

# 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 Arts Ensemble and the Kisumu Professional Players were both asked to write and present a proposal in three villages, in the districts of Siaya

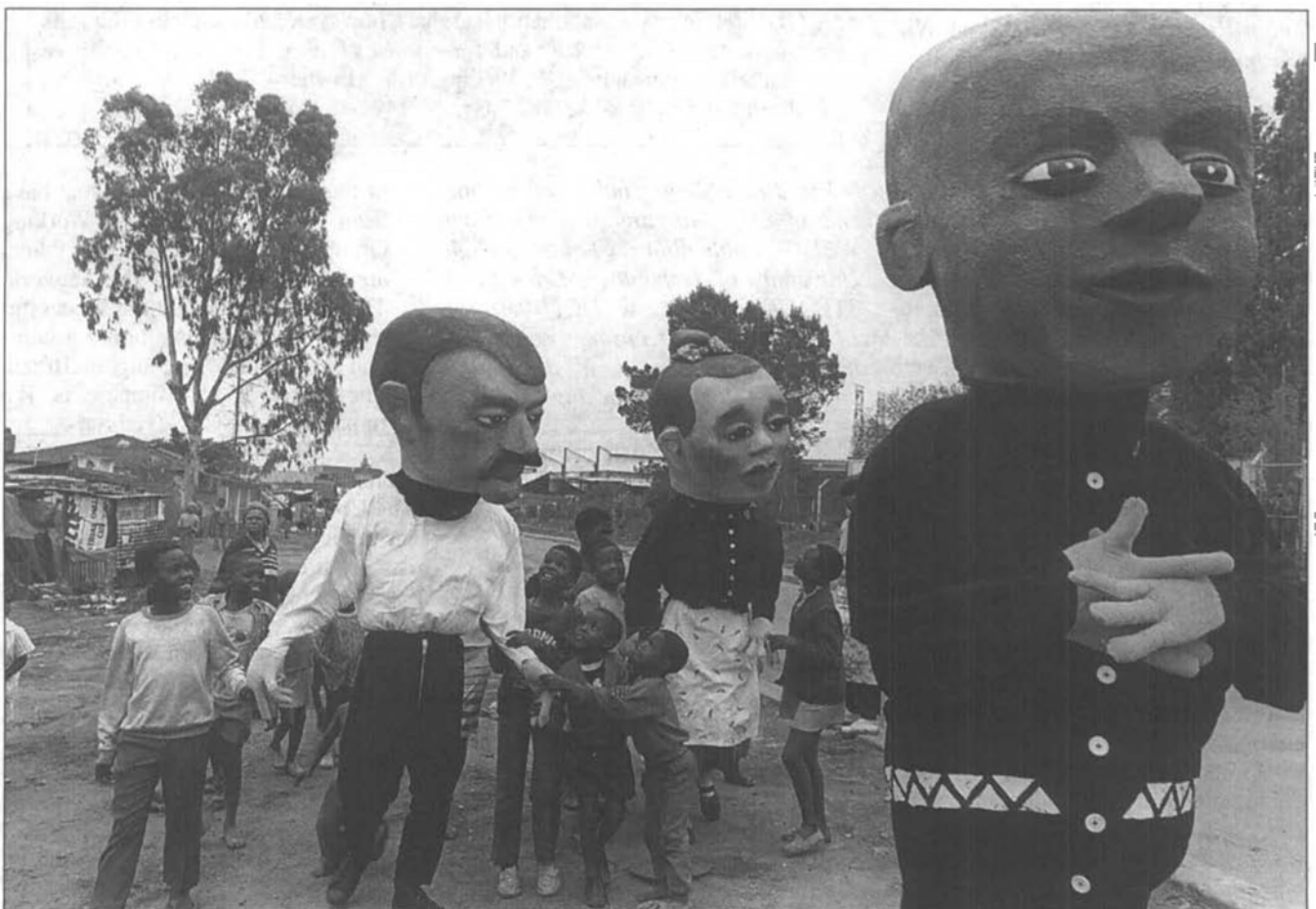
and Kisumu, where RDWSSP was already active. The only villages considered were those in which 30 per cent of latrines were completed.

## Audience participation

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.

The Kisumu Players performed in a school, and reached an interested audience of young people who are likely to change their behaviour. During the performance, the students were asked to explain what they saw, for example, how they would interpret a mime. Results from this pilot project should be compared with another RDWSSP II

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Gisele Wulfsohn/Panos Pictures

*By walking through the village before the performance, actors can involve children — and ensure bigger audiences.*

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. But what was different was that this was the first play to incorporate hygiene and water messages. This type of drama was usually associated with *harambees* (special occasions): funerals; traditional ceremonies (circumcision, wedding, naming a

child); school drama/music festivals, and parents' days; church; or when officials — such as the District Officer — visited.

People's general impressions of the performances included: 'very informative', 'enjoyable', 'entertaining', 'interesting', 'funny', 'taught a whole cross-section of the community', and 'good'. A few other remarks are worth quoting:

- 'relieved community of monotonous household chores';
- 'involving community members from promotion to performance was a good idea';
- 'simple/local language understood by all' (five villages);
- 'would like to be taught drama, to train communities';
- 'reached people in their home areas';
- 'starting-time was late, women were not able to make arrangements for the evening meal'.

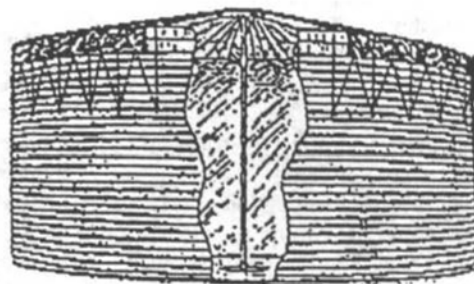
When asked what they thought the performances were about, the villagers could remember at least 70 per cent of the ten messages contained in the plays. Ninety per cent of the audience felt that the performances reflected the life of the community.

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

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## 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.

### Note

The object of this exercise was not to collect data on hygiene behaviour; RDWSSP II has special observation and baseline studies to measure this.

**Table 1. Hygiene behaviour — villagers' responses**

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

blame them for all these practices, as responsibilities should be shared;

- one play seemed to indicate that women should be shouted at and ordered around, and should not be given a chance to explain. This was perceived as unfair;
- actors playing a variety of roles in a play, causing confusion;
- the starting-times of the performances were late. Some people also indicated that Sunday performances should be scheduled to reach the people coming home from church.

### 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 sim-

ple 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 ongoing 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 training teachers, women's groups, and youth groups, or members of other village institutions. The 'water and sanitation 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 encourage new ideas and new ways of thinking. Community members have different reasons for changing their behaviour after seeing the performance, 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 villagers 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.

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### 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. Hopefully, 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 surprise 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 embarrassing situation.

Another embarrassing situation arises at the marketplace. Two *mandaazi* (sweet) sellers have very different ideas about cleanliness. The first is proudest of his large, inexpensive 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 competitor, 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.*