is: who qualifies for inclusion in the category ‘the people’?

In her own opinion, Jamila Mohammed (2009:296) posits that a simple definition of the term ‘popular’ as the culture that appeals to, or that is easily digested by the general public may conceal a number of complexities and nuances of its use. She adds that the precise meaning of ‘popular culture’ will vary, for example, as it relates to folk culture, mass culture or high culture. She further reveals that popular culture may refer to individual artefacts (often treated as texts) such as a popular song or television programme, or a group’s lifestyle (and, thus, to the pattern of artefacts, practices and understandings that serve to establish the group’s distinctive identity).

From the foregoing submissions, one important element in the definition of popular culture is the concept of commercialization of culture, which can also mean the commodification of cultural artifacts. It is a phenomenon where cultural materials are produced in mass for consumption in a typical market arrangement. Arguably, it is through this process that the ‘popularity’ in a given culture is further crystallized, for example, the commercialization of individual artifacts such as popular song, television programme, film, or literature. In this sense, however, the concept of popularity is restricted to mass appeal or acceptance by a wide spectrum of audience. This readily positions popular artifacts as potential vehicles that

can be used to reach a broad spectrum of audience with a message of change. Although other forms of popular arts such as dance, music, drama, among others, have been used for communicating change across the world, popular literature has often been under-utilized, especially in Africa. That is, popular literature has seldom been utilized in communicating development beyond the primary function of entertainment. Popular literature includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favour with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. Generally, popular literature, unlike high literature, does not seek a high degree of formal beauty or subtlety and is not intended to endure. The growth of popular literature has paralleled the spread of literacy through education and has been facilitated by technological developments in printing. With the Industrial Revolution, works of literature, which were previously produced for consumption by small well-educated elites, became accessible to large sections and even majority of the members of a population.

The boundary between artistic and popular literature is murky, with much traffic between the two categories, according to current public preference and, later, critical evaluation. For example, while he was alive, William Shakespeare could be thought of as a writer of popular literature, but he is now regarded as a creator of artistic literature. Indeed, the main, though not invariable, method of defining a work as belonging to popular literature is whether it is ephemeral, that is, losing its appeal and significance with the passage of time. The most important genre in popular literature is and always has been the romance, extending as it does from the middle Ages to the present. The most common type of romance describes the obstacles encountered by two people (usually young) engaged in a forbidden love.

Popular Literature in Nigeria: The Kano Market Literature

To engage in a discourse on popular literature in Nigeria, the Onitsha Market Literature can be a good starting point, although there are preceding semi-literary and popular theatre activities that can be said to have fore-grounded the practice. Liman (2008:94), citing Obiechina (1973), reveals that as early as 1947 Cyprian Ekwensi's booklets, *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Igbo Tales* and *When Love Whispers*, have been on display in bookshops in the towns, cities, of south-east and other parts of Nigeria. Other works that have brought prominence and visibility to the growing stock of Onitsha Market Literature include Cletus Nwosu's *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny*; Sigi Kamalu's *The Surprise Packet*; H.O. Ogu's *How to Fall in Love with Girls*; R. Okonkwo's *Never Trust All That Love You*; Ogali O. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter* and A.U. Udeh's *The Nigerian Bachelor's Guide*.

Yet, other titles in the stock of Onitsha Market Literature are meant to serve educational purposes rather than providing simple entertainment value. They are such titles as *How to*

Write Better Letters, Applications and Business Letters; How to Write Good English and Composition; How to Succeed in Life; How to Know Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba and English language, etc. (1973:18). Several books dealing with romantic relationships are reflected in such titles as *How to Write Love Letters, How to Talk to Girls and How to Win Your Lover's Hand in Marriage*. Onitsha Market Literature has followed the tracks of first indigenous newspapers such as *West African Pilot, Nigerian Daily Times, Southern Nigerian Defender* and *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* that have popularized the publication of stories of general interests, concerning human affairs, apart from the overwhelming objective for which the papers are set up. The popularity of Onitsha Market books has created a situation that can best be conceptualized in terms of culture industry:

The production of pamphlet literature soon involved a swarm of people in different functions of publications: authors, promoters, publishers, printers, distributors. Pamphlet publishing became a booming industry, so that, by the early 1960s, any active collector swooping down on Onitsha Market might be rewarded with as many as two hundred titles. The printing of the pamphlets was later to spread from Onitsha to Aba, Port-Harcourt, Enugu and the other towns of Eastern Nigeria and even beyond. The Onitsha main market, however, remained the chief centre of the pamphlet trade, attracting to itself pamphlets produced as far a field as Sapele, Ibadan and Lagos (Obiechina, 1973:4).

Kano Market Literature can be said to be the Northern Nigerian version of Onitsha Market Literature. Also known in Hausa as 'Adabin Kasuwar Kano' or 'Litattafan Soyayya', Kano Market Literature consist of story books, mostly romance, that emerged in the literary scene in the 80s and 90s, and have continued to thrive till date. The centre for the production of these books is Kano, a city reputed as the nation's centre of commerce. This makes Kano Main Market a major factor in the development and sustenance of this literary tradition. In the year 2000, Abdalla Uba Adamu revealed that he had up to four hundred and forty-three titles of the books in his library. Sometimes a book will run to two hundred pages, but more usually a book of that length or longer will be split into parts and sold as separate sections. The themes of this literature circle around the perennial issues of crime, violence, money, power, status, love and marriage. It is on love, marriage and power that majority of stories are focused. The stories of true love between age-mates thwarted by the intervention of a rich and powerful man are legion, with the conflict between obedience to parents and true love being the hook on which much anguish turns.

According to Furniss (1998:07), Hausa popular literature has been a subject of a long-running public debate in the newspapers and cultural magazines led by journalists and

university academics such as Ibrahim Malumfashi, Ibrahim Sheme, Yusuf M. Adamu, Abdalla Uba Adamu, Mohammad Danjuma Katsina, and others. He further avers that the popularity of cultural magazines such as *Garkuwa* and film magazines—*Fim*, edited by Ibrahim Sheme, and *Tauraruwa*, attest to the widespread interest in many aspects of current forms of cultural production among particularly younger urban people in Nigeria. Of particular importance to the discourse on Kano Market Literature is the activities of early writers' clubs that include 'Raina Kama' (Deceptive Appearances), 'Kukan Kurciya' (A Cry of a Dove) and Dan Hakin da Ka Raina (The Splinter You Ignore) who were instrumental to the development and popularization of Hausa popular literature. Whereas Raina Kama and Kukan Kurciya were based in Kano, Dan Hakin Da Ka Raina was based in Kaduna. The identification of a volume as being one produced by a group is most clearly evident in titles produced in the early 90s, when there was often a logo on the front cover. Some of the early titles worth citing here include *Wa Zai Auri Jahila* (Who Will Marry an Illiterate Woman?) and *Alhaki Kwikwiyo* (A Misdeed is Like a Puppy) by Balaraba Ramat Yakubu, *In Da So Da Kauna* (Where There is Love There is Desire) by Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino, *Kyan Alkawali* (The Beauty of a Promise) and *Rikicin Duniya* (This Deceptive World) by Dan'azumi Baba, and *Kwai a Baka* (An Egg in the Mouth) by Aisha Chediyar 'Yan Gurasa.

Another important element in the early development of Kano Market Literature was the intervention of university academics, particularly from Bayero University in Kano who clearly provided encouragement, proof-reading and advice to these budding writers. Notable among these figures were the Late Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, a mainstay of Hausa cultural studies in the university, and Dr. Sa'idu Mohammadu Gusau, the bulk of whose own work had been on court praise singers. But who clearly was a key figure in encouraging these writers of fiction and who provided prefaces to their books? It is some of these same academics that have led a debate in the newspapers and magazines about whether this literature represents ephemeral, unworthy, frippery that will quickly fade away, or it is the beginning of a serious and important cultural movement. Opinions differ; however, the pivot argument is whether this literature properly promotes Hausa customs, in conformity with Islam, or is a corrupting influence. Attacks and defence are often framed in these terms. Even more is this burning issue with the advent of video films.

Furthermore, women have been prominent in the development of this writing, and they have been equally significant as readers. Malumfashi (1999) documented about seventy women writers of Kano Market Literature and their titles in a paper presented at the 17th Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria held in Zaria in 1999. A pioneer female figure in

the evolution of Kano Market Literature is Balaraba Ramat Yakubu who was among the founding leaders of 'Raina Kama' Writers' Club alongside other five men that include Adamu Hassan Yakasai, Hamisu Bature, Aminu Abdu Na'Inna, Dan' azumi Baba Chediyar 'Yan Gurasa and Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino. It is also argued that perhaps the rise of women as readers of Kano Market Literature is instrumental in influencing the contents of the books to be mainly romance. This position is corroborated by Furniss (1998:11), thus: "I was told in Kano in April 2000 that the high number of Mills and Boon style romance is a reflection of the demand coming from women as readers". (Furniss, 1998:11).

One of the most remarkable transition in recent years has been the move from books to video films. For instance, when Balaraba Ramat Yakubu became Ramat Productions, so also Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino became part of Gidan Dabino Video Productions, Dan'azumi Baba became part of RK Studios and many other film production companies mushroomed in the late 90s. Two examples of books that were adapted into film are *In Da So Da Kauna (Where There is Love There is Desire)* by Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino and *Wa Zai Auri Jahila (Who Will Marry an Illiterate Woman?)* by Balaraba Ramat Yakubu. At the moment, the trending thing is the practice of reading these books on radio. There are special radio programmes across some states in Northern Nigeria dedicated to oral reading of these books with the aim of entertaining listeners while also providing avenues for them to send in their feedbacks either through phone-ins or emails. By this practice, literary tradition finds a meeting point with oral tradition in a symbiotic relationship where one complements the other.

The flexibility of Kano Market Literature, especially its adaptability to the radio medium, renders it attractive to development agencies bearing the gospel of change across Northern Nigeria. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why BBC Media Action Nigeria and Society for Family Health opted this literature among other popular entertainment forms, to communicate maternal and neo-natal health care in Northern Nigeria under the auspices of Maternal and Neo-Natal Health Care Project.

Sister Iyami Jalo's *Ranar Bakin Ciki*: A Viable Medium for Communicating Maternal and Neo-natal Health Care, or a Candle in the Wind?

Sister Iyami Jalo Turaki was born in the town of Kumo, in Akko Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State. She attended LEA Primary School Kumo, and later proceeded to Women Teachers' College (WTC) Kaltungo. She also attended School of Health Technology in Kaltungo, where she obtained a Diploma as a Community Health Extension Worker (CHEW). Jalo currently works as Family Planning Officer at the Primary Health Care (PHC) Department in Akko LGA. She has been trained on Prevention of Mother to

Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT), Care of New Born Baby (CNBC), and Infant Feeding Option Training on Village Health Workers, among others.

As a writer, Jalo has six published titles to her credit. They include: *Yanayin Rayuwa* (Such is Life), *Duniya Juyi* (No Condition is Permanent), *Hadin Allah* (What God Has Joined), *Mardiyya*, *Daren Aurena* (My Wedding Night) and *Ranar Bakin Ciki* (A Sorrowful Day). Three other titles in the pipeline include: *Da Ma Ace* (How I Wish), *A Wani Dare* (On a Certain Night) and *Zabin Zuciyata* (The Choice of My Heart). Jalo's dual experience as a community health worker and a promising writer makes her a more suitable personality to champion the campaign on maternal and neo-natal health care in Northern Nigeria.

Maternal and neo-natal health care is concerned with giving adequate, timely and effective health care to pregnant women during pregnancy, and after delivery, including their newborn babies. It requires women to promptly access pre, ante, and post natal health care services available to them. Newborn children are expected to be administered routine immunization and given adequate care, especially from age one to five. However, compliance to this basic health necessity has been poor in Nigeria, especially the northern region of the country, leading to persistent high rate of maternal and neonatal mortality. According to UNICEF, every ten minutes, one woman dies on account of pregnancy or childbirth in Nigeria. This means that about 800 women die in every 100,000 live births. Nigeria's newborn death rate (neonatal mortality) is pegged at 528 per day, one of the highest in the world. More than a quarter of the estimated one million children who die under the age of 5 years annually, in Nigeria, die during the first 28 days of life (neonatal period).

The North-East Zone has the highest maternal mortality rate of 1,549 in every 100,000 live births, compared to 165 in every 100,000 live births in the South-West Zone. The highest death rate of infants within the first 28 days (neonatal mortality) of life is in the North-East and North-West regions of the country. Also, the highest death rate of under five children is in the North-East and North-West regions of the country. (UNICEF: Mother, Newborn and Child Health and Mortality in Nigeria-General Facts available at https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/ng_pu). Most of these deaths are attributed to poor health systems, low utilization of skilled antenatal care, and preference for home deliveries. Other factors include poor health infrastructure, poorly equipped health facilities and negative attitudes and behaviours that are not conducive to attaining good maternal and child health. It is this grim health situation, especially in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria that Jalo's *Ranar Bakin Ciki* seeks to mitigate.

Ranar Bakin Ciki recounts the story of Amina, a young girl of about 15 years who is in love with Lawandi, a young man of about 21 years old and a student. Amina's greatest wish is to marry Lawandi because she believes he is the only man that loves her so much, and can support her dream of advancing her education to tertiary level to fulfil her dream of becoming a medical doctor. Whereas Amina lost her mother at the tender age of eight, Lawandi also lost his father when he was still a child. Contrary to her expectation, Amina's father, Malam Hadi decides to marry her off to Kabiru the son of his bosom friend Malam Inuwa. In her matrimonial home, Amina finds another father in her father-in-law. He does everything within his power to ensure that Amina is happy, and also deals with anything that threatens her joy, especially her mother-in-law, Umma Yalwa, who does not like Amina. Not long after her marriage to Kabiru, her father-in-law, Malam Inuwa, passes away during a brief illness. His demise makes Amina vulnerable to Umma Yalwa's tyrannical proclivity. She seldom gives Amina money to buy cooking recipes whenever her husband Kabiru travels, even though he usually gives Umma Yalwa some money before leaving. It is under this unfriendly atmosphere that Amina falls sick. Instead of her to be taken to the hospital, her mother-in-law goes to a native doctor named Zabarbado for herbs, while her husband gets some drugs for her from a medical store next door. All these were administered to Amina to no avail. Her condition deteriorates and she begins to bleed. Kabiru suggests that she should be taken to the hospital, but Umma Yalwa insists that they tarry awhile, as Zabarbado herbal concoction will surely heal her. At the end, Amina has a miscarriage.

After some time, Amina conceives again. This time she decides to start visiting the hospital, even though it is not the culture of Masaka villagers. She has been able to develop her self-efficacy through her past experience and a radio programme she recently started following called 'Don Lafiyarmu' (For Our Health's Sake). Through this programme, she understands that it is important to start visiting the hospital at the early stage of pregnancy, and not waiting till it grows older. She shares her intention with her husband Kabiru, but he refuses to allow her go to the hospital out of fear of his mother. "I understand what you are saying Amina. My only problem is Umma. Notwithstanding, I will reason for a way out" (P129, translated from Hausa by me).

Four weeks later, Amina experiences another bleeding when her husband has coincidentally travelled again. She informs Umma, adding that this time she wants to be taken to the hospital. Umma vehemently kicks against it, opting to return to her native doctor Zabarbado. "Not in this house! I am trying my best for you. The last time, it was witches that attacked you. This kind of attack is beyond the power of hospital. Only Malam (Zabarbado) can give you desired help. His help is not going to be limited to stopping your bleeding, but will also ensure that you deliver safely" said Umma. (p.131, translated from Hausa by me).

Umma proceeds to Zabarbado and returns with herbs as usual, saying that, according to Malam (Zabarbado), this time she is being attacked by jinns. Amina unwillingly continues to take the herbs to no avail. When her condition begins to deteriorate, Amina sends her husband's younger brother to her neighbour's (Talatu's) house. It takes the intervention of Talatu, her husband, and Maigari (Village Head) before Umma allows Amina to be taken to the hospital. Unfortunately, when she arrives the hospital, it is discovered that her baby is already dead. She is operated upon. It is while in the hospital that Umma is educated out of her conservative views and negative maternal health attitudes. It is here that Umma reveals the misconceptions she hitherto had about modern medicine. According to her, her erstwhile dislike for hospitals and modern medicine was informed by widely circulated belief that tablets imbue negative traits in unborn babies and also infect them with strange diseases. This belief is debunked by her son Kabiru and the doctor on call in the hospital. The doctor takes his time to highlight the numerous benefits of visiting the hospital by pregnant women. With this clarification, Umma feels a deep sense of remorse for causing the loss of her would-be-grand-children. One year later, Amina conceives again. With the support of her husband and Umma, she visits the hospital till her time of delivery. She finally gives birth to a baby boy, who is named Mohammadu Inuwa, in loving memory of her late father-in-law, Malam Inuwa.

Undoubtedly, Jalo's *Ranar Bakin Ciki* explores in details some of the factors that account for high rate of maternal and neo-natal mortality in Northern Nigeria. The issue of early marriage at the expense of education is explored in the character of Amina. Although she nurses the ambition of advancing her education to tertiary level, this dream is truncated by her father, Malam Hadi. Malam Hadi, an ardent custodian of tradition, deems it culturally appropriate for Amina to be married off at a tender age so that she can fully mature in her husband's house. This, he believes, will also shield her from numerous temptations that accompany puberty. The implication of this, however, is that Amina proceeds to her marital home with little or no knowledge of maternal health care. Hence, when she falls sick, she does not know the right step to take. This knowledge gap is later filled by her bitter experience and a radio programme 'Don Lafiyarmu' (For Our Health's Sake).

Another factor *Ranar Bakin Ciki* brings to the fore concerns negative health attitudes and behaviours, often informed by deeply-seated misconceptions about modern medicine on the one hand, and a conservative reliance on traditional medicine, on the other hand. Amina's mother-in-law, Umma Yalwa personifies this in the novel. She innocently believes that the solution to Amina's sickness lies in the hands of Malam Zabarbado (a native doctor), and not the hospital. To worsen the case is the position Umma occupies as the major decision-

maker in the house since the death of her husband, Malam Inuwa. Oftentimes, mothers-in-law wield such powers in traditional Hausa society. Hence, the only way to navigate through their misconceptions is by thorough orientation and explanation on the benefits of modern medicine as against herbal concoctions. This is not to discountenance alternative medicine, though; it is to insist that even when it is to be taken, it should be based on professional medical advice.

Delayed medical attention is another factor that is responsible for high rate of maternal and neonatal health mortality in Northern Nigeria. This is demonstrated in the novel where Amina lost her six-month-old baby, because she did not get timely medical attention as a result of her mother-in-law's insistence on herbal concoction. The argument here is that it is not advisable to seek medical attention as a last resort; instead, it should be a priority for pregnant women. By and large, the onus of *Ranar Bakin Ciki's* argument is that for us to cut down the high rate of maternal and neonatal mortality in Northern Nigeria, there is an urgent need for people, especially pregnant women, to imbibe the culture of accessing pre, ante and post-natal health care services available in the hospital. The question we may raise here is: can we confidently say that *Ranar Bakin Ciki* has the capacity to engender desired change on maternal and neonatal health care in Northern Nigeria? Is this an effective communication approach for addressing maternal and neonatal health problems in Northern Nigeria? Or is it just a candle in the wind?

Answering these questions will require a deep reflection on how the novel is packaged and delivered to the target audience. The novel is first a piece of literature, which is delivered to literate audience as such, free of charge. The story takes the reader through the travails of Amina from her father's house where she is maltreated by her step-mother Gwaggo Asi, to her husband's house, where she meets another tormentor in the person of Umma Yalwa, her mother-in-law. Through these phases of our heroine's life, the reader vicariously shares in Amina's pain, and also rejoices in her ultimate triumph. The same applies to the character of Umma Yalwa. Readers that share her beliefs can vicariously follow the processes of her change, while duplicating same in themselves. This is a resultant effect of character identification.

According to Onuekwe (2015:41), identification with the characters in entertainment-education programmes (in this case, literature) helps the audience to empathize, internalize, imitate, identify with, and establish emotional connections with the characters. Sometimes audience members do not have the opportunity to meet the characters physically, but can still develop some intimacy with them, which can lead them to mimic rewarding behaviours. Many reports and studies on the readership of Kano Market Literature suggest that women

constitute majority of the readers. This makes it an appropriate medium for communicating maternal and neonatal health care to women. Through this medium, women can enhance their knowledge and adopt desired behaviours in tandem with the promotion of maternal and neonatal health care. The only lacuna, perhaps, is the fact that most of these women are not the major decision-makers in their households. They are under the authority of their husbands. This implies that educating women alone does not automatically guarantee success in maternal and neo-natal health care until men are also educated on it.

Ranar Bakin Ciki was further read on the radio in Gombe. This provided an opportunity for the non-literate audience and those who had not been able to access the book to also enjoy the story and profit from the lessons therein. However, in an informal discussion with Yakubu Modibbo Kumo, a novelist and a screenwriter, who was also among the team that conceptualized the case study text in Gombe, he avers that like the book format, the majority of listeners of book-reading programmes on radio are women. If such is the case, it means that the same challenge confronting the book format is also extant here. That is, men who are often the major decision-makers in households may not listen to such programmes where important books such as *Ranar Bakin Ciki* are read. This can have negative implications to the drive towards improved maternal and neonatal health care in Northern Nigeria, especially when men do not subscribe to the culture of going to the hospital. On the other hand, both the book format and the radio reading programme can elicit behaviour change among mothers-in-law who wield decision-making powers in their households like Umma Yalwa. Perhaps, more studies need to be carried out along this direction to empirically substantiate the possibilities.

The crux of the argument here is that until all key household decision-makers have access either the book format or other complementary outlets such as the book-reading programmes on radio, Kano Market Literature may not be effective in addressing the high rate of maternal and neonatal mortality in Northern Nigeria.

It, therefore, becomes imperative to devise other means through which contents of such books can be creatively infused into programmes that are mostly listened to by men. Novels like *Ranar Bakin Ciki* can also be adapted to stage performances, films, and television soap operas for wider audience coverage, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of Kano Market Literature as a viable medium of communication for development in Northern Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has brought to the fore the phenomenal popularity of Kano Market Literature in Northern Nigeria, and the attempts by development agencies to ride the waves of this literature to communicate development in the region. Specifically, Sister Iyami Jalo's *Ranar*

Bakin Ciki, is critically analyzed to ascertain its effectiveness as a medium of communicating maternal and neonatal health care in Northern Nigeria. The novel was written under the auspices of Maternal and Neonatal Health Care Project, co-piloted by BBC Media Action Nigeria and Society for Family Health (SFH), with support from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Since publication in 2017, many copies of the novel have been distributed to target audience, and the story has also been read on the radio for listeners in Gombe. The study found out that majority of the audience of Kano Market Literature (either as readers or book-reading radio programme listeners) are women, who can be educated on maternal and neonatal health issues. But the challenge might be that most of these women are under the authorities of their husbands. In other words, men are key decision-makers in majority of households in Northern Nigeria. This implies that for the novel to be more effective in communicating maternal and neonatal health care in the region, it must be able to influence men towards embracing the desired practice of ensuring that pregnant women access pre, ante and post natal health care services available to them in the hospitals. The paper recommends that creative ways of attracting more men to reading books and listening to book-readings programmes on the radio need to be devised. As for households where mothers-in-law wield decision-making powers like Umma Yalwa, the novel and book-reading radio programmes can be relied upon to engender the desired behavior change on maternal and neonatal health care issues. Understanding these socio-cultural dynamics is crucial to any effort by development agencies aimed at riding the waves of Kano Market Literature for effective communication of maternal and neonatal health care in Northern Nigeria.

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