

FAMILY PLANNING PRIVATE SECTOR (KENYA){PRIVATE } COMMUNITY HEALTH AWARENESS PUPPETEERS (CHAPS)

PUPPETRY: RAISING AWARENESS IN KENYA

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1. BACKGROUND

The Community Health Awareness Puppeteers (CHAPS) was started in 1994 by the Family Planning Private Sector (K) with the aim of using puppetry and folk media (drama, song, dance, poetry, story telling) to create awareness on reproductive health and other issues affecting the Kenyan Community. CHAPS was registered as an NGO affiliated to FPPS (K) under the NGO Co-ordination Act.

Although the programme originally began with exclusive emphasis on reproductive health additional funding from donors has enabled CHAPS to expand its activities to cover other social and developmental issues such as drug abuse, female genital mutilation, corruption, environmental conservation and gender issues.

2. WHY USE PUPPETS IN EDUCATION?

2.1 Puppetry breaks down barriers

Puppetry breaks down racial, social and political barriers and stereotypes because it represents the `neutral' aspect of the human, exaggerating its `larger than life` issues.

2.2 Puppets can say more than a live actor.

Puppets can get away with being highly controversial and thus often say more than would be possible for a live actor. This is especially true when dealing with taboo or sensitive issues such as family planning, sexually transmitted diseases or the reproductive system. A puppet performance can be less embarrassing to the audience than a human act on stage. The puppet forms a barrier between the performer and the audience. Since the actors are not seen by the audience, they are less sensitive.

2.3 Puppets can be less expensive than hiring live actors.

Puppets are more portable, easier to transport and accommodate. Several, or if necessary, only one puppeteer, can present a whole cast of characters.

Puppetry, like theatre, is a mimetic art. It holds up a mirror to society and gives people a chance to look objectively at themselves and especially to laugh at themselves. It is less threatening than a human performer, is non-partisan and can represent humans from any walk of life.

2.4 The puppet can deliver a strong message.

This can be done in a light-hearted manner without offending or frightening the audience.

3. THE PROCESS

3.1 Who is eligible for training?

Youth Groups

Community Based Distributors of contraceptives

Community groups or motivator's and village health workers

Institutional clubs

Social Workers

Workers or groups of employees involved in information, education and communication (IEC)

Entertainers.

Since workshops are conducted in English and Kiswahili languages, participants must be fluent in one of the languages. A background in performing arts e.g. in music, drama, dance poetry or story telling is an advantage. The participant are drawn from community based organisation located countrywide.

3.2 Training of puppeteers

CHAPS enables communities and youth groups use this art to address local issues and problems.

The puppetry course organised by CHAPS is divided in three categories: Puppetry for Beginners, Advanced Puppetry and Training of Trainers (TOT). The workshops on puppetry are aimed at passing skills and experiences. Participants at the workshops are taken through puppetry techniques, script writing, manipulation and basic acting techniques etc. Once trained, puppetry troupes are expected to be community-based. Themes and issues depicted in their performances stem from the community myths, rumours, gossip and reality of daily struggles to deal with problems.

3.3 Training Methodology

The facilitation adopts participatory and adult learning methodologies which encourage involvement of participants in learning activities through practical exercises and reflection on their life situations. The training encourages creativity, innovation and improvisation both in construction of puppets and performance .

Involvement in lectures, plenary discussion, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), role plays,

Participatory Education Theatre (PET) techniques and research are used to tap the ingenuity and creativity of participants.

3.4 Combining Puppetry with other art forms

Puppetry was initially introduced to complement folk media (traditional theatre through use of song, drama, dance, poetry, story telling) activities in the communities which FPPS had initiated in mid 1980's. The curriculum to date has been expanded to include other art forms like the use of masks, mime, role plays and Participatory Education Theatre (PET) techniques.

3.5 Demonstration of Skills

A rich combination has been used to enrich the quality of the performances. Examples are facilitation and narration skills, role plays, PET and audience participation. It has also assisted audiences understand the messages better. Their participation during the performance and during PET exercises leads to interactive discussions. The discussions help to thrash out any issues that arise during performances and reinforces the messages.

3.6 Performances

The number of puppet performances given per week varies according to the composition of the troupes. Where puppeteers are otherwise employed they can only perform after work and on weekends. However many of the puppeteers involved are from youth groups and unemployed. They can perform more frequently, almost on a daily basis. The performers engage the audience in a discussion during and after a performance. This is to ensure the ownership, relevance of the issues and possible follow-up action.

4. FUTURE DIRECTION

We are exploring possibilities of using puppetry for advertising, puppetry on television, puppetry for other non-health issues e.g. child abuse, violence against women, civil rights, community responsibility (e.g. the aged, orphans, street children) community development, proper driving etc.