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Engaging Thaba Tseka Young People in Lesotho Public Service Activities: Paray High School Drama Group Case Study

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Abstract: *Public service is not only the responsibility of governments. For-profit and nonprofit organizations are major providers of public goods and services, as are citizens in their respective different capacities. The community as co-producer or primary provider of public service is an increasing phenomenon. The concept of “Citizen Driven Government” describes this practice in public administration. Prevalent instances of citizen driven government are found in the areas of health, education, crime reduction and gender sensitization. This paper elaborates on the role of youth in the delivery of a community driven public service for the Thaba–Tseka district in Lesotho. It describes their participation in planning, designing and implementing of a drama project to enhance knowledge and change behavior surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic.*

Qualitative and quantitative results presented in this analysis reveal the impact of the community-youth-driven initiative. The active participation and discussion on issues, facilitated by their use of drama, improved openness, confidence, open communication between peers, youth and adults surrounding HIV/AIDS. This improvement in communication represents transformative behavior for a culture where silence and limited openness about sexual issues (HIV/AIDS in particular) are presumed to be protective of the youth and too embarrassing for adults. This level of public service in Lesotho by these young people was in essence an extension of what the Ministry of Health, Education and Youth Sports and Gender were tasked to do. In conclusion, this analysis argues for more youth driven activities in an era where governments have limited resources and are relying more on citizens as co-producers of public goods and services.

Keyword: Youth in public service, performing arts in public service, HIV/AIDS and public service

Introduction

As civic engagement activities around the world illustrate, public service is not only the responsibility of governments but their citizens as well. Citizens are increasingly driving the delivery of public service, particularly at the community level. This trend in civic engagement includes community participation in the delivery of healthcare, education, crime prevention and gender sensitization. Young people are also engaged in these activities, and drama represents one mechanism they have used. This paper discusses a youth led public service activity in the Southern African nation of Lesotho using theatrical performances.

The Paray High School drama group pioneered an HIV/AIDS public service health and education initiative for the Thaba–Tseka District of Lesotho. The objective of this initiative was to help break the silence amongst their peers and between youth and adults around issues of HIV/AIDS. The drama group’s use of theater to provide this service represents a unique and effective mechanism for enhancing communication around sensitive social issues. The public service provided by these young people was essential and an extension of what the Lesotho Ministries of Health, Education, and Youth Sports and Gender were tasked to do, yet unable to achieve. In essence, youth provision of this public service effort benefits the community of Thaba Tseka by successfully facilitating discussion of sensitive health issues, which remains a challenge for organs of government in the region.

Both qualitative and quantitative results suggest that this youth led public service activity improved openness and communication between youth and adults in a culture where silence and reticence about sexual issues (HIV/AIDS in particular) are presumed to be protective of youth and because they are too embarrassing for adults. Results also include improved confidence among members of this youth group and an enhanced capacity to articulate their views about taboos that surrounded HIV/AIDS. Moreover, both adults and other youth who experienced the high school drama group’s performances displayed more knowledge of HIV/AIDS and actively participated in discussions about sexually transmitted diseases.

The results from the Paray High School Drama Group initiative suggest that youth should be encouraged to be more involved in public service activity. This is particularly important in an era where governments face major resources constraints and offer limited employment opportunities. Involvement in public service not only gives young people a sense of responsibility for assuring the welfare of their community but it also provides them preparation for working conditions that emphasize greater self-employability and self-reliance. It also allows them to have a voice on communicating concern about HIV/AIDs and other important issues that affect their lives.

HIV/AIDS as a Public Service Issues in Lesotho

The World Health Organization (2006) has discerned that HIV/AIDS prevention is most successful, particularly among young people, through safer sex practices fostered by peer-to-peer education and communication. Nowhere is this needed more than in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Graham Pembrey’s (2009) research on HIV/AIDS points out, Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the hardest hit regions devastated by this disease. Lesotho is one of the countries in the region that carries this burden, ranking third with a prevalence rate of 23.2 percent (UNAIDS 2009).

Fighting HIV/AIDS in Lesotho has been a persistent challenge wanting for new approaches to help arrest and eliminate the disease. Since the first official case was noted in 1986, the infection rate increased rapidly before experiencing a decrease in 2005, from 28.9 percent to 23.2percent (CIA World Fact book, 2009; World Press 2009). The high rate of infection has remained constant since 2005 (National AIDS Commission Agency, 2010). According to recent estimates, Lesotho has the third-highest HIV/AIDS rate in the world. United Nations estimates suggest that this rate could increase to 36 percent within the next 15 years (USDOS 2010). The call for action was issued and

the youth of Lesotho are responding. The Paray High School drama group HIV/AIDS project is one of these responses.

The benefits from this youth driven initiative are documented and discussed below. However, the broader linkage to public service should not be overlooked. For instance, government provides services through its different ministries (i.e., Ministry of Education, Health, Gender, Youth and Sports) also benefits from school-based youth projects that have voluntarily brought public service initiatives to communities. This is particularly true with the Paray High School Drama Group project, which sort to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS by facilitating communication between adults and youth, and among youth and their peers; an objective that government has not been able to accomplish. Creating such communication was particular challenging within the prevailing cultural perceptions and administrative responses surrounding the spread of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho.

Contracting HIV/AIDS in Lesotho was initially attributed to prostitution (which in the context of Lesotho's culture is any type or extra marital sexual relationship either paid for or emotionally based), or having sexual relations with foreigners. These negative perceptions foster secrecy to avoid stigmatization and discrimination. Delayed public health response to HIV/AIDS issues cemented the secrecy and accelerated infection rates.

However, not to bow to defeat, students from Paray High School Drama Group in the Thaba Tseka District made an effort to educate people about HIV/AIDS and help prevent further infections. With support from the World Bank and USAID in 2004, the students launched their project, which was designed to be as far reaching as possible. Facilitation and cultivation of tolerance were embedded in the messages they communicated.

The views and perceptions of what motivates open communication and tolerance between adults and youth, what cultivates destigmatization, as well as how to prevent discriminative behavior and tolerance towards those infected and affected was discussed early in the project. Additionally, consideration was given to: what drives young people to stay interested in and tolerant towards issues around sexuality and HIV/AIDS; and, subsequently moves them to develop public service initiatives for their communities. Activities associated the Paray High School Drama Group project do not purport to offer insight in these areas. They did, however, facilitate lively discussions and generate interesting findings that merit attention. These findings suggest promising possibilities for this and other youth driven projects. There are limitations surrounding these findings, which are presented below, that should be acknowledged.

Project Objectives

The objectives of the Paray High School Drama Group Project were to:

1. Improve communication among communities as a voluntary public service preventative strategy for HIV/AIDS;
2. Discourage discriminating and destigmatizing individuals affected and infected by HIV/AIDS; and
3. Encourage youth/peers in the project to be more active and appreciative of their involvement in spreading preventative HIV/AIDS messages as a public service initiative.

These objectives provided the framework for both the design and implementation of the Paray High School Drama Group Project.

Contextualizing the Study

The contextual essence of Paray High School Drama Group's "edutainment" initiative involved real life situations surrounding HIV/AIDS. This initiative was started shortly after the Thaba-Tseka district was declared highly affected by HIV/AIDS. Although initially assumed to be prevalent among migrants employed for the development of the Katse dam (the biggest man-made dam in Sub-Saharan Africa) and later the Mohale dam for exportation of water to South Africa, it soon began to affect the entire community. The impact was evidenced when almost half of the 800 students in Paray High School were either double or single orphans, most were assumed to be victims of the wide spread impact of HIV/AIDS.

High levels of poverty were apparent as most could not afford to buy school supplies. Thus, World Bank and USAID funding for the drama project came when a public service intervention that would reach large number of surrounding communities was desperately needed to alert people about the alarming impact of the pandemic in Thaba-Tseka. The Paray High School Drama Group's project, however, was an extension of the long tradition of using art as an instrument for public service in Africa.

Literature on the Arts and Public Service

The role of art as an instrument for public service is expansive and has received considerable attention from scholars in several fields. This includes discussions of the significant role that arts play at all level of African society. Much of this literature addresses the oral tradition of using music and songs to influence behavior and promote public policy agendas. Work by Kwasi Ampene (2005) on "Female Song Traditions" in Ghana chronicles literature in this area. Ampene points out that, even in an entertainment focus era, most of this music continues to have an educational function. As he posits, in addition to entertainment purposes, performer-composers "create new songs for performances at social events "to encourage socially beneficial behaviors..." He cites example of ministry choirs that exalt the benefits of prenatal care, breast-feeding and healthy diets. Similar literature is available that discusses the use of music and songs to influence the behavior of men. This includes the seminal studies by Kwabena Nketia (1992; 1974; and 1977). As he observes in his 1977 work: Men's songs include special communal labor songs such as those used by the dokpweco-operative work groups among the Fon of Dahomey, or the music used for collective farming among the Nupe of Nigeria.

There are hunting songs (which may be distinguished from the general class of hunters' songs), walking songs, beer-drinking songs in areas where social life revolves around periodic brewing of millet or banana-beer, heroic songs sung by men. As Nketia, Ampene and others points out, the general pattern of for the use of the arts in Africa is one that emphasizes its integration with other activities, including social and political action or public service. Traditional African arts have, however, been adult driven. That is, they are used to transmit social values and behaviors to the youth, which have been sanctioned by adults. The communication, in this regard, is one way.

An emerging body of literature focuses on youth generated art and its capacity for positive peer influence, particularly in the area of sex and HIV/AIDS. Among this literature is work by Catherine MacPhail (2006). MacPhail's work reports on two youth-driven HIV prevention programs in South Africa that seek to develop social capital, empowerment and conscientisation among young people. Her conclusion is that there is the need for true adolescent agency in challenging the social constructions of adolescent HIV risks at the social and community levels. That is, there is a need for programs that are conceived, planned and implemented by young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Research by scholars at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health (2009) supports this conclusion. As pointed out in the School's report on its work in Guinea with youth to prevent STIs, HIV and unintended pregnancy, tremendous success can be achieved through "Community Mobilization with Youth for Youth." As the School's research shows this must be more than just tacit youth involvement; they must be empowered with control and direction for the program.

A report by the World Health Organization (2006) also supports the call for youth driven programs to address issues of HIV/AIDS. A central theme in this report and research discussed above is the need for better communication and tolerance around issues relating to the disease. This includes better communication and tolerance within and across generations. Research suggests that youth-driven initiatives have been effective in these areas. The research questions develop for the Paray High School Drama group project emanated from this call for youth driven programs to help address issues of HIV/AIDS in the Thaba Tseka District of Lesotho.

Research Questions

Three research questions derived from the literature were developed to guide the study:

1. What measures are appropriate in youth oriented public service initiatives in improving communication between adults and the youth on HIV/AIDS and sexuality issues?
2. To what extent can drama performances by youth as a public service effort be effective in minimizing stigmatization and discrimination of those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS? And,
3. How efficient can the youth encourage their peers to be more positively involved in preventive efforts against the spread of HIV/AIDS in a public service setting?

Survey instruments were developed to help answer these questions. Participant observer methods were also employed. Findings from survey data and observation notes from the Paray High School Drama Group project are intriguing and merit attention. They suggest promising possibilities for this and other youth driven projects.

Methods

The Paray High School Drama Group consisted of students who served as participant observers in the project. These students went through a series of training sessions to prepare them for their role in the research process. These included informational sessions on HIV/AIDS to help them

understand the disease and to better prepare for developing a robust drama series. Paray Hospital Health and People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) personnel conducted the training sessions. Informative HIV/AIDS materials from UNICEF, PHELA (“Live” in Sesotho) and CARE Lesotho were used to facilitate the training.

A mixed method research approach was adopted to contextualize the perceptions and to quantify them where possible. However, the qualitative approach took dominance because it was important to understanding how the group understood the feedback they received from participants during their public service performances. Direct interaction with audience participants enabled the drama group members to be entertainers, primary researchers and participants in the project.

Population

The 31 members of the drama group, 16 girls and 15 boys, wrote drama performances with a variety of messages about HIV/AIDS. The scenes were comical and designed to capture people’s attention and help them feel relaxed about discussing HIV/AIDS issues. Each scene included no more than six actors who incorporated the audience with throw back questions, which prompted those present to be part of the story line and participants in the drama sessions. The other group members were part of the audience. This allowed them to capture data while serving as participant observers. The size of audiences ranged from 50 to over 1000 depending on the location. School based and other public locations attracted larger audiences than rural villages.

Instrumentation

Data were collected through the use of pre and post-performance questionnaires. The main purpose of these exercises was to acquire an understanding of the audience’s knowledge-base about HIV/AIDS issues. The focus was on the degree of open communication, stigmatization and discrimination, and general attitudes on HIV/AIDS issues. Instruments employed were developed to assess how the audience was affected by the drama performances. More than 200 pre and post questionnaires were randomly administered to individuals who attended the performances. Each contained 23 questions. Responses were recorded and coded as yes or no options. The frequency of coded responses were calculated and recorded in percentages.

The number of questionnaires administered was deliberately kept at a low level to not detract from the performance. It was important that the performers were able to deliver the intended messages. Priority was given to helping increase knowledge about HIV/AIDS over data collection. The pre and post performance questionnaires were able provide feedback on changes in attitudes surrounding HIV/AIDS from a random sample of those attending the performances. No structured interviews and observations were also used to collect qualitative data for understanding the context of participants’ tolerance and communication around sex and HIV/AIDS issues. After the drama performances, interviews guided by open-ended questions were administered that allowed the audience to speak freely.

Questions were posed and anyone from the audience could respond. Subsequently, the audience would be asked if they agreed or disagreed with the responses. Majority responses would be noted, and the minority opinions would also be acknowledged. Lastly, during and after

performances, members of the drama group would mingle with the audience to observe individuals' reaction to the messages being communicated and make research notes. Their experiences as participant observers were processed and incorporated into post-performance discussions and observations.

Limitations of the study

As noted earlier, there are limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. Set against the purpose and questions delineated above, findings from the study may be limited because one of the authors served as an advisor for the drama group's project; therefore there may be issues of biasness. The external collaboration for this article is an effort to mitigate this potential research bias. Also, since not all members of the audience were included in survey questionnaires, important data may not have been captured. A more extensive effort, which engages larger cross sections of the country's population, is desirable in future research. The finding discussed below, therefore, might best be considered preliminary, pending results from a more extensive evaluation of the project.

Finally, it is imperative that people are not judged without informed knowledge, because intolerance based on ignorance is narrow-minded and judgmental. Acquiring and sharing information to help cultivate tolerance and patience has become especially important on issues of HIV/AIDS because no one is completely immune from the disease. The values brought to bear on this issue are transmitted socially and are sustained or transformed socially. Corneo and Oliver (2009) posit, in this regard, "Value systems are endogenous and taught by parents to their children. In conjunction with actual behavior, value systems determine the esteem enjoyed by individuals. Intolerant individuals have all symbolic value invested in a single style of behavior, whereas tolerant people have diversified values." As members of the targeted population, the performers and the researcher are not immune from prevailing values and circumstances in the Thaba-Tseka District that brought these values to bear in the project.

Another circumstance that should be noted is the pervasive impact of HIV/AIDS on the lives of those who live in Thaba-Tseka. If one does not contract the disease then there are chances they will be affected by it. Thus, the focus was on cultivating an empathetic attitude between adults and youth, infected and affected and peers; less attention was given to rigorousness of the research process. Nevertheless, findings from the project and the drama group's process for generating them are important contributions, which should be shared.

Findings

Pre and Post Questionnaires

Tolerance and Open Communication between Adults and Youth

Data generated from both adults and youth were used to explore individuals' comfort discussing sexuality and HIV/AIDS with their children or parents. According to pre-tests, approximately 98 percent of adults were uncomfortable discussing sexuality and HIV/AIDS issues with their children prior to the drama group's performances. Similarly, 100 percent of the youth respondents indicated

that they would never discuss HIV/AIDS and sexuality issues with their parents. These findings suggest that open communication about sexuality and HIV/AIDS are uncomfortable topics in Lesotho households.

When groups were asked if they would like to speak more openly about sexuality and HIV/AIDS, 100 percent of youth said yes, as did approximately 55 percent of adults. Nearly 35 percent of adults felt these issues should not be openly discussed and only 8% was undecided. Adults often expressed the belief, during discussions after performances, that openness is equivalent to giving children permission to have sex, which they felt is the primary cause of increases in teenage pregnancies and high prevalence of HIV/AIDS among young people. Importantly, after performances respondents' views concerning openness were more favorable, indicating that dramatized public performances helped change their opinions about open communication.

Interviews and Observations Findings

Tolerance and Open Communication between Adults and Youth

In an interview with the drama group members, there was unanimous agreement that they had helped to open lines of communication between adults and youth on issues of HIV/AIDS. Initial responses confirm their perception. One student stated, "After my mother saw me perform, when we got home she tried to talk with me about the risks of early sexual activities, and HIV/AIDS. It was clear she was uncomfortable but she did her best." Her mother had never discussed the topic before in their household.

After a mass interview in one village, the chief supported by his subjects expressed concern about life threatening issues facing the youth and encouraged parents to talk with their children to help protect them from contracting HIV/AIDS. He threatened to personally check to see if parents were obeying his orders: "Ke tlo tsamaea motseng mona ke fuputsa hore na batsoali ba bua le bana ba bona ka taba tsa thobalano le koatsi" (I will be going house to house checking that parents speak with their children about sex issues and HIV/AIDS). He also encouraged more open communication to combat the secrecy surrounding the disease.

The findings from questionnaires, interviews and observations support the chief's concern about the need for better communication between parents and their children. Responses indicate that there is only minimal communication between youth and adults around sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Communication was found to be difficult for both groups. It appears to be difficult for adults because they were never taught or learned how best to talk about sex issues with their children. Culturally, sex issues are perceived as adult turf, even though it is apparent that teenagers are sexually active. The drama group members were, however, able to facilitate, to some extent, plausible communication and tolerance between youth and adults in the communities where they performed.

As Klein et al (2005) point out; parents are the primary source of education. Additionally, in matters of sexuality, they should take the first step to improve communication between themselves and their children to develop healthier and more informative relationships. Or, as winter (2004) emphasizes, to best protect youth from health hazards parents should be able to facilitated communication and impart knowledge and information for the best interest of their children.

Recommendations for facilitating open communication emphasize that parents should become better trained in how to engage and encourage youth to communicate openly about controversial issues without fear of being reprimanded. Adults also need to realize that open communication does not mean undermining the cultural contextual elements of respect or losing control over their children. It is also imperative that youth be “conscientized” of the need for open communication without being disrespectful to adults. Findings suggest that young people should be encouraged to communicate their concerns about being exposed to dangers of HIV/AIDS. In the Lesotho cultural context, reintroduction of “youth communals” (Thakaneng) at village level might prove helpful to reconnect the youth with adult wisdom on contemporary challenges related to HIV/AIDS.

Tolerance between Infected and Affected

To impact tolerance between individuals infected with HIV/AIDS and those affected by it, the drama group liaised with young people living with the disease. These infected individuals were directly involved in the drama project and student drama performances were informed by their discussions with them. In their effort to reflect the lives of those with HIV/AIDS, there was significant tolerance and a positive attitude illustrated towards the infected group. The audience sometimes questioned whether individuals, invited to participate who were infected with HIV/AIDS, actually had the disease. They often asked: “how do we know they are HIV/AIDS positive?”

As one of the infected, who had lived with the virus for close to ten years, observed: “the only way to know was for them to see his positive results, which he was willing to share?” Through further observations, there was admiration from the audience for the infected because they looked as healthy as everyone else. In contrast to those who participated in the drama performances, the only encounter individuals often had with HIV/AIDS victims was when it became publicly known that someone they knew was either very sick or dying from the disease. Thus, meeting a positive healthy looking person stimulated hope and tolerance for the infected. However, as one infected person told the group, sadly some people think victims of the disease are using it for publicity and to get money from donors.

Observations by participants in the project suggest that an infected person’s healthy appearance may also bring doubt and suspicion about her/his status. Nsubuga and Jacob (2006) emphasize this view in their work. They noted that the lack of knowledge could lead people into believing that those living with HIV/AIDS should be discriminated against. In this regard, the drama group’s efforts were a positive response to the United Nations declaration for a fight against discrimination and stigmatization of those infected with this disease.

Establishing Peer Tolerance on HIV/AIDS Issues

The launching of the drama group came at the time when youth interest in HIV/AIDS issues was dwindling. One of the obvious objectives during the inception of the drama group was the generation of new energy in their peers around the disease. In conversation with a member of the drama group, the student observed: “Taba tsa AIDS li ea bora feela drama group e etsa hore li be monate.” (HIV issues are boring but the drama group makes them more interesting). Hence, the

drama group stimulated a heightened sense of curiosity and participation through their comical performances.

The comical juxtaposition of the sacred secrecy and sexual issues between adults and youth was a major attraction to their peers. One of the students, significantly amused, laughingly pointed out that she liked looking at adults' faces when a particular drama portrayed emotional and sexual relations between teachers and students, husbands and wives or adults and youth. She said it was very interesting to look at how uncomfortable adults become when they were also exposed.

Another student, a male, said the drama group was the best thing that ever happened, because during interactive sessions they were able to air their thoughts without fear. A member of the drama group further noted there was an increased level of tolerance, open discussion and raised interest from peers. Or, in his own words: "ka nnete kea bona moea oa bacha o phahame, ba bonahala bana le thahasello ka taba tsa HIV/AIDS." (I am impressed that there is increased interest from the youth about HIV/AIDS issues).

In a society where young people are not encouraged to speak out, communication with their peers is often the only platform available to help air their thoughts and ideas about issues of HIV/AIDS. The encouraged communication facilitated by the group made it easier for peers to take each other seriously. In emphasizing this point however, Vincent (2009) highlights that the best way for children to engage in open communication is through communication with their own peers. This form of communication is not intimidating and facilitates openness, especially on controversial issues such as HIV/AIDS. In this regard, the drama group activities suggest that communication between peers can be a good facilitator for achieving tolerance and open communication.

Youth are observant of their surroundings and informed by them on many issues, including HIV/AIDS. Hence, it is highly recommended that peer education be given renewed attention. This should include support from adults, resources and creative opportunities to resuscitated interest and tolerance around HIV/AIDS issues. In addition, life skills should not only be the focus in the classroom but in the home as well. Through information discerned from questionnaires, observations, interview results and participant observer activities, the conclusion drawn is that unless people acknowledge the existence of HIV/AIDS, regardless of age or status, it will be difficult to understand and address issues that surround the disease.

Recognizing that all are susceptible to HIV/AIDS, either as affected or infected, will help people to be more protective of each other and practice more open communication. It also suggests that those living with the disease should be encouraged to be more open about their status when they are still healthy. This would give hope to those who become infected by minimizing the myth that HIV/AIDS always means death and acute illness.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

During this project it became apparent that there is minimal communication in Lesotho's Thaba-Tseka district between youth and adults about sexuality and HIV/AIDS. It is still very difficult for both parties to have open communication about these issues. It is difficult for adults because they were never taught or learned how best to talk about sex issues with their children. For many, sex

issues are still perceived as adult turf although it is apparent that young people engage in sexual activities.

As Klein et al (2005) point out; parents are the primary source of education and, in matters of sexuality, they should take the first step. To help protect the youth from health hazards, parents should be able to facilitate communication and impart knowledge and information in their children's best interest (Winter 2004). Improved communication between parents and children promote healthy and informative family relationships, which offer the best protection for youth. To a modest extent, the drama group was able to facilitate plausible tolerance and communication between the two parties in communities where they performed.

The drama group's performances encouraged tolerance of those infected and affected by affiliating their efforts with youth living with HIV/AIDS. Healthy looking persons with HIV/AIDS participating in the project also caused doubt and suspicion as to whether they were really infected with the disease. This contrasts with a prevailing view, driven by a lack of knowledge that those living with HIV/AIDS should be discriminated against. The drama group performances represented a response to this prevailing view by supporting the United Nations declaration to fight discrimination and stigmatization of those infected with HIV/AIDS.

As noted earlier, research suggests that the best way for teenagers to be able to engage in open communication is through dialogue with their own peers (Vincent 2009). Communication between peers seems to encourage tolerance on HIV/AIDS issues. In a society where children and the youth are not encouraged to speak out, communication with their peers was facilitated through the drama project and a platform was provided to help youth air their thoughts and ideas about issues of HIV/AIDS. This communication made it easier for peers to take each other more seriously and created respect for individuals' opinions about sex and HIV/AIDS. The communication facilitated through the project was not intimidating and enhanced openness, especially around this controversial issue. The drama group project not only facilitated open peer communication it also promoted tolerance in a very conservative environment.

The efforts by the Paray High School Drama Group project to unravel the wealth of information about how people communicate and what motivates their communication, how they relate to each other because of their different HIV/AIDS status and attitudes on HIV/AIDS were noteworthy youth-driven public service activities. These young people should be commended for and encouraged by this initiative. It represents a unique and effective approach for helping to improve communication and promote tolerance around a critical public health problem.

Recommendations

Recommendations that emanate from this project are also focused on enhancing tolerance and communication around HIV/AIDS. They include suggestions for improving communication between adults and youth; promoting tolerance for those infected or affected by the disease, and utilizing peers learning and socialization to help develop better understanding and communication about HIV/AIDS.

Improving communication between adults and youth-To help improve communication between adults and youth:

- Parents should be equipped with skills on how to encourage young people to communicate openly about controversial issues without fear of reprimand. It is imperative to help adults (parents) understand and realize that open communication does not mean undermining the cultural contextual elements of respect or losing control over their children.
- The youth need to be “conscientized” to understand that open communication does not mean being disrespectful to adults and therefore be encouraged to communicate their concerns, problems and fears that may expose them to dangers of contracting the disease, respectfully. Reintroduction of youth communal (Thakaneng) might be helpful in this regard. They should be encouraged in villages as this will help to reconnect the youth with adult wisdom on contemporary challenges related to HIV/AIDS.

To promote more tolerance for those infected and affected by the disease

- Individuals living with HIV/AIDS should be encouraged to be more open about their status when they are healthy. This would minimize the myth that HIV/AIDS means death and acute illness. It will also give hope to those who have been or will be diagnosed with the disease.
- Funding for peer education should increase. As the project illustrated, peer education can resuscitate youth interest in socially dormant issues that need their attention. This is especially needed to help develop better understanding and communication about HIV/AIDS.

Life skills are another area that needs the attention of parents and educators. Living in an environment where sexual promiscuousness is the socially norm and contracting HIV/AIDS highly possible can be a challenging dilemma for teenagers. They need decision-making skills that empower them to cope with peer pressure. Learning these skills should not only be classroom based but should also be an out of the class activity, so authority and control shift from teachers to pupils/students.

For these recommendations to be realized not only should young people be more involvement in public services activities but more resources must be made available to encourage and support their provision of these activities. In this way, they will be public servants in their own right. Communities should also be empowered to generate and share information that suits their context and helps young people to take ownership of solutions to paramount problems.

In this regard, the drama group project is helping position the Thaba Tseka community to enhance civic engagement in public service. This includes opportunities to take advantage of new civic engagement policies recently enacted by the Lesotho national government. The Lesotho government recently announced its commitment to involve local people in a wide range of policy decisions relating to employment, health, crime reduction, education, local government services and regeneration. “According to ministers, an enhanced role for local people will increase local accountability and improve service standards. Previous experience of community-focused initiatives suggests however that there are significant obstacles to increasing public participation” (Foley, and Martin 2010). This is particularly true for the engagement of youth in Thaba Tseka.

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