Clean up your act — development theatre for water and sanitation by Louise Levert

A project in western Kenya found that spreading news through word of mouth was not enough. They launched a pilot programme in which theatre proved to be the effective medium for their messages.

Despite what development workers may think, getting a message across is not a simple case of having trainers in the field. This at least was the experience of the Rural Domestic Water Supply and Sanitation Project (RDWSSP II), based in Nyanza Province. Although individuals told their neighbours about the benefits of better hygiene practices, the results were disappointing.

Folk-media groups seemed to be the next logical step. But which type? The long-term objective of the project is to construct about 1000 water points and a large number of latrines through community participation, and it was decided to run a pilot programme, using two local theatre groups, the Misango Arts Ensemble, and the Kisumu Professional Players.

From the start it was obvious that the financial and logistic implications of trying to reach 250 communities scattered over six districts, each year, would make it almost impossible for the project team to visit every village.

The pilot project was launched between April and May 1994, and set out to assess whether 'theatre for development' would be a realistic, cost-effective way of boosting hygiene training. The general focus was on ten water and sanitation 'messages' (see the box on page 30), on which hygiene training centres, and on the individual's responsibility towards the development of his or her community.

The Misango theatre group actively involved people as they made their way through the village. They performed at a mobile clinic, in schools, and in public places; as a result, they attracted a lot of people to the main performance. Then, during the show, the audience of women and children was encouraged to participate; they were also asked for their comments. In this way, they felt involved, an approach that went down very well.

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Audience participation

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ongoing pilot project on schools and hygiene training.

In public places, at water points in particular — short performances resulted in lively discussions. The number of people reached in this way may not be high, but the impact is likely to be considerable.

Evaluations of the audience's reactions were carried out by the theatre group; and by two external researchers, who conducted baseline household interviews before and after performances, as well as submitting their own evaluation. They used observation sheets, household questionnaires, and focus-group interviews.

Results
Both types of evaluation were useful, with audience reaction indicating the strengths of the performance, as well as how it might be improved. Both theatre groups made useful comments on hygiene education in general, and on the programme in detail. The household interviews and focus-group discussions provided an insight into the questions surrounding the pilot project, and contributed general ideas which could be of use in future programmes. For example, when asked about who was responsible for hygiene in schools, the majority of respondents gave the answer: 'parents and the community' — but they considered the government to be responsible for health. Those answers related to people's willingness to change aspects of their behaviour which did not match the 'ten messages' may also be of interest to the programme.

Members of the audience, and the focus-group, considered drama to be the most interest-provoking medium; the messages they remembered mostly came from plays. In general, however, it was the variety of the performance that people reacted to most positively, so focusing on one type of performance — to reduce costs — would not appear to be an option.

The majority of the audience at the main performance were children under eighteen; this was partly due to the school holidays. The shows appeared to appeal most to women and children, the latter showing particular interest in songs and drums.

The people said...
At least 90 per cent of the Nyanza villagers said the performance they had watched was nothing out of the ordinary; they had seen folk-media performances before. In general, however, it was the variety of the performance that people reacted to most positively, so focusing on one type of performance — to reduce costs — would not appear to be an option.

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The majority liked the shows, but there were some specific criticisms:
- one play in particular portrayed women as dirty, unhygienic, and guilty of poor sanitation practices. The women felt that it was unfair to...
Water and sanitation messages

RDWSSP bases its hygiene education initiatives on ten messages:

**Clean water**
- Draw water from a protected source
- Transport water in a covered container
- Store water safely
- Draw water safely
- Use water from a protected source

**Sanitation**
- Everyone should use a latrine
- Wash hands after using the latrine
- Clean the latrine regularly
- Dispose of children’s faeces in a latrine
- Train children to use a latrine from two years of age

During the interviews at home, people were asked what they thought about the ten messages, and if their everyday habits matched up (Table 1).

They were then asked what would persuade them to modify their behaviour. The answers served as a kind of indicator of the community’s willingness to change, and they were compared with the answers obtained before the performance.

**Water**

Ninety-seven per cent of the respondents agreed with the five water messages. Eighty-six per cent of the men claimed that their normal habits already tallied with the recommendations, compared to 53 per cent of the women; the high figure for the men was felt to reflect some over-optimism.

Only two men (one of whom disagreed with the message) were unwilling to change their behaviour. Five of the women said that they would not take up the recommendation about carrying water in a container; while another five said they were either unwilling, or unable, to draw water from a protected source. One woman was unwilling to commit herself to storing water safely.

**Sanitation**

Ninety-four per cent of the men agreed with the messages, while the women were unanimous in their approval.

After averaging the answers given to the questions specifically about sanitation, it emerged that 76 per cent of the men, and 46 per cent of the women claimed to be putting these suggestions into practice.

The men who disagreed with the messages were unwilling to change their behaviour. Three women did not plan to change the way in which they trained small children in using the latrine, and one woman did not want to clean the latrine.

Table 1. Hygiene behaviour — villagers’ responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you draw water from a protected source?</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you transport water in a covered container?</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you store water safely?</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you draw water safely?</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use water from a protected source?</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you always use a latrine?</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you wash your hands after using the latrine?</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you clean the latrine regularly?</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you dispose of children’s faeces in a latrine?</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you train two year-olds to use a latrine?</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meeting objectives

The Misango Arts Ensemble and the Kisumu Professional Players more or less achieved their objectives, and did so in a professional way. The Misango Arts Ensemble appear to have reached about 60 per cent of the community. The Kisumu Professional Players’ target of 80 per cent was over-optimistic — the eventual figure was around 40 per cent. The ‘messages’ seemed to be understood, and the audience said they would like to see the performance again.

Limitations

There are problems:
- The price of entry to see the performance was approximately Ksh42, too high for many people;
- In Luo areas, the pilot project used the main language, Dholuo, but problems arose as people spoke at least three other languages in certain areas. Performances in the official national language, Kiswahili, would limit their effect considerably;
- The project aims to assist 250 communities a year, which may not be feasible. Even a target of 50 to 100 communities would incur many organizational difficulties;
- As one of the theatre groups suggested, performances should be held during the dry season when there is less work to be done in the fields. Market days, festina, and special holidays should be avoided. This limits the time available, and a simple calculation shows that the project will probably need to engage a couple of theatre groups to achieve its aim of visiting all the RDWSSP communities.

Which approach?

Audience numbers, people’s reactions, and focus-group discussions indicate that the Misango Arts Ensemble was more successful than the Kisumu Professional Players. In both cases, however, audience interaction was limited. Audience participation is one of the basics of theatre for development, and more needs to be achieved in this area.

The Kisumu Professional Players used attractive and efficient staging, which helped get the ‘messages’ across; but they also provoked negative comments about their language, and on their portrayal of women.

Future plans

The findings of the pilot project would suggest that theatre for development
should be combined with other ongo-
ing pilot projects which involve
schools and other institutions.
In one community, for example, the
local women's group staged their own
water and sanitation performance,
which was enthusiastically received by
the audience.
RDWSSP II's next step is to conduct
a pilot project which focuses on train-
ing teachers, women's groups, and
youth groups, or members of other vil-
lage institutions. The 'water and sanita-
tion messages' performances, which
proved to be effective, will serve as a
basis for the training.

There is no doubt that theatre for
development has the potential to
courage new ideas and new ways of
thinking. Community members have
different reasons for changing their
behaviour after seeing the perform-
ance, and these are mostly related to
social interaction with other members
of the community. Whether this will
lead to permanent behaviour change,
however, is a question outside the
range of this pilot project. But the vil-
lagers enjoyed the performances, and
easily accepted a medium which
reflects their own lives.

References

1. RDWSSP II is implemented in Nyanza
Province by Lake Basin Development Authority
(LBDA), Kisumu. LBDA is assisted by a
Programme Advisory Team (PAT) with experts
of bkh Consulting Engineers, FemConsult,
KWAHO, AMREF, and NES.

Loukie Levert is a Communications Adviser
working with RDWSSP II, Programme Advisory
Team, Kenya National Assurance Building (10th
Floor), Wing A, PO Box 1137, Kisumu, Kenya.
RDWSSP has produced a training video based
on the pilot project; contact them for more
details.

Behind the scenes

People often react better to the social implications of a
message, than to explicit warnings of health hazards, and
technical details. Dramatizing embarrassing situations is
less likely to offend, and can be done humorously. Hope-
fully, the audience will look at what they consider to be an
uninteresting subject, in a new light.

In one play, after walking into a rather unpleasant sur-
prise in the family compound, a man chastises his brother
for not teaching his children to use the latrine. His brother
then scolds his wife for putting him in such an embar-
sassing situation.

Another embarrassing situation arises at the market-
place. Two mandaazi (sweet) sellers have very different
ideas about cleanliness. The first is proudest of his large,
expensive wares, while his rival boasts of his good
hygiene practices. A prospective customer appears on the
scene. Initially, he declares that, for him, bigger is better.
The triumphant vendor, who has run out of paper in which
to wrap the mandaazi, goes to borrow some from his com-
petitor, but, suddenly, is stricken with an urgent call of
nature. The customer then witnesses the stall-holder
returning to handle the food without bothering to wash his
hands; he soon realizes that cleaner is better than bigger,
and turns his attention to the other vendor. A fight ensues,
and a market inspector steps in to break it up.

To drive the message home, the theatre group relies
on audience participation. The market attendant begins to
ask women in the crowd if they would buy mandaazis
from the unhygienic vendor. The end result: the bad
vendor is embarrassed into admitting his sub-standard
hygiene practices, and agrees to clean up his act.

Audiences enjoy sketches of familiar situations — entertainment, not lectures.