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# Pack 113, Item 5

Type: Drama

January 2020

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**The power failure**

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### Notes to broadcaster

In Burkina Faso, sexual and reproductive health is still a taboo subject, and adolescent girls and boys often act in ways that upset their parents and society and may threaten their health and even their lives. It’s important in such a context that communication between parents and teens is active and strong.

This drama is about communication between Sam, a 16-year-old teenager, and his parents. Seeing some blood spots on the wrap skirt of his sister who is in pain, the young boy runs to inform his father. But, to the surprise of the boy, his father does not seem overly concerned. He takes the opportunity to ask questions of his parent. He wants to know if what his sister is suffering from are the “periods” he has heard about. He also wants his father to tell him about contraceptives and virginity. Annoyed and almost offended that a boy of his age would ask such questions, the father goes out. When he returns, he is surprised that Sam is asking similar questions of his mother. The angry father warns the boy, who now becomes silent. The lines of communication have been interrupted. The father and the mother try in vain to communicate with their son, then finally call on an uncle. The uncle discovers by talking with his nephew that, in reality, the boy asked questions on sexual and reproductive health in order to take part in a competition organized by an NGO on the topic. Unfortunately, the teenager asked his parents questions without explaining the reasons for asking them. The father and the mother considered these questions taboo and so failed to communicate appropriately. This is why the communication was suddenly “cut” like a power cut. Fortunately, the uncle succeeds in re-establishing communication between the parents and their son.

You could use this drama as inspiration to produce a similar program on communication between teens and adults, and how gaps in communication can be bridged. Or you might choose to present the drama as part of your regular farmer program, using voice actors to represent the speakers.

The drama includes five scenes, varying in length from 1-2 minutes to 5-6 minutes.

You could follow the drama by interviewing teens and their parents, and talking to experts in adolescent-parent communication. Ask about the problems they encounter and the kinds of strategies they use to solve these problems. Invite listeners to call in or text in with their own stories, or with questions and comments.

The estimated running time for this item, with signature tune, intro, and extro, is 20 minutes.

**CHARACTERS:**

**1. Sam: S**on of Ido and Katiana

**2. Ido:** Sam's father and Katiana's husband

**3. Katiana:** Sam's mother and Ido's wife

**4. Abraham:** Ido's brother and Sam's uncle

**ScEne 1.**

**SETTING**: Sam and Katiana’s living room.

**TIME**: End of the morning (just before noon)

**SFX**: LOW MUSIC COMING FROM A RADIO OR A TELEVISION IN THE BACKGROUND

**CHARACTERS**: Sam, Ido, and Katiana

**SAM:** (scared) Dad ... dad ... come quick, Safi is wounded! It's terrible. Her loincloth is stained with blood and she is moaning.

**IDO:** Sam, don't panic. Your sister is not hurt.

**SAM:** She is, Dad. How is she not hurt? I tell you that there’s a lot of blood on her and her cloth is soaked with blood. She’s lying at the door of her room. I'm going to call Mom to come from the market quickly.

**IDO:** No, son, don't bother your mother. In 48 hours, it'll be over.

**SAM:** (DISBELIEVING) It will be over?

**IDO:** Sam, these are things that are unique to women and girls.

**SAM:** Dad, what is it? Is it what we call the “period”? I have heard about it but I've never seen it. (silence) Dad, why aren't you answering me? (silence) Dad, tell me ...

**IDO:** (INTERRUPTING) Sam, that's enough! I'm thirsty, give me a glass of water.

**SFX**: Sam's footsteps going back and forth, the sound of a glass placed on a table

**SAM:** Dad ... By the way ... I don't know about certain things and my friends tease me.

**IDO:**  What things?

**SAM:** For example, contraceptives. What are they?

**IDO**: Give me my shirt, the one on the chair.

**SFX**: SAM'S FOOTSTEPS GOING BACK AND FORTH

**IDO**: Thank you, Sam.

**SAM:** By the way, Dad, as well as contraceptives, I'd like to know what virginity is. Why does virginity concern only women?

**IDO**: Bring me my shoes, Sam.

**SFX:** SAM'S FOOTSTEPS GOING BACK AND FORTH

**SAM:** But Dad, why don't you answer my questions? I would like to know if family planning is the same as contraceptives?

**IDO:** Sam, if your mom comes back from the market, tell her I'm at the PMUB booth (*Editor’s note: PMUB is a lottery and people buy tickets at the PMUB booth*). I'll be back soon.

**SFX:** Dad's footsteps going out

**KATIANA:** (PAUSE) Sam, where's your dad?

**SAM:** He went to play PMUB.

**KATIANA:** As usual.

**Sam:** Mom, have you seen Safi? She's in pain, isn't she?

**KATIANA:** My boy, your sister has painful periods.

**SAM:** Painful? Oh yeah? Are periods painful? What's causing this?

**KATIANA:** You will know one day.

**SAM:** I'll seize this opportunity, Mom … What are contraceptives? (IDO'S FOOTSTEPS AS HE COMES IN)

**KATIANA:** My son, contraceptives? One day you will know ...

**IDO:** (IRRITATED) What? Sam, are you still asking questions? That's enough now. You're only 16 years old and you're already bothering us with your indecent questions. Contraceptives, periods, virginity—these are not questions that you should be asking at your age! When I was 25 years old, I didn't dare ask such questions to anyone, let alone my father and mother.

**SAM:** But Daddy ...

**IDO:** There is no "but.” I do not want you to ask us any more irrelevant or inappropriate questions.

**SOUND EFFECTS:** Sam's footsteps as he leaves the room

**KATIANA:** Honey, don't you think you overreacted with the kid?

**IDO:** Not at all! Your son only asks questions about sex. That's not a good sign at his age. Had he asked me historical questions about our village or our country, I would have answered without hesitation.

Transition music

**SCENE 2**

**SETTING:** Sam and Katiana’s living room, then Sam’s bedroom

**TIME:** Evening

**CHARACTERS:** Ido, Katiana, and Sam

**IDO:** Sam, what's going on? Your high school principal told me that your academic performance has deteriorated significantly. (Silence) See? Instead of focusing on school, you are concerned about sex. (silence)

**KATIANA**: Son, isn't your father talking to you? When a father talks, we listen to him and pay attention to what he says instead of sticking our noses in a notebook. (silence) Sam, aren't you going to say anything?

**SAM**: I am studying.

**IDO**: I am studying, I am studying ... And that is stopping you from answering? (Silence) And then, my boy, what is this way of dressing? Your jeans have holes all over them. Who gave you these pants? (Silence)

**SFX:** Sound of Sam entering his room, sound of a door opening and closing.

**KATIANA**: Ido, for the last few days, Sam has been sulking. He doesn't respond to anyone, and he doesn't even come home for lunch anymore, even though his school is only 400 metres away.

**IDO**: As they say, he doesn't care about anything or anyone. I'll talk to him.

**SFX:**  Sound of Ido joining Sam in his room

**IDO**: Sam, are you sick? (Silence) Why do you have trouble answering us? (Silence) Now tell me: what's going on? (Silence) Why don't you come home for lunch anymore and why have you started coming home late in the evening? (Silence) My son, am I not talking to you? (Silence) Sam, I want you to answer me right away. (Silence) But, you ...

**SFX:** Sam's footsteps going out

TRANSITION MUSIC

**SCENE 3**

**SETTING:** Sam and Katiana’s backyard, under the trees

**TIME:** Afternoon

**SFX:** Sounds of birds, carpentry in the background

**CHARACTERS:** Ido, Katiana, and Abraham

**IDO**: Big brother Abraham, Katiana explained the problem clearly. Sam is increasingly bored. He doesn't answer when you talk to him. As his father, he ignores me. He doesn’t have much consideration anymore.

**KATIANA**: Brother-in-law, your son has really changed; we have done everything, but he won’t talk. (*Editor’s note: In many African cultures, a nephew is also called a son.)*

**IDO:** What intrigues me are his questions about sexuality. Not only ... (Power failure)

**KATIANA, IDO AND**

**ABRAHAM:** (CRY OUT WITH DISAPPOINTMENT ALL TOGETHER) Hohoo!

**KATIANA:** I hope they will restore the power soon. I don't want to miss today's TV series.

**IDO**: It’s Sonabel again! (*Editor’s note: Sonabel is the power company in Burkina Faso.)* They always cut off the power at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Imagine! Last week, we couldn’t watch the European Champions League match because of Sonabel.

**ABRAHAM:** It is not for nothing that people call it "Sona villain.”

**IDO**: Let me give you some light. My phone has a light.

**ABRAHAM**: Thank you, Ido, the light from your phone is strong.

**IDO:** I have no problem even if it is dark.

**ABRAHAM:** Good! Friends, let's get back to the point. They say that good things can come from bad. Indeed, the power failure that would have plunged us into total darkness had it not been for this makeshift light, allows me to illustrate my point.

**KATIANA:** "My husband," what does a power outage have to do with this problem? (*In Burkina Faso, the brother of a husband can be called “big husband” or “small husband” depending on whether he is the older or younger brother of the husband.*)

**ABRAHAM:** Katiana, the situation you are experiencing with Sam is like this power outage.

**IDO**: Abraham, what do you mean by that?

**ABRAHAM:** You are out of communication with Sam. A power failure can have several causes. It can be a short circuit, the power line may have been damaged, or animals and accidents can also cause a power failure. Well, it's the same with your son. You know that in parent-child relationships, communication failures happen and there are many kinds of causes. Often, parents can cause a short circuit in communication or damage the communication lines without even knowing. So you created a barrier between you and your son, leading him to isolate himself and refuse to talk to you.

**KATIANA:** I think you're right, Abraham.

**ABRAHAM:** Sam is becoming an adult. He needs to know certain things, but you have evaded your responsibilities by treating questions that are important to the teenager he is as taboo. You have shown that he cannot communicate with you, that he is not free to ask you the questions that concern him. With children, shouting and giving orders should be avoided. You should listen to them carefully, discuss things with them, and not judge. You said that Sam was totally walled up, but didn't you help give him the material to build the wall? We are adults, it’s true, but our children are also entitled to their views. They should be able to express themselves without feeling underestimated or rejected. Communication, good communication is a fundamental pillar of your relationship with your child. Indeed, the quality of our communication determines how much help we can provide to our children.

**SOUND** **EFFECTS**: SOUND OF A FAN SWITCHED ON

**KATIANA:** Ahhhh, thank God, the power is restored.

**ABRAHAM:** You can now follow your series, can’t you?

**KATIANA:** Of course, my darling.

**IDO:**  Big brother, what do you think we can do to fix this breakdown in communication?

**ABRAHAM:** Ido, you're right, communication must be restored like this electric current. I'm going to talk to my nephew. We get along well. But once communication is restored, you need to communicate better with him.

TRANSITION MUSIC

**SCENE 4**

**SETTING:** Abraham’s office

**TIME:** Morning

**SFX:** Sound of an old fan in the background

**CHARACTERS:** Abraham and Sam

**ABRAHAM:** Sam, my dear nephew, how are you?

**SAM:** I'm fine, Uncle Abraham.

**ABRAHAM:** Sit down, son. (SOUND OF SOMEONE SITTING ON A CHAIR) What is it, Sam? You look haggard and anxious.

**SAM:** Everything is alright, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** Sam, I hope you continue to be among the best in your class? (SILENCE) Your father told me that you had some difficulties this term? (SILENCE) When I said I would see you, your cousin Myriam insisted that I say hello.

**SAM:** Is she alright?

**ABRAHAM:** She's fine, but this morning she had some dizzy spells as I was going out.

**SAM:** Is she suffering from headache?

**ABRAHAM:**  You know your cousin has painful periods like your sister Safi.

**SAM:** Uncle, what are painful periods?

**ABRAHAM:** Good question. Sam, do you at least know what periods are? You must have studied this in class?

**SAM:** Not really. We study this in upper secondary.

**ABRAHAM:** Put in crude terms, you know, in creating man and woman, God made sure that the woman was ready to procreate every month—that is, to receive a seed from the man. Once this seed from the man meets what is called an ovule in the woman, it then forms an egg that later becomes a fetus and later still a child. If, during the month, the egg does not meet the human seed, then the egg breaks into pieces and, since it’s a product of the woman’s body, it’s expelled as blood accompanied by the residues of the ovule. And the woman's body sheds this blood through the vagina. That is what we call “periods.” Now, for some women, the discharge of this blood is accompanied by painful contractions. The woman feels pain. This is what we call "painful periods." And every month, this process begins again if the man’s seed or sperm and the woman’s egg do not meet.

Son, it's not a perfect scientific definition, but I had to explain it to you this way so you could understand. So, you should know that whenever a man and a woman have sex, there is a risk for a foetus to develop. This foetus will become a child if both of them don’t find a way to prevent the egg and the sperm from meeting. This is why we use the word “contraceptive.” Contraceptives “counter” the woman’s body from “conceiving” a child. Do you get it?

**SAM:** Yes, Uncle Abraham. Thank you very much.

**ABRAHAM:**  I forgot to say that it starts at puberty. Do you know what puberty is?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** My dear nephew, your parents could not explain this to you in simple and graphic terms. Besides, they felt it was early for you to know these things. They thought that you would discover these things over time. You have to understand them, that's how your parents were raised. And in turn, they want to educate you as they were educated because they think that it is the best way. Do you understand, Sam?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle. I wanted information on this so I could take a test organized by an NGO that awards prizes like bicycles, mini-computers and tablets, T-shirts, and other things.

**ABRAHAM:** When is this test?

**SAM:** It was last Thursday.

**ABRAHAM:** I hope you took part in it?

**SAM:**  Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** How was it? You answered correctly, didn't you?

**SAM:** I got a T-shirt, sneakers, and a cap, but I wanted a computer or a tablet.

**ABRAHAM:** Why didn't you win the tablet or the computer?

**SAM:** The first winner got a bike, a computer, and a tablet. The second to fifth got computers and tablets.

**ABRAHAM:** What was the test about?

**SAM:** The sexual and reproductive health of young people.

**ABRAHAM:** How well did you do?

**SAM:** I was nineteenth, uncle. I didn't have much information.

**ABRAHAM:**  What questions did you get stuck on?

**SAM:** Questions about periods, contraceptives, virginity, and children's rights.

**ABRAHAM:** I understand your disappointment, I was even going to say your revolt against your parents. You wanted a tablet very much, didn't you?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle. My friends Boukari and Stéphane won computers and tablets. I was the only one who didn't get one. (CRYING)

**ABRAHAM:** Son, I understand, don't cry. Next time, come and see me, I might be able to help you. (SOUND OF A TABLE DRAWER BEING OPENED) Here is some literature on adolescent sexual and reproductive health. It will help you understand certain things.

**SAM:** (SNIFFING) Thank you very much, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** Sam, I know you're angry with Mom and Dad. But you have to understand them. They usually answer your questions, don't they?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** You know they're not bad parents, right?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** You see, I have no doubt that if you had clearly explained to your parents that you wanted to take part in a contest, they would have helped you. Even if they couldn't answer all your questions, I'm sure they would have found a solution one way or another. They would have told you to come to me or referred you to Dr. Siaka who is a gynecologist and a friend of your father's. Unfortunately, you just asked questions about this and that. And since they were about sexuality, they thought it better to protect you from negative sexual experiences. They didn’t want you to get in trouble. Hence this terrible misunderstanding. My dear nephew, you also bear some responsibility. Next time, communicate clearly. Do you understand?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** You know, poor communication can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. You asked your parents interesting and relevant questions—that's good, but if you had told them the reason for these questions, it would have been better. So, it's not quite fair of you to be too mad at them. They didn't know how to answer you. They almost rejected you and I understand that it hurts you to the point where you withdrew into yourself. But know that they are your parents and they love you. They wanted to protect you, but they got the opposite result. You thought they had forbidden you to ask them questions or that they didn't love you.

**SAM:** I've been thinking about that. All the other parents helped their children. No one helped me. It's like I'm an orphan.

**ABRAHAM:** Sam, that’s just a feeling and it’s false. Children think that every time there is a misunderstanding. My dear nephew, you know that your parents love you and that they do their best to take care of you, don’t you?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** So! This is proof that your parents are taking good care of you. So, stop making bad judgments and learn to communicate better next time. I know they have learned their lesson too. So, I want you to go and talk about things normally with them with the respect and love that children owe their parents. If necessary, apologize. Do you understand, son?

**SAM:** Yes, uncle.

**ABRAHAM:** Goodbye, dear nephew.

**SAM:** Goodbye, dear uncle.

TRANSITION MUSIC

**SCENE 5**

**SETTING:** Sam and Katiana’s living room

**Time:** End of the afternoon

**SFX:** Sound a radio or a television in the background

**CHARACTERS:** Ido, Katiana, and Sam

**SAM:** Good evening, Daddy. Good evening, Mummy.

**IDO:** Hi, Sam.

**KATIANA:** Good evening, Sam.

**SAM:** I apologize for my attitude.

**IDO:** My son, your mother and I regret this misunderstanding.

**KATIANA:** Sam, to make it up to you, we want to offer you this. Here you go! (NOISE OF A PAPER-WRAPPED GIFT BEING UNTIED)

**SAM:** (WHISTLING) What? A tablet! State of the art. It’s the same one that the NGO gave to the winners of its contest. Yippee! Thank you, Mom. Thank you, Daddy. God bless you.

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