



# Ma Ma Oo

## HEALTH EDUCATION RADIO DRAMA Citizen Impact Brief

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International Development  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

# Ma Ma Oo

## BACKGROUND

Maternal and child health (MCH) in Myanmar remains a key area of concern. Each year in the South East Asian nation at least 2,400 pregnant women and 70,000 children die (UNICEF, 2014).

Many pregnant women are at risk because they do not receive appropriate antenatal care. Twenty-six percent of pregnant women do not attend the recommended four antenatal health checks and 17 percent do not receive any antenatal care at all. Further, three in ten women give birth without the help of a skilled birth attendant (UNICEF, 2014).

In Myanmar, infants and children under the age of five are most at risk of morbidity and mortality, particularly in rural areas. The under-five mortality rate is more than twice the regional average and the maternal mortality rate is also higher than the regional average (UNICEF, 2014).

The majority of maternal and child deaths in Myanmar could be prevented. A lack of resources and distance to health services are key barriers to MCH for rural communities. These structural issues are further exacerbated by low MCH literacy and health seeking behaviors.

In this context public broadcasting can play a vital role in Myanmar by providing information and generating discussion to empower citizens with vital health knowledge so they can keep their families healthy.

## ABCID & MRTV COLLABORATION:

### Radio programming to improve maternal and child health literacy and health seeking behaviour in Myanmar

This ABCID media development project worked with Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) to produce an eight part, radio drama series on maternal health issues. This series, funded by the Australian Embassy, combined entertaining narrative with specific educational health messaging and was broadcast on MRTV from 20 December 2015 for eight weeks. It has since been re-broadcast on FM stations and Radio Australia in 2016. *Ma Ma Oo* is the second radio co-production between MRTV and ABC. The series follows the success of a pilot maternal and child health radio program implemented in 2014. The pilot tested key messages using an edutainment and discussion format which featured the same main character, Ma Ma Oo. The pilot results showed that listeners increased their knowledge and changed their attitudes as a result of the information and issues covered. It illustrated the vital role that media can play in communities, contributing to development issues like improving health. In Myanmar radio is the most accessible media, especially for reaching rural and ethnic minority communities.

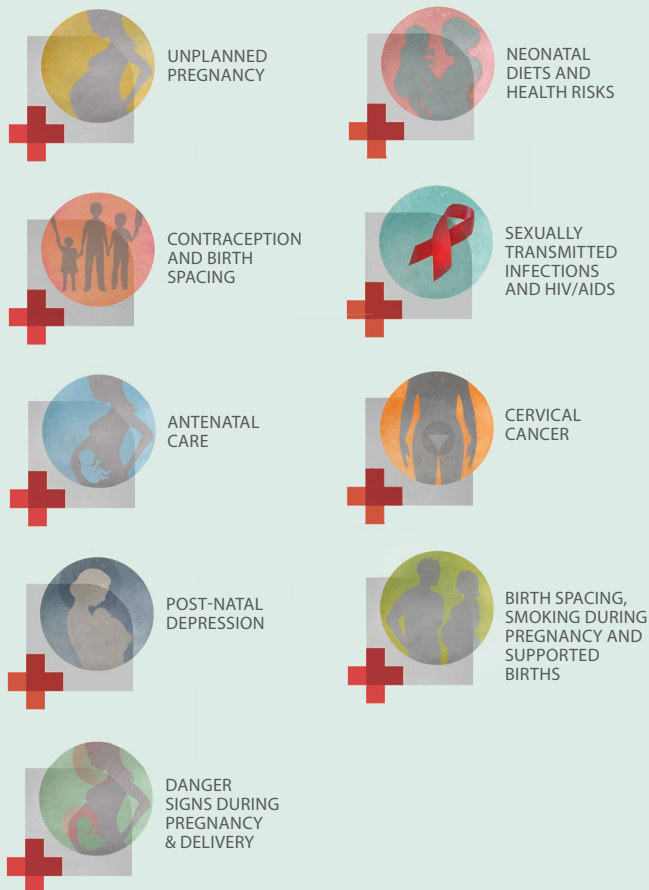


# Ma Ma Oo HEALTH EDUCATION RADIO DRAMA

## MA MA OO

*Ma Ma Oo* is a radio drama series about real life issues in a village setting in Myanmar. The series is about a young midwife being introduced to life in a rural village, guided by the narrator and experienced midwife, Ma Ma Oo. The series traces interactions between the main characters and people in the village as they come across maternal and child health issues in their lives. The drama aims to provide citizens with entertaining and engaging radio content about maternal and child health. The target audience for the drama includes peri-urban and rural women, although it is expected to engage a broad cross-section of the community.

The information areas covered in the series were aligned to the Myanmar Ministry of Health public messages. Key messages were developed about the following topics:



## IMPACT

The following impact briefing provides details of citizen feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of the program. A copy of the program can be downloaded from <http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/>

## METHODS

The research was conducted using two qualitative data collection techniques, focus group discussions and listener groups conducted with 40 women across three peri-urban townships. Focus group discussions were held first to seek spontaneous feedback on what citizens had gained from the drama when listening to the broadcast. To gather a more detailed insight into the relevance and appeal of the program, participants from the focus groups were asked to listen to episodes three and four of *Ma Ma Oo*. Participants were then prompted to provide feedback on characters, plot and key messages. A detailed report on the findings and methodology can be accessed on request from ABC International Development.

## CITIZEN FEEDBACK

Overall, citizens provided very positive feedback on the *Ma Ma Oo* drama series. They found the storyline engaging, entertaining and relevant to the health issues which they face in their own communities. Participants had strong recall of key events and their outcomes. Listening to the series increased their knowledge and awareness of key health messages, resulting in some participants planning to change their behaviour.

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### CHARACTERS

The main characters in *Ma Ma Oo* were considered both likable and motivational. Ma Ma Oo (an experienced midwife) and May (her trainee midwife) were perceived to be intelligent and caring. Many participants reported that they would try to emulate their behaviour and attitudes in the future.

*“If that thing happens again, I will support as a fellow human being. After all, I’ve listened to Ma Ma Oo drama.”*

(PARTICIPANT, GROUP ONE – SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE)

### PLOT

Overall, the storyline of the series was perceived to be realistic, engaging and entertaining. Citizens commented on how relevant the plot was to their own lives and experiences. For participants in peri-urban areas, some of the scenarios, while less relevant to their own lives, gave them insights into some of the challenges that rural communities face. This seemed to motivate them further to harness their relatively good access to health services. Some praised MRTV for being responsive to the lives of their audiences in these locations. The plot was relevant to participants because the storylines related to events which had actually occurred in their lives. In fact, during focus group discussion participants recalled various scenarios addressed through the drama plot which had occurred in their own villages.

*“The person who created this drama has a very good imagination ... the plot has all the details ... We wait and wonder what will happen and what will come next week... What I’m saying is the drama plot is very similar to the reality of the villages.”*

(PARTICIPANT, GROUP FOUR – SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE)

*“That kind of things usually happens in the village. That’s why it’s very much related to (our) village.”*

(PARTICIPANT, GROUP TWO – SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE)



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## MESSAGING

The *Ma Ma Oo* drama series provided citizens with new information about maternal and child health and health seeking which has influenced their intended behaviors. For consistency and relevance, messages were aligned to the Myanmar Ministry of Health public messages. Across all groups, seeking antenatal care 'early and often' was articulated as the key message of the program. Participants also clearly articulated that they intended to change their future behavior as a result of this information. This indicates that listening to the program has the potential to improve health literacy and influence antenatal health seeking behaviours.

**"To live closely with health professionals when starting to conceive a baby."**

(PARTICIPANT, GROUP FIVE - SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE)

After listening to episodes three and four of the program as part of the research, participants were able to remember and articulate key health messages. Some of the messages recalled across the groups included: risks of smoking during pregnancy, HIV testing at marriage and before child conception/birth, HIV treatment, child nutrition, hygiene and sanitation as well as mental health after miscarriage. This highlights the breadth of issues and knowledge included in the program. Participants also reported that they would use the knowledge that they gained to share with other people in their village.

## FORMAT & PRODUCTION QUALITY

In general, the participants praised the program for providing them with health knowledge and identified the benefit of this type of radio drama for both women and men. Groups responded positively to actors' voices, tones and acting. The radio drama format appears to be an appropriate and feasible way of improving health literacy.

**"This is how we get the knowledge. This is truly educating. Please broadcast more drama like this. This is really good for not only women but also men."**

(PARTICIPANT, GROUP FOUR - SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE)



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### BROADCAST SCHEDULING

MRTV broadcast the drama at 11.30am on Sundays and each episode was rebroadcast at the same time on Tuesdays. Participants suggested more suitable broadcast times (between 7pm and 8pm) would increase their likelihood of listening to the program consistently.

### CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Although many of the issues that occurred in the lives of the characters resonated strongly with participants, a common sentiment was that in many villages people like Ma Ma Oo and May don't exist. The characters Ma Ma Oo and May were not totally reflective of the reality of life for women in many rural and peri-urban settings, some of whom do not have easy access to a trained auxiliary midwife or doctor or even a car to reach one. As a result, some of the plot resolutions were perceived to be unrealistic in the resource constrained context of village life.

*"I don't know anyone like Ma Ma Oo in this village. When such things happened in our village there's no one suddenly coming to encourage us."*

(PARTICIPANT, GROUP ONE – SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE)

Overall messaging was well understood, however some more sensitive messaging around infidelity and unplanned pregnancy was sometimes reinterpreted in unintended ways due to cultural sensitivities surrounding this issue. This could be negated in future programs by pairing radio drama with a discussion segment straight after the drama has been broadcast to draw out and clarify issues raised in the program.



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## REACH

The series, in the Burmese language, was broadcast weekly on MRTV and affiliated FM stations from 20 December 2015 until 14 February 2016. MRTV intend to re-broadcast the drama series several times throughout 2016. MRTV radio can be accessed across Myanmar, however to date formal reach data is unavailable. Ma Ma Oo was also broadcast on Radio Australia and online via the Radio Australia Burmese website and Facebook page. Reach figures for these platforms are included below.



## References

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Further information:

[www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/research](http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/research)