

Concept Paper on the use of theatre for Development in communicating Health Messages in Zimbabwe by Patsimeredu Edutainment Trust

Introduction

Patsime Edutainment Trust has been operating in Zimbabwe since 2002. It has acquired a lot of experience and expertise in using theatre in development particularly health communication issues. We have worked with a diversified portfolio of partners and stakeholders including civic and government institutions. This paper maps out the background of Patsime, what it does and why it does that and how it does it. The paper shows our concept and it is our hope that other this paper will be used by other organisations to develop their own programs or those organisations that want to work with us and want to understand what we do and why and how.

Background

The use of theatre groups in AIDS health education started in 1989 when Batsiranai Theatre Production Unit produced a play on HIV and AIDS. Leading theatre organisations such as the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre (ZACT) and Amakhosi Theatre Workshop also began using theatre extensively together with AIDS Service Organisations (ASOs) and other Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to use theatre in HIV, AIDS and family planning prevention campaigns.

In September 2001 Amakhosi Cultural Centre organised a one year long practical theatre skills training programme to promote the use of Theatre for Community Action methodology in all the seven districts of Matebeleland North Province.

The lack of continuity in these programs and the recognition that theatre is an effective tool in HIV and AIDS behavior change and maintenance communication resulted in various strategic partners and stakeholders meeting in January 2002 to discuss the creation of a body that would support the activities of theatre groups working on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The various stakeholders present were the Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS), Training And Research Support Centre (TARSC), John Snow International (JSI), University of Zimbabwe, Centers for Disease Control (UZ/CDC), Department for International Development (DFID), Over the Edge Theatre Group, Community Theatre Group and Masala Media.

While theatre could be integrated to improve tools of communication and add value to information, it was felt that the potential of theatre with reference to its role in conveying HIV and AIDS information was not fully utilised. The discussion noted that theatre groups in Zimbabwe who performed plays on HIV and AIDS issues faced the following challenges:

- Lack of technical support, which resulted in insufficient or, at times, incorrect information being passed on to the public. Specifically there was a problem of stereotyping and use of discourse, which perpetuated stigma, and the discrimination of people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.
- Poor linkages between the theatre groups and AIDS Service Organizations and Community Based Organizations and hence lack of social and community mobilization and continuation of programs after performances.
- Limited capacity to adequately mobilize resources for their activities.

Patsimeredu has an understanding that information is now available on HIV and AIDS but is not effectively reaching its intended beneficiaries and we believe that focus should be on information dissemination through theatre to achieve effective communication. We also understand that theatre is an important medium of development communication and we believe that theatre augments the available media to achieve positive behaviour change.

Patsimeredu comes from this background and because of its solid grounding and understanding of developments in HIV and AIDS communication and issues it has moved from merely providing information as a limited strategy to Beyond Awareness Behaviour Change Communication which emphasizes more dialogue, communication and meaningful involvement of communities in HIV and AIDS communication. It understands the challenges faced by other theatre responses, which faced continuity problems and were not national in character. It thus has as one of its main objectives the need to empower community theatre groups on how to network and source funds from various sources to enhance continuity.

Why involve the Community?

Dagron A.G (2001) in a report to the Rockefeller Foundation entitled Making Waves: Stories of Participatory Communication for Social Change quite aptly and eloquently described the challenges with communication in communities:

“Communication has been neglected for too long in development projects and still is. Even when development organisations and staff realise today that beneficiaries have to be involved, they have to understand that without communication there can be no long-term dialogue with communities. The fact that development projects are mostly in the hands of economists and technicians impedes the understanding of social and cultural issues that are key to a communication strategy” (2001:9)

Patsimeredu was informed by this understanding and has learned from the findings of a network of communication experts facilitated by the Rockefeller foundation in communicating with communities. The network came with the following conclusions that while mass education campaigns aimed at changing individual behaviours play an essential role in AIDS prevention, they are highly unlikely to be successful or sustainable unless they are accompanied by deep rooted social changes. These will only result from internally driven change processes, including informed and inclusive public debate, which take into account the following factors:

- Sustainability of social change is more likely if the individuals and communities most affected own the process and content of communication.
- Communication for social change should be empowering, horizontal (versus top down), gives a voice to the previously unheard members of the community, and is biased towards local content and ownership.
- Communities should be the agents of their own change.
- Emphasis should shift from persuasion and the transmission of information from outside technical experts to dialogue, debate and negotiation on issues that resonate with members of the community.

- Emphasis on outcomes should go beyond individual behaviour to social norms, policies, culture and the supporting environment.
- The greatest weapon that humanity has remains humanity's most unique characteristic-communication.
- An overwhelming conclusion from Uganda and other countries, which are success stories, is that the extent to which people talk to each other within communities and between communities, are critical success factors.

Patsimeredu consults extensively with communities before they develop their plays. They also communicate with Community Based Organisations as experts in their own areas and as such input advisors. Through facilitation of discussions we allow communities to discuss and provide solutions for their own problems. In our training workshops, community theatre groups are involved at all levels including the areas they are interested in.

Community based theatre in Zimbabwe

The history of pre-colonial Zimbabwe is abound with examples of forms of drama which` existed in child and adult plays, the oral narrative and ritual. In these social activities, one could find role-play, plot, suspense, music, song and dance, and costume and audience participation. In colonial Zimbabwe in the shantytowns, indigenous performing traditions were infused with messages of liberation. In the liberation struggle prop theatre developed were song, dance and drama were used to articulate the aims of the armed struggle.

It employs the expressive modes of the ordinary townfolk. The emphasis is always on oral performance, which characteristically includes song and dance. This classifies community-based theatre as popular theatre, which has been defined as:

“A theatre speaking to the common man in his language and idiom and dealing with problems of direct relevance to his situation” (Kidd in Chatikobo 1991:1).

The oral nature of Zimbabwean community-based theatre contrasts with the so called mainstream literal drama which tends towards sophisticated language usually European and a more personal handling of material, literary drama tends towards sophisticated language (usually European) and a more personal handling of material. Because of that inclination towards personal drama of material, literary drama tends to facilitate the emergence of a tradition of great writers, great texts and great directors, something which community theatre seeks to negate.

The Project

Concept:

Depending on the requirements of the audiences, we employ various theatre strategies, which are very interactive. Through our experience, performing the plays that we produce ourselves will set the agenda and get the youth talking. Through our experience in working with people, facilitation, training in HIV and AIDS issues the emphasis is placed on dialogue and debate. Depending on our discussions and the requirements of different target audiences, we have different strategies for theatre for development strategies such as improvisation, hot spotting, story telling, snapshots,

forum theatre, role-play, mime and gestures alternative endings and choreographing HIV and AIDS games.

The advantage of the *Buddies for Love* team is their experience in theatre, their training in HIV and AIDS issues and their popularity and familiarity with the people. Messages can be individually tailored to suit the audience. This forms the perfect basis for intimate, effective and long-lasting campaigns

Buddies for Love Program

It has become clear that to reach out to youth in Southern Africa, new methods are required which go beyond providing information to strategies that enhance dialogue, debate and negotiation. Through Theatre for Development we have learned that we can get youth communicating on HIV and AIDS issues among themselves.

The program raises key issues in relation to HIV and AIDS. The project emphasizes the need for dialogue and debate, which places youth at the centre of their own communication. The program has a thematic approach where it scripts plays, uses various Theatre for Development strategies and facilitates discussion. The project also conducts participatory workshops where various strategies for theatre are used depending on the needs of the participants.

The Buddies for Love programme can be tailor made for different communities. We have a schools and community centres and an events related program, which are tailor- made to suit the requirements of the organizers. We can facilitate discussions on HIV and AIDS issues.

Training Workshops Program

Patsimeredu has trained theatre groups in the production of plays that deal with HIV and AIDS issues. Different theatre strategies are employed depending on the needs of the participants. The main focus is on how theatre groups can communicate quality information and the need to use discourse which is sensitive to people living with HIV and AIDS. This is our strategy towards de-stigmatising HIV and AIDS and thus reduces discrimination and misconceptions about HIV and AIDS.

The approach is participatory and includes a repertoire of Theatre for Development strategies such as improvisation, hot spotting, story telling, snapshots, forum theatre, role-play, mime, gestures and alternative endings and choreographing HIV and AIDS communication games such as exercises for introducing, ice breaking, energizing, forming groups, enhancing group dynamics, improving listening skills, observation and improving analysis. Training in facilitation skills is central component in our project, as we believe that more people skills are important in HIV and AIDS communication.

Our Audiences

Early Adolescence (10-13 years or Grade 5 to Grade 7)

This is a critical period with a transition from middle school or junior school to high school. Adolescence are exposed to a wider variety of people. By this time they are good at understanding perspective and intent, which makes their world infinitively more complicated. They must negotiate their way through a period of enormous uncertainty that leads to intense information seeking, media use and experimentation.

Middle school and junior high (form 1 and form 2) represent a last chance for campaign designers to reach many at risk youth in a traditional setting, because at risk youth tend to begin dropping out of school. At this time, cognitive skills are sophisticated and most at risk, children have not yet given up and dropped out.

Mid-to-Late Adolescence (13-16+ or Form 1 to Form 4)

From mid-adolescence on, children focus on achieving independence by forming an identity, developing a positive body image, developing an inner conscience, defining sex roles and learning about cross sex relationships, preparing for future family and civic roles, and developing more sophisticated problem solving capabilities. In the meantime, they still realize that ultimately teachers, counsellors, parents and other adults are still in charge. To avoid seeming dependent or controlled by adults they tend to reject explicit acceptance or approval of adult sponsored interests. Now beyond simple physical rewards and punishments but not fully able to reward themselves from within adolescents seek social rewards and strive to avoid social threats. Their programmes need to be experiential rather than academic.

A great deal of experimentation is taking place, so campaigns need to emphasize moderation and intervention more than prevention. Adolescence seek solutions, not preaching, and they want to be part of the solution rather than viewed as the problem.

They need to hear messages frequently to counterbalance the frequent pressure they face. A mass medium campaign serves more as a catalyst to direct adolescence to sources of help than as a catalyst to direct adolescents to sources of help than as a solution to any problem. The major effect of mass media tends to be more communication.

Teachers

They spend a lot of time with young people and as such, they should be encouraged to integrate health issues into their teaching. The perception in primary and secondary schools that Health Education especially as it relates to HIV and AIDS is not an important part of the school curriculum should be changed. Patsime offers latest repackaged information and SAfAIDS publications, which aids in this process. Teachers are also potential child abusers and as such, the advocacy is being directed to them.

Student Teachers

The product Buddies for Love may be suitable to this segment and can be a tool that can be used once they become qualified teachers

Universities, Polytechnics and Technical Colleges

These targets have different needs from adolescence, as they are now young adults, as such they need a production of their own that deals with high-risk behaviour issues. The media has raised concerns about the poverty levels at colleges and universities (because of insufficient payouts and lack of part-time employment) have put students at risk as they turn to sex work. This is coupled with the relative independence from parental control and consequent “new freedoms”. Alcohol and substance abuse are rife and have been seen as important co-factors.

Theatre Groups

We consult with Community Based Organisations, District AIDS Action Committees and other stakeholders on identifying theatre groups to train. We believe that through the Diffusion of Innovations that training theatre groups or theatre leaders will increase the reach and impact of our interventions.

Stakeholders at District Level

We believe in community and social mobilisation and as such, we consult and work with community stakeholders. These include District AIDS Action Committees and provincial and district Education representatives.

Our New Programs

Information Distribution

We have developed a system where we record all the publications that we receive for distribution. This will assist us in our evaluation of the program. In February and March we distributed 3800 materials in Rusape and Masvingo in Zimbabwe. Some of these publications such as The Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Action (SAHA) is very much liked by teachers in remote rural areas who do not have access to information. Some of the publications that we have distributed include Men and HIV in Zimbabwe, Tuberculosis leaflet, Infected AND affected, the reality of HIV and AIDS related stigma in Southern Africa and SAfAIDS News, which are all our technical partner’s publications. We intend to distribute information from CDC, JSI, and PSI Zimbabwe.

Patsime and SAfAIDS Media Unit and Advisory Services Unit Drama Skits for Television

Patsime is working with SAfAIDS and has produced skits on HIV and the Workplace, Men Involvement in HIV and AIDS prevention and care, HIV and AIDS and Disability and the burden of care with specific focus on women’s involvement in care work. These will soon be televised as part of the discussion forums hosted by SAfAIDS.

Patsime and John Snow International Program

JSI is carrying out a TOT program on Young People and HIV and AIDS with specific focus on care. The thematic areas of the program are similar with the concerns of our Buddies for Love Program. Patsime did a performance for participants at the program from various sectors. The conclusion that was reached was that Buddies for Love compliments the program and as such Buddies for Love will be performed at these programs. The Patsime management also feels that they should be included in one of the workshops as participants to share experiences.

Buddies follow up play and workplace play

We are currently working on the scripts for two plays. One deals with how the church can deal with HIV and AIDS on the pulpit and Pastoral counselling on HIV and AIDS. *Buddies for Love* is a broader theme and currently we are working on the sequel.

Formative Research for a Church Based Response to HIV and AIDS Production

We have consulted with the Heads of Christian Denominations on the behaviour change communication issues in the church that we can use to develop our advocacy messages. HOCD has indicated that it will be very much interested to work with us for such a production. We are currently working on coming up with a play for Faith Based Organizations in consultation with HOCD.

Patsime and Inter-country People's Aid

Patsimeredu Edutainment Trust conducted a theatre-training workshop with youth theatre leaders in Hatcliffe, Dzivarasekwa and Porta Farm in Zimbabwe known as HA.DZL.PO in August last year. HADZL.PO, which is an initiative of IPA, has benefited from this training programme and has done Buddies for Love productions. Patsimeredu was invited to be part of a panel of judges on the Buddies for Love performances by youths from the three centres and puppetry competitions.

Training Manual

We have developed a theatre-training manual and we are making consultations with the media unit at SAfAIDS before we can produce the final draft.

Development of a Monitoring, Planning and Evaluation Framework

We have developed a discussion guide for Buddies for Love where we have extensively consulted with the SAfAIDS media unit. The discussion guide looks at various aspects of event preparation and management. It also deals with social mobilization, facilitation skills, communication, monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

Various organizations are approaching Patsime to compliment their programs or to request us to do productions for particular HIV and AIDS interest areas they are working in. This shows us that organizations are beginning to recognize the power of theatre, which offers excellent opportunities for communities to communicate HIV and AIDS issues, which because they are intertwined with human sexuality has experienced a lot of silence and deaf ears. People are part of this process at all levels of our society. Though Theatre for Development is a new concept per se it borrows a lot from traditional approaches, which makes it acceptable to our people. It does not necessarily require argumentative reasoning and argumentation but rather offers opportunities for parallel thinking and as such productive regardless of people's level of intelligence, literacy or educational status. We want to broaden our program portfolio as this presentation has shown but in order for us to do so we need more resources.

For more Information on our Programs

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