

WASH Promotion through Participatory Education Theater

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Using Theater to Promote Positive Change

Participatory Education Theater (PET) is an interactive approach adopted by CARE through the Global Water Initiative (GWI) program in Kenya to promote Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in target communities and schools. Almost 50,000 people are benefiting from the PET intervention in Garissa, Fafi and Balambala districts of Northeastern province in Kenya (see map). These communities are pastoralist, dependent on livestock as their main source of livelihood.

Use of the PET method by development practitioners is increasing as it can yield impressive results in regards to social and behavioral change. Theater stimulates the audience by involving them both intellectually and emotionally to make concepts real and concrete while sensitizing them to different issues and ideas, in this case, WASH. There is positive potential for social and behavior change through this process during which audience members can think critically about possible solutions and actions through the dilemmas faced by the characters.

Participatory theater also offers a more comfortable space for the community to open up about taboo issues, which is often a challenge for development actors.

Before the use of PET in GWI, program staff found that conventional training provided to a beneficiary community often most benefits a particular group – those who are literate and can learn through a lecture-style environment. As the program seeks to be all-inclusive and reach total transformation, PET is a dynamic means of education and awareness promotion that can reach many different groups at once and promote change in a creative and engaging way.

Different Ways to Perform PET

In 2009 and 2010, the program trained three registered youth groups of a total of 30 members in the target communities on WASH and Theater for Development. These youth groups set up PET events aimed at particular audiences in their communities. The GWI project team feels that youth are the best

group to engage in this activity because of their high energy and creative spirit. Furthermore, youth from within the local context understand the culture, language and the way of life of the community. With assistance from the program, youth groups created, organized and performed three different types of PET for safe WASH practices and relevant issues:



Youth performing a dramatic play in Nanighi community in Fafi district (Dec 2010)

Dramatic Play: The youth group writes and performs a play in the local language that reflects the problems that a given community faces regarding WASH. The CARE facilitators work with the youth group to ensure that they understand the specific problems and develop a storyline that addresses that community in particular. Through watching the play, the community sees a reflection of its own behavior. Since it is portrayed in an entertaining way, it helps the community to remember the issues and builds their interest to participate in community mobilization to change WASH practices for the better.

Talk show: In this PET method, one of the facilitators stages a “talk show” in the local language to the community. This is done immediately after the play/drama. This facilitator asks the community members questions on the dramatic play they have just seen. This helps the facilitator gauge the response of the audience and better understand which issues to emphasize. To create incentives for participation and make it more entertaining, the facilitators give prizes to the people who answer the most questions. Through this talk show element, GWI

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A Partnership Funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation



staff learn more about community challenges related to WASH and has the chance to listen to suggested solutions. Common barriers to safe WASH include availability and price of soap, scarcity of water, and unsafe water handling leading to contamination.

Demonstrations: While dramatic plays and talks shows mostly focus on the challenges related to WASH. The PET tool also provides hands-on demonstrations to solutions to common WASH challenges. During WASH demonstrations, community members are asked to participate, which is found to build morale and confidence. The youth group members demonstrate practices such as hand washing and safe water handling and treatment.



Nanighi community in Fafi district participating in a PET hand-washing demonstration (August 2011)

PET in Schools

The GWI program has tried different methods to promote WASH in the school setting. PET has been one of the most successful tools. This is not surprising given that children need more stimulation and often respond best to a medium that is creative and entertaining. Learning is found to be fast and practical through PET. PET is aligned with the national school curriculum as WASH is one of the core units covered.

Lessons and Recommendations

- PET has proved to be one of the most effective methods used by the GWI program for mass WASH promotion. The entertainment factor provides a strong incentive for engagement and the way

messages are communicated through PET allows for deeper internalization of the issues.



Balich Health Club in Garissa District performing WASH drama during school

- At the school level, PET has also had a very positive reception. It is found that pupils learn best through PET methods of dramatic plays and photos in particular. PET also provides a break from the somewhat monotonous nature of the traditional classroom setting and increases pupils' concentration on the subject matter. Most schools in the GWI target areas do not have other opportunities for children to experience drama/theater, which is healthy for child development. Another indirect benefit is that some youth are able to discover their talent and interest in theater through participation in PET.
- The methodology has also proven to be a useful method to encourage membership in school health clubs. The number of pupils joining health club increases every time there is a PET performance.
- Interestingly, the local traditions and cultures of these target communities do not allow some modes of expression such as music. For PET to succeed in these areas, GWI adapted the PET tools to fit with the local culture and must continue to be sensitive to certain established cultural norms.
- PET still has limitations in terms of reaching all groups, such as physically challenged people (visual or hearing impairment). To ensure inclusiveness of needs through PET, there are other PET tools that should be explored in the next Phase, such as puppetry.