

*Title:* Conscientizing and Empowering Young People in Kenya to own the Fight against HIV/AIDS using Problem-posing, Entertaining, Creative *Ngoma*: Introducing PECNOSC Communication Strategy Idea

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*Abstract:* HIV/AIDS intervention programs for the youth in Africa tend to valorize literacy or Eurocentric communication approaches such as brochures, posters, lectures etc. over the oral African-centered approaches such as cultural dance performances i.e. *ngoma, nyimbo, mashairi* etc. Mounting evidence indicates that these Eurocentric modes have a propensity to alienating and disempowering the youth because they do not start the communication processes from within their experiences and in many cases incapable of giving full respect to their values. To make a dent in the fight against HIV/AIDS among young people in African countries, there is need for culturally sensitive intervention programs that put greater emphasis on getting them involved in perceiving HIV/AIDS as their problem rather than an adult/government/international agency agenda. In this presentation, I share techniques, insights, and lessons learnt from my PhD project that was out to investigate how *Ngoma* (local cultural performances in Kenya) could creatively be used to conscientize and empower the youth to take ownership of the fight against the scourge. This project, conducted in two high schools located in Taita/Taveta District in Kenya from April to September 2003, was a participatory communication research where participants and researcher co-generated knowledge through collaborative communicative processes.

## Introduction

Throughout my fifteen years experience as a high school teacher, head teacher, and community leader in Kenya, I have observed many rural development projects fail mainly because of ineffective communication between social change agents and the people. In most cases, the *Watu wa maendeleo* (commonly used Swahili terminology for social change agents) used local chief's meetings as a means to diffuse development messages. During such meetings, the urban-dwelling change agents would ceremoniously arrive in a convoy of big airplane-like cars, extraordinarily dressed, and exuding with sophistication. From a "high" table, distanced from the community, they would address the people as if they were empty vessels to be filled (Freire, 1970). After lecturing and sloganeering, the change agents would formally take off pending a repeat of similar rituals.

In these *barazas*, opportunities were rarely provided for the people to air their views so as their needs and concerns could clearly be identified and addressed. The communication approach was clearly linear, top-down, expert-driven, and non-negotiable (Ascroft & Masilela, 1989). My informal evaluation, through everyday interactions with the people, fairly consistently revealed that the community's discourse had little to do with the actual social change message delivered. Not surprisingly, the village gossip emanating from such *barazas* paid more attention to the convoy of big airplane-like cars, the urban aura and dressing of the change agents, and the pomp that took place that day. This was to me an indication that *watu wa maendeleo* more often than not created the wrong or unintended buzz within the target audience.

For example the introduction of the hybrid cockerel, that was meant to "better" the local chicken, in Wongonyi village (I was a head teacher and local leader for four years (1993-1997] in this community) never really took off. This was because the communication strategies adopted by the concerned government officials presumed the indigenous knowledge, people's ideas, feelings, cultural values, and messages in existing folk media etc. to be uneducative and hence totally ignored them. Consequently, the government officials never managed to get a clear understanding of the strong cultural undercurrents and local myths that militate against introduction of anything labeled

“hybrid” which the Wongonyi people alleged to be a way used by the government to implement family planning measures.

In addition, the community had such deep-seated beliefs about the hybrid cockerel being less flavorsome than the indigenous breed, more prone to diseases, expensive to maintain, and not part of their culture. My informal conversation with some of the government officers on why they thought the project failed revealed a fairly consistent prevailing attitude that it was because of the people’s ignorance, laziness, and anti-development mind-set. In my opinion, the hybrid cockerel project in Wongonyi failed because the government officials did not adequately immerse themselves in the village so as to be able to create dialogue and share information which would have been directed toward mutual understanding, mutual agreement and collective action.

One of my major tasks, as a head teacher and local leader in Wongonyi location, was to sensitize and mobilize the community to meaningfully participate in school development projects. Being cognizant to the fact that top-down communication approach alone may not be effective, and being a native as well as a teacher of creative traditional dramatized dance, I decided to experiment with some of the indigenous communication channels. Music and dance have been used since time immemorial among the Taita, the ethnic group found in Wongonyi, to entertain and educate the young in preparation for adult roles. Therefore, by inventively inserting appropriate change messages in the commonly used local Taita and Swahili cultural performances, I found out that I could use the students to effectively “talk” from within the experiences of the community, and hence establish good rapport. Through a process called *kumaza*, which consists of a combination of drama, dance-song, talk-singing, poem, call and response, the students made their problems known to the community through respectful, non-threatening, entertaining and stimulating dialogue.

For the illiterate members of Wongonyi community, who constituted the majority, I observed that the repetitive and circular communication inherent in the entertaining creative Taita cultural dance performances assisted in intelligible articulation and visualization of the central ideas in the messages. Secondly, since the creative dance-songs were based upon the locally spoken Taita and Swahili languages, the people could easily comprehend and understand the social change message being delivered. Finally,

the vibrant drumbeats and repetitive call and response nature of the dance-songs were stimulating, hard to ignore, and thus naturally invited participation in their rhythms. This was especially true for the majority of the village women, who initially would start by “responding” to the “calls” from their seats, but as the performances progressed, shot up to actively participate in the dances and hence vicariously internalize the message.

These observations and experiences have invariably challenged me and raise a number of questions. Why are the indigenous, time-honored, and culturally relevant communications channels within rural communities in Kenya usually downplayed or totally ignored in communication for social change? Why are literacy or Eurocentric communication approaches such as lecturing, brochures, posters etc. valorized over the oral Afrocentric approaches such as dramatized dance-songs, poems, *mashairi*, *sarakasi* etc., especially in rural communities where they (Eurocentric) seem to be ineffective? Is it that oral African-centered communication approaches lack the capacity to carry modern social change messages such as family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention etc.? Finally, the fact that these indigenous, participatory communication modes are still alive and vibrant in many rural communities in Kenya, how can they be creatively utilized to effect social change?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This participatory communication research was out to overcome three major challenges in designing HIV/AIDS intervention programs aimed at the youth in Kenyan schools:

1. Move away from the top-down lecture/teaching/preaching approach and make the intervention program more participatory at all stages of development
2. Minimize the cultural distance between health promoter (teacher, health professional, AIDS activist etc) and the health receiver (youth)
3. Find appropriate language(s) that can articulate the HIV/AIDS disease in a manner intelligible to the reality of the youth i.e. a verbal and non-verbal communication channel that could assist in achieving shared meaning between health promoter and health receiver

## **Significance of the Study**

This study put in place a school based HIV/AIDS intervention program that investigated how *Ngoma* could be used to mobilize the youth in Kenyan schools to take ownership of the fight against HIV/AIDS. The results of this study are significant in that they provide substantive ideas for further study and theorizing on problem-posing, entertaining, creative *ngoma* as a participatory communication strategy which valorizes thoughtful practical application of African-centered cultural media/resources to enhance young people's capacity to solve their own problem. This study also adds sheds insights on the rhetorical agency of local cultural performances and their immense potential to organize and mobilize for social change within grassroots communities in Africa.

## **Statement of the problem**

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya presents a number of challenges among young people. Candid discussions about safe sex, condom use, and AIDS/STIs are still a cultural taboo and hence the epidemic flourishes amid stigma, fear, and denial (UNAIDS, 2001). Unemployment, poverty, death of parent(s) from AIDS, and other harsh social realities often place the youth in a vulnerable position. For example, affluent older men have been known to use money, and other luxuries such as expensive cars, cell phones etc. to lure schoolgirls into providing them with sexual favors (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). Despite the knowledge about high risks of contracting HIV, these schoolgirls are willing to take a chance. This partly explains why the rates of HIV infection among young girls in Kenya are five times higher than that for boys (Human Right Watch, 2001).

After a slow start, the Kenyan government finally began to take some measures to scale down the epidemic. Late 1999, the President declared the epidemic a national disaster and set up the National AIDS Control Council (NACC) to mobilize and coordinate resources for prevention of HIV transmission and provision of care and support to the infected and affected people in Kenya (NACC, 2001). After many years of resistance to school-based HIV/AIDS intervention programs, especially on the part of religious organizations, the Ministry of Education finally distributed curricula material for both primary and secondary schools. These consist of basic facts about HIV/AIDS and a teacher's guide that lists objectives and main points to be covered in the various

lessons. Therefore it can be presumed that the young people in Kenyan schools have had no coherent HIV/AIDS information until the government distributed HIV/AIDS curricula material in 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Teaching about HIV/AIDS may be helpful in increasing awareness but more participation and involvement of the youth is needed for effective social change. Research findings, based on 12 school-based sex education programs from developing countries around the world, indicated that “chalk and talk” was not enough (Scalway, 2001). For example in Zimbabwe, researchers compared a lecture on AIDS prevention with a session in which students put a condom on a model and practiced negotiating condom use. When interviewed four months later, those who took the practical skill course knew more about condoms and reported having fewer sexual partners than those who attended the lecture only (Scalway, 2001).

The fact that sexual health and HIV/AIDS are emotional and sensitive topics, more often than not, does increase the already existing cultural distance between the resource person (teachers, health professionals, parent etc.) and young people thus making effective communication almost impossible. Cultural distance between the resource persons and young people tend to manifest in two salient ways. One is the generation gap that emanates from age differences. It is customary for the young in African societies to show maximum respect towards those who are older in age. Consequently, there are various sensitive topics such as menarche, wet dreams, sex, HIV/AIDS etc. that young people find extremely difficult, if not impossible, to discuss with adults. The other way in which cultural distance does manifest is through education, which could also be linked to differences due to socio-economic status, expert knowledge, and position in society. In general, those who are educated and work for the government or other reputable organizations in Kenya, such as medical practitioners, engineers, teachers etc. tend to be alienated from the general public.

From my past experiences as a high school teacher, and head teacher in Kenya, I am aware that young people tend to detest authority figures, especially those that show no concern for their welfare. In addition, using the current official school system of reward and punishment to diffuse HIV/AIDS prevention may increase awareness but may not be effective in securing widespread adoption and practices among the youth. Kothari and

Kothari (1997) argue that when health receivers distrust or are afraid of the health promoter then bonding problems arise which lead to lack of understanding and cooperation required to deliver high quality health services. Therefore one major challenge in designing HIV/AIDS intervention programs for the youth in Kenya is finding ways to bridge the cultural gap between the resource persons and the young people.

Another challenge in designing HIV/AIDS intervention for the youth is finding an appropriate language that can articulate the disease in a manner intelligible to their reality. This requires finding a verbal and non-verbal communication channel that could assist in achieving shared meanings between health promoters and young people in the campaign against the epidemic. A statement by male representatives from an AIDS Committee of Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya is indicative of this need. They clearly state that “start teaching about AIDS in our school curriculum-in a language understood by the youth” (Scalway, 2001, p. 7).

Available literature (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Nduati & Kiai, 1997; Onyango, 2001; UNAIDS, 2001; Singhal & Rogers, 2003) and my personal experiences as a native from Kenya, indicate that HIV/AIDS is not only viewed differently from a western perspective, but is also viewed differently from one cultural group to the other. These differences, some subtle others conspicuous, stem from cultural groupings such as adults vs. youth, medical vs. non-medical/public, male vs. female, literate vs. illiterate, rural vs. urban, coastal vs. upcountry, Luo vs. Taita etc. There is evidence (Fadiman, 1997; Katalanos, 1994; Kothari & Kothari, 1997; Kaufert & Putsch, 1997) that effective communication is difficult when two parties have different cultural values about health/disease and points to the need to use trained interpreters or intermediaries for efficient provision of health services.

To make a dent in the fight against HIV/AIDS infections among the youth, intervention programs need to acknowledge and be sensitive to these underlying challenges. Airhihenbuwa (1995) laments the valorization of Eurocentrism in the production and acquisition of health knowledge and behavior, coupled with the continued oppression and suppression of cultural expressions of non-Western peoples. He strongly advocates for the inscription of culture at the root of all health promotion and disease

prevention programs, at least in some manner that legitimates its importance in public health praxis. Airhihenbuwa (1995) rightly points out that:

This process of engaging teachers/interventionist and students/audiences in the production of meaning, value, pleasure, and knowledge should be central to the mission of health promotion and education. It is only through such dialogue that varied cultural expressions and meanings are affirmed and centralized, and the production of cultural identity can be legitimating and empowering relative to promoting individual, family, community, and societal health. (p. xiv).

Onyango (2001), in advocating for a cultural approach in HIV/AIDS prevention and care asserts that the targets group's cultural resources should be considered as building framework for strategies and sustainable social action. Singhal and Rogers (2003) posit that HIV/AIDS interventions should go beyond the conventional mass media to include other culturally situated expressions. They give an example of *Khangas*, the traditional fabric wrap commonly worn by women in East Africa, which is now being used to carry HIV prevention messages.

The UNAIDS' Local Responses emphasizes on getting a target audience involved in perceiving HIV/AIDS as their problem, rather than as a government agenda (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). The purpose of such facilitation is to empower local actors to take responsibility for finding solutions to their AIDS problem in a fashion that is appropriate to them. For example in Tanzania, a UNAIDS local initiative is underway to get, female guardians at schools involve teachers and students to curb unwanted pregnancies, rapes, and sexual exploitation (Singhal & Rogers, 2003).

I believe that the young people in Kenya are key to controlling HIV/AIDS spread among their peers. Like any other cultural group, the Kenyan youth has innate potential to bring about their own change in response to HIV/AIDS as long as they are provided with resources or what I would like to refer as “activation energy” to get them mobilized. Consonant with the cultural approach advocated by the UNAIDS communication framework, this participatory communication research was out to investigate how the ubiquitous local cultural performances called *ngoma* in Kenyan schools could be used to conscientize and empower the youth to own the fight against on HIV/AIDS. The following research questions guided this study.

## Research Questions

- ❖ How *ngoma* could be used to carry and convey current social change messages on HIV/AIDS prevention to the youth in Kenyan schools?
- ❖ How *ngoma* could be used to trigger and sustain candid dialogues on HIV/AIDS among the youth in Kenyan schools?
- ❖ How *ngoma* could be used to introduce the youth in Kenyan schools to a critical form of thinking about HIV/AIDS so as to transform their attitudes
- ❖ How *ngoma* could be used to mobilize the youth in Kenyan schools from position of **spectator** (passive beings) to position of **spect-actor** (active being) so as to take ownership of the fight against HIV/AIDS?
- ❖ How *ngoma* could be used to reduce cultural distance between HIV/AIDS resource persons and the youth in Kenyan schools?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Young People and HIV/AIDS

Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is triggering national emergencies around the world. In any society, most infectious diseases tend to kill those who are weak such as the old or infants. In the case of AIDS “like war, kills those in prime of life. Indeed, in one way it is worse than war. When armies fight it is predominantly young men who are killed. AIDS kills young women, too.” (*Economist*, p.77). The fact that 22 million have died from the scourge so far and over 36 million is infected means that the worst is yet to come. With 80 percent of the 22 million deaths occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is a problem of unprecedented magnitude in the continent (Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Young people are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection because of risky sexual behavior, high incidences of drug abuse, and lack of access to coherent HIV information and prevention services (UNAIDS, 2001). Young women are particularly more likely to be infected because they are susceptible to sexual violence, coerced sex, and unequal power relationships. In nearly 20 African countries 5 percent or more of women aged 15 to 24 are infected (UNAIDS, 2001). Exposure to conflicting messages through TV, family, school, religious institutions etc. about sex, HIV, and the kinds of behavior that is

moral, fashionable, or responsible often leaves young people confused about HIV. Hence lack of proper knowledge about AIDS, may lead to judgments on sexual health and partnership based on superstition, harmful gender stereotypes, the latest youth culture or some other kind of non scientific information (Scalway, 2001).

Currently there is no known cure for AIDS and prevention is therefore one major intervention strategy that is being used to curb the scourge. The fact that HIV is mainly transmitted through sexual contact implies that communication for social change, at both the individual and community levels, is an important element in the fight against AIDS among young people (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). But what is communication for social change?

### **Communication for Social Change**

According to Servaes (1996), participation is “a term used to refer to a number of social and planning processes occurring in many different places and in many different contexts. To some, participation is a means to reach a certain goal; to others, participation is an end in itself.” (p.15). There is a general feeling of hesitancy in this field to arrive at a definition because the inherently dynamic and contextual phenomena are difficult to be defined, operationalized or institutionalized by those external to it (Arnst, 1996). Servaes (1996) conceives that authentic participation defines itself within each unique structural, social, and cultural context as it unfolds.

A working paper by Rockefeller foundation (2002), *Communication for Social Change: An Integrated Model for Measuring the Process and Its Outcome* defined participatory communication as the social process where people come together to define who they are, what they want and how they will obtain what they want. That is a process in which groups with common interests jointly construct messages oriented to the improvement of their existential situation and to the change of the unjust social structure. Participatory communication for social change is therefore an approach that focuses on using direct, grass roots, many-to-many communication, which springs from the affected communities (Gray-Felder, 1999). It is communication that gives voice to the previously unheard and communication that has a bias towards local content and ownership.

Despite the problem of definition, there are two major approaches to participatory communication agreed upon. One is the Freire's (1970) pedagogy of dialogical communication and the other evolves from the ideas of access, participation and self-management articulated in the UNESCO debates in the 1970s (Servaes, 1996). My research project was based on substantive ideas emanating from Freire's (1970) and Boal's (1974) comprehensive theoretical and practical body of knowledge. It was also informed by the entertainment-education theory (Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

### **Freire's Pedagogy of Dialogical Communication**

Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which through problem posing education introduces or begins to introduce individuals to a critical form of thinking about their world, has been widely applied in various participatory communication approaches. Freire's theory is based on his conviction that every human being, no matter how "ignorant" or "submerged" in the "culture of silence" is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such dialogical encounter, the individual can gradually perceive his or her personal and social reality, and deal critically with it. In this process the old paternalistic depositor-depository relationship, where the teacher is the depositor and the learner a depository, is overcome.

In Freire's proposed pedagogy of the oppressed, the teacher /social change agent is no longer the authority, but a facilitator: someone who both learns and teaches in dialogue with other fellow learner-teachers. In the conscientization process, Freire used a photograph, a picture or a drawing representing the existing reality and a discussion would then be initiated. The participants would be encouraged to question why things were as they were, what could be done to rectify the situation etc. Communication channels were used to generate dialogue, to help people talk, and understand each other. The Freirian method moves away from the conventional top-down development communication approach, which Freire described as perpetuating the culture of silence of the dispossessed. Freire's method has had wider application in Entertainment-education communication strategies (Singhal & Rogers, 1999) and Boal's (1974) *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

## **Entertainment-Education Strategy**

Entertainment-education is a strategy that has applied Freire's methods in an attempt to make mass mediated messages more participatory. Entertainment-education is a process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate in order to increase knowledge about an educational issue, increase favorable attitudes, and bring about social change (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). The participatory nature of entertainment-education approach arises from the fact that the messages can stimulate dialogue among audience members that creates opportunities for social change at both individual and community level. For example analyses of *Tinka Tinka Suk*, an entertainment-education soap operas in India (Papa, M., Singhal, A., Law, S., Pant, S., Sood, S., Rogers, E., & Shefner-Rogers, 2000) suggested that this strategy could lead to behavior change that is facilitated by parasocial interaction; meaning the degree to which audience members identify and overtly react to media characters by "talking" to these characters or through discussion with other audience members about them. Reflecting on the educational themes present in a media program can also help viewers recognize behavioral alternatives in their lives. Through dialogue some audience members hold conversations about the educational content of a media program. This creates a socially constructed learning environment in which people evaluate previously held ideas, consider alternatives, and identify steps to initiate social change.

## **Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed**

Boal began developing the theatre of the oppressed in Arena theatre in Sao Paulo Brazil from 1956. Influenced by Freire, he developed a series of imaginative theatre exercises that transforms theatre from "monologues" of traditional performance into a "dialogue" between audience and stage. Boal's interactive, dialogic, problem-posing, reflective, and conscientization techniques have been used by labor, community organizers, and educators all over the world as participatory tools for democratizing organizations, analyzing social problems, and transforming reality into direct action.

Boal first employed Freire methods in his experiments with the people's theatre in Peru. These experiments were carried out in the cities of Lima and Chiclayo, within the

program of Integral Literary Operation (ALFIN, 1973). ALFIN was a literacy campaign that began in 1973 with the objective of eradicating illiteracy in Peru (Boal, 2000). Conscious to the fact that teaching an adult to read and write poses a difficult and delicate problem, ALFIN project formulated two principal aims. One, to teach literacy in both the first language and in Spanish without forcing the abandonment of the former in favor of the latter. Secondly, to teach literacy in all possible languages, especially the artistic ones, such as theatre, photography, puppetry, films, journalism, etc. (Boal, 2000). Boal's method proposes theatre as a language capable of being utilized by any person, with or without artistic talent to mobilize individuals from positions of passive beings or spectators into spect-actors, activated spectators/audience members who take part in the action.

During ALFIN project, the trained educators would give a camera to a member of the study group, they would teach them how to use it, and propose to them to speak in photography. The questions asked were simple and the group later discussed the answers, which were the photos taken. For example when the people were asked where do you live they responded with various photo answers. One depicted a photo that showed the interior of a shack, another a child bleeding from the face etc. Every element of the photo was discussed by the group; the object focused on, the angle from which the picture was taken, the presence or absence of people in it etc. In this case, the "language" of photography was integrated with the other common languages to help discover valid symbols that encompass the whole community or social group. Boal's work has precipitated the wide use of local theatres/cultural performances as participatory communication approaches to social change. These media channels have the advantage of being already there at the community level as a form of entertainment and are firmly rooted in the traditional cultural and artistic expressions of many.

### **The Dioro Child Survival Project**

The Dioro Child Survival Project began in Mali in 1989 with the specific goal of reducing mortality rates among children and women of reproductive age. The Dioro Approach is based in the philosophy that in order for health projects in Africa to be meaningful and sustainable, they must actively support African cultures to incorporate

positive cultural values, knowledge, and practices. During the Dioro initiative, the griot performed the song about the Green Pendelu, maternal health, warning signs during pregnancy, and the importance of couple communication in a village assembly after introductory discussions. End results of this project demonstrated that there was a more positive attitude towards pregnancy and the campaign proved effective not only in promoting non-verbal and verbal communication but is also facilitated social change. The Dioro Approach project report concludes that the potential exists for local cultural performances to contribute to the health and welfare of rural communities (Feek, 2000).

As a teacher and choreographer-dancer with many years experience in creative cultural dramatized dance performances in Kenya, I envision great potential in the role that local cultural performances or *ngoma* could play in organizing and mobilizing for social change.

### **Problem-posing, Entertaining, Creative *Ngoma* for Social Change**

*Ngoma* is a local cultural performance in Kenya that refers to a diverse musical setting where there is a combination of drum, song, poetry, drama, dancing and story telling. It is used as an avenue where differences are made open and defended, resolved or stabilized in less threatening ways (Gunderson & Barz, 2000). Like other cultural performances in Africa, *ngoma* is not a separate art but part of the whole complex of living. Based upon the indigenous oral languages, *ngoma* contains a mosaic of information and skills that are meant to assist individuals cope with life within the community. Thiong’O (1986) posits that local cultural performance “is entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment; it is moral instructions; it is also a matter of life and death and communal survival.” (p.23).

Turner’s (1987) *Anthropology of Performance* posits that cultural performance functions as a special form of public address as well as a rhetorical agency. According to Turner, it is through cultural performance that many people both construct and participate in public life. This is particularly true for the poor and marginalized people denied access to middle class public forums. For example in my ethnic group the Taita from coastal region of Kenya, cultural performances such as *ngoma ra mwazindika* are the venues for public discussion of vital issues important to the community as well as an arena for

gaining visibility and staging their identity. Therefore *ngoma* acts as the rhetorical practices where the people engage in dialogue and self reflection for purposes of change and equipment for life.

A further elaboration on a specific type of *ngoma ra mwazindika* that dwells on the theme of hunger or *njala* among the Taita should provide a better picture. This is a local cultural performance that articulates a hunger situation and provides tips on how to cope in future. Through entertainment-education i.e. drama, dance, song, poems, talk-singing etc. the performers try to vividly capture and project to the audience all that is experienced during the hunger period as well as provide “solutions” in case it occurs in the future. Such articulation not only helps capture a difficult situation/experience but it also suggests helpful motives for the people to embrace in confronting their trials. Similarly since the dance performance invites participation in its rhythms; it enables the people to intelligibly process the situation. By *Wachemshangoma* (performers) engaging the audience through an entertaining and participatory call-response fashion, they vicariously assist the people to understand the dangers of hunger and hence equip them for living.

*Ngoma* was officially introduced into the Kenyan school curriculum during the 1980s to promote cultural revival, creativity, entertain, educate, and shape young people’s cultural identity. The fact that *ngoma* is inherently dialogic and theatrical in nature and is already entrenched in Kenyan schools made it an ideal specimen for this participatory communication research project that was edified by all the previously cited models of communication.

### **Methodology**

This was a participatory communication research in which participants and researcher co-generate knowledge through collaborative communicative processes. The roles of the researcher and the researched constantly changed and the interaction was aimed at fostering a pedagogical environment for all participants. Participatory researches do not follow rigid designs and thus challenge investigators to be inventive about the range of methods that could be used by the people themselves (Tandon, 1985).

This research project was conducted in Murray girls and Kenyatta boys high schools in Taita/Taveta district in Kenya. These schools are fully boarding schools, where the students live in the school for three months before going home for one month holiday i.e. spend about nine months per year in school. Over eighty five percent of the student population comes from coast province, fluent in Swahili, English and a native language. Native languages spoken by the different ethnic groups in the coastal region of Kenya are quite similar and can be understood by a majority of people across the groups. The student population had ages ranging from fourteen years to twenty one years and came from different socio-economic status. The projects ran concurrently for a period of 6 months (April-September 2003) and a total of about 75 participants (70 student, 2 teachers, 2 research assistants, and researcher) were involved in the exercise. Ethnographic methods of collecting data that included writing thick descriptive field notes, participant observation, informal conversations, in-depth unstructured interviews, video and audiotapes were employed in this study.

In this investigation, it was my intent to use my insider's location in multiple contexts (native, former teacher and administrator in several schools in the area, youth leader, *ngoma* teacher/performer, father, and community leader) to establish trust and rapport, which were crucial prerequisites for conducting such a study. Since in Taita a village raises a child, I also felt compelled to go and give back to my community that has contributed a lot to make me what I am today.

### **Results of the Study**

Four phases of the research process can be delineated:

#### **Preliminary acquaintance with the research audience**

Letters of introduction, copies of research permit by the Kenyan government, personal vita and other relevant documents were sent to the principals of the two schools in April 2003. This was followed up through telephone calls about two weeks later for purposes of setting an appointment on when to visit the schools. Due to the location of where I stayed and its proximity to Kenyatta high school, I informally got to meet the principal of Kenyatta High School, who is a former colleague and friend, several times

before the date of appointment i.e. first week of May when the schools opened. This was instrumental in setting the ball rolling much earlier in Kenyatta than in Murray.

By the first week of May I had my first meeting with the principal. The reception was warm and cordial. I made it very clear to the principal the purposes of my research project and what I required from the school. He was very enthused by my research idea and suggested I work with the Peer Guidance and Counseling club. I was introduced to the patron i.e. the teacher in charge of the club and we set an appointment to meet the student committee responsible for running the affairs of the club.

On my consequent visit, I got to meet the student committee. This was a brief meeting lasting about forty minutes where we got to know each other and set a date for officially meeting the entire club members. During this big meeting day, which was on a Saturday, the patron introduced me to the club members and excused himself. What transpired is better stated by these notes from my field note book which I quote and paraphrases thus:

...There were about 40 students in the room. They introduced themselves giving their name and class. It was a mixed lot consisting of students from form one to four. A majority was in upper level classes and they were prefects, dormitory captain, games captain, entertainment captain etc. they held some responsible position in the school....The main purpose of the club is to counsel others. This is done either in a group or one on one. How? Teachers recommend discipline cases to them. They also give speeches and do short drama skits during general school assemblies on some Fridays to counsel the others on various issues affecting them.... The members got some basic training on guidance and counseling through the teacher-in-charge and a local community based organization that came in once to provide some basic training. The club has been on for six year.

During this first meeting with the club members, I introduced myself in detail and made it clear that I was on their side. I stated the purposes of the research and made apparent that despite the fact that I was a teacher and head teacher in several schools in the area for many years, I was a student like them who is out to share and learn during this particular participatory study. I also clearly spelt out to them that the project cannot be carried out without relation of mutual understanding and trust among all participants. This session involved facilitating discussion and providing a lot of room and time for questions so as to clarify any issues that were not clear to them. There were many questions about my personal life both living in Kenya and particularly in the United

States. There was apparent heightened eagerness on the part of the club members to one day go study in the U.S.

I proceeded to show them videos on my creative *ngoma* work in the U.S. and other works by other artists. At the end of the forty five minute show, I asked for any ideas how we could get started with formulating creative *ngoma* pieces for our project.

My field notes capture the kind of ideas that were forth coming on that day:

....Many ideas came out. One student talked about having a picture of his girlfriend on one hand and a textbook opened, as if reading it, on the other. From this depiction he would create a discussion by asking his fellow students which one is good for us? Another suggested having some drumming on the background while rapping messages on HIV/AIDS prevention. His rationale was that rap is really the “in-thing” among the youth in the school and hence bound to compel their attention. There was also a suggestion about using popular musical beats by famous Kenyan artists on the background to sing message on HIV/AIDS. The popular beats would surely be a good attention-getter for the youth. Some other suggestions were about having mixed discussions between boys and girls as the youth involved both sexes. I thought about having Murray girls coming over some weekends to Kenyatta to have joint sessions....Students to write ideas on creative *ngoma* pieces on paper coming into mind and pass them to the chairman anytime along the coming weeks. To meet on Saturdays and Sundays and keep constant contact with them during the week as well.

It wasn't until the end of the second week of May that I had an opportunity to meet the principal Murray girls. I made apparent the purposes and requirements of my research project from which she recommended I work with the True Love Waits club members. I was introduced to the patron and set a day to meet the members of the club the following week on Wednesday. This is what transpired on that day:

At Murray, the headmistress is in a meeting. I meet Mr. Mwamburi, one of the patrons of the club. He seemed to be expecting me but had not prepared anything. He sent for the girl in-charge of the club. He introduces me to her. The girls were expecting me. We go round looking for an empty classroom to meet. There are about 40 girls....one girl candidly talks about the full meaning of True Love Waits club. They meet during club days on Wednesdays to discuss issues on boy/girl relationship. Sex is not a must in love relationships-idea is to promote abstinence-seeking genuine love without sex.

During this meeting with the club members I talked about my study and what I required from them just like I did with the boys in Kenyatta. I went far and beyond to

delve on virtues of working hard, determination to succeed in life against all odds and challenged and inspired them to follow my footsteps. This is part of what I told them:

....you can see I do not have three eyes, or three legs, I am just like you born and raised in the villages of Taita. If I did it you can also go to study in the U.S. All you need is to dream big.... The girls seemed really captivated and got some good rapport with the message sinking well as indicated by the questions arising. How did you get your way round in America? How can I apply for Universities there? Can you help me....

Students are usually very respectful of teachers/adults to the point of fearing and being suspicious of them. My gut feeling is that this kind of interaction was crucial in clearly revealing my intention to them, indicating that I was totally on their side in this participatory research and gaining their trust.

There was a problem about showing the videos on my creative *ngoma* work in the U.S. during this first meeting because the headmistress wanted to be sure what they were all about. On this particular day she was busy in a meeting but I managed to catch her after the meeting. We discussed about the contents of the video and after assuring her that they were educational material containing some of my creative cultural dance pieces while in the U.S., she gave the go ahead. It is important to mention that the headmistress was a college mate and former colleague as well.

The next meeting with the True Love Waits club members was a challenge but it did finally work out as this excerpt from my field note indicates:

...I meet faith, a trained peer counselor working as my research assistant. As we drove to Murray, the car overheats because of the steep climb. We stop and let it cool. At Murray, first I was told that I could not meet the girls; I insisted that the headmistress had assured me to come this day. Teacher on duty was not very cooperative. Sent word with a student and some members of the club were found. Once gathered in a classroom, I introduced the business of the day. I showed videos of my work in the U.S. to boost their moral and provided fertile grounds for ideas to flourish.... Response was very positive judging from levels of applause and hands clapping after the show. One girl said she wants to do a dance in Giriama, her native tongue. Another girl emphasized about being proud of their culture and not aping the west. Faith, my research assistant, introduced herself to the students. She also seemed enthused by the videos and talked about working with the girls in getting ideas for their creative *ngoma* pieces.

In both schools, it was during these initial meetings that I planted the seed for development of creative *ngoma* pieces that are entertaining and problematize the

HIV/AIDS situation. The idea was for the students to try and come up with a *shairi*, *ngoma ya kitamaduni*, *wimbo*, *sarakasi* etc. that was 3-5 minutes long and had the capability to trigger a heated dialogue among their peers.

### **Decoding of the project site**

Once the participants had agreed to the participatory communication research project, I worked on establishing a rapport with them. The main activity during this phase involved visit upon visit to the project sites with the aim to understanding the dynamics of the school community. My intention was to observe the everyday moments of the group and routines with an attitude to understanding what I saw as a participant observer. I also carried out indirect observations on how they interacted in places that I had no access to like the class sessions, the dormitories where they sleep, dining hall where they ate and places they spent their leisure time through informal conversation with those involved in the project and other students. I also did have informal conversation with some teachers, especially those involved with the Peer Counseling club in Kenyatta high school and True Love Waits club in Murray girls.

During this phase a number of issues came up and were discussed with a view to reaching a mutual agreement. Some of the issues the participatory meeting sessions addressed were (1) languages of communication? In line with Boal's work, we settled on all spoken languages i.e. Swahili, English, a mix of both, and native tongues. Incases where native tongues were used in creative *ngoma* pieces the user would translate the central idea of the message using either one of the three languages. (2) Where were the meetings going to be held? This was one challenge during this phase. Venues initially kept changing depending on which classroom was available. Later during the program, there was some consistency and we tended to have available the same classroom unless there was something really important e.g. an evening lesson going on. (3) Time of the meetings and which days? This was another challenge that took time to solve because there were many other after-school activities taking place in both project sites which the club members were also involved. For example in both schools there was music practices going on in preparation for the district and provincial music festivals, athletic practice, volley ball practice, form four science practicals in readiness for the national exams etc.

After a couple of meetings and various changes, we settled on Mondays and Sundays for Murray meeting sessions and for Kenyatta we met on Tuesdays and Saturdays. It also worked out that during the weekdays the sessions were short, about one and a half hours, because they were tired after a long day in class and they had to have time to prepare for supper and evening study. On the weekends we met during the afternoons. These sessions were longer, about two and a half to three hours, during which they were more relaxed and seemed eager to do something different other than school work.

Other issues that came up were how large should the group be? Who else should be part of the dialogue circles apart from the club members? How should the evaluation of the creative *ngoma* pieces be done? For an effective dialogue circle we noted that having more than 40 members could be counterproductive. It did not give adequate time to everyone to actively participate within a two hour session. On who to be included, we agreed that health professionals, HIV/AIDS activists or resource persons could be invited to share their experiences and provide facts and knowledge on the disease. However, due to lack of funds, professionals were not involved in these projects apart from the research assistants and patrons of the concerned clubs.

Finally, there were three options on evaluation procedures: (a) have brief meetings after each session (b) longer meetings after a couple of sessions or (c) an evaluation workshop at the end of the whole exercise. The members settled on option (a). After each *ngoma* circle we held brief meetings to evaluate the sessions citing what worked, what did not work and what needed improvement during the next meeting. The meetings also clarified the roles of the researcher as a co-enactor and also as organizer and coordinator of the whole project working toward creating an enabling atmosphere through establishing trust, rapport, and bonding between all the members in the *ngoma* dialogue circles.

The most important task during this phase was to come up with themes for the creative *ngoma* pieces they were working on. This involved investigating what educational campaigns on HIV/AIDS they had been exposed to in their respective communities e.g. posters, notices, announcements, lectures etc. I interviewed the members to get their responses on the various campaign tools. For example in Kenyatta, I

asked them to take some of the themes that they dealt on during Friday morning assemblies, where the counselors would come out to make short speeches or skits, and creatively attempt to insert them in the *ngoma* pieces.

Some other questions that I tried to seek answers for were for example what is the community/groups (school) “gossip” and in what manner do the group members talk about their reproductive health and HIV/AIDS? Any deaths/sicknesses of a member through direct or indirect relation to AIDS? What were their imagined styles of life in a world of HIV/AIDS? How do they relate to their leaders on this subject and in general and how do they relate to each other in their group and to others outside the group? What is their vocabulary and expressions of their world and how they construct it? What materials are they exposed to? Internet, television, books on HIV/AIDS, Magazines?

What I found out in both school is that the club members were fairly informed on matters of HIV/AIDS. They were fully conversant with its modes of transmission and that there is no cure. In Kenyatta, they were exposed to television via satellite. They actually had access to music channel “O” where there is plenty of nudity and curse words. They watched television mostly on weekends. In Murray there was no television. Both schools were exposed to videos on the dangers of contracting HIV/AIDS such as the *Silent Epidemic*, a twenty minutes video sponsored by UNICEF Kenya and produce by Ace Communication Studios. This video depicted horrifying pictures of HIV/AIDS related ailments. Both clubs were also aware of a magazine called Straight Talk. This is a monthly pull out from the East Africa Standard newspaper that talked on teen reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other issues pertaining to young people. Some of the True Love club members in Murray had their short articles published in this magazine. I also came across a resource book used by the True Love club patron titled *bloom or doom* which provided some tips on preventive measure on HIV/AIDS for the youth in schools. It was produced by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), a government body that is in-charge of curriculum development in many of the Kenyan institutions of learning.

After a number of visits (about six visit at each project site) and generally discussing issues emanating from the above protocol, some of the problem-posing, entertaining pieces emerging included themes on peer pressure, parental and other

authority figures pressure to conform, societal norms and values that put pressure on the youth, teenage pregnancy, boy-girl relationship, abortions/adoptions of orphans, support person/groups for the youth, where are we to go, drug abuse and its effect on youth, sexually transmitted diseases/AIDS, adolescence/secondary development and how to deal with it etc. It is important to note that during this phase, the development and testing of the creative *ngoma* piece at every meeting took place. Here I depict one of the scenarios as recorded in my field note book:

...Boys at Kenyatta were to read their pieces. I arrived and the usual room we used was not available. The chairman of the club had to run around to seek for a room....Got a form four class that was empty. Turn up was not good, numbers were dwindling. The chairman goes up and down to round members. I wonder whether the moral is going low. Chairman indicates boys could be getting impatient with video filming. Bored of re-running the pieces. No money, got to think hard on keeping the spirit going. Next meeting to change activity. Go launch peer counseling club at neighboring school as a way to bring variety and to nip the boredom bud from growing any further. After all I have no much tangible incentive to give them so far! Funds still not forthcoming but use power of things hoped for in the future as incentive to do things now. Most form fours out of the project to concentrate on their mock exams. Only three of them remaining as of now. These seem to have the creative juice. To train them as *wachemshangoma*. Many pieces read are well thought-out but yet need to be problem-posing to precipitate heated debate. Need to be fully loaded with burning questions that touch on their lives. I suggested that they have questions to be answered to precipitate discussion. They seem to be more comfortable in Swahili than in English. Next Sunday to test run creative pieces, pose problems, and see ensuing discussion.

I capture another interesting scenario that took place at Murray:

...When coming in, girls who I know tend to be visibly asking what? Ready for the meeting or just to stick out. Patron is out for games and some girls are also out for games. Some are out for Christian Union movement and others for music practice in preparation for the festivals. Core group is present and ready to present pieces. Fatuma presents a Giriama song; call and response is evident and so is the drumming. After the dance, she explains the central idea in English-that it is warning the girls on HIV/AIDS. It is very dangerous, it is killing many parents and orphans are out there not getting their basic needs. She warns the girls to be very careful about how they carry themselves out there. Christine Zighe and Susan Wawuda do a short skit in Swahili mixed with *Sheng*. The story line is about a strict mother who doesn't allow her daughter to go out for discos. Girls were laughing which seemed like the story resonated well with them. There were plenty of giggles, aahs! and ummhs! This may be because it touched on a subject common to most teenage girl, mother-daughter conflict. There were poems in English and Swahili, songs etc.

## **Ngoma Dialogue Circles**

The objective here was to present through problem-posing, entertaining, creative *ngoma* neither complex nor simple thematic content on HIV/AIDS that will challenge the club members during the *ngoma* dialogue circle to critically think about the situation, candidly dialogue with a view to empowerment and taking action. During these sessions, all participants sat in a big circle. The session usually started with a dance-song; call-response mode was used to create a non-threatening and enabling atmosphere for stimulating dialogues triggered by the creative *ngoma* pieces presented (Gunderson, 2000). *Wachemshangoma* were employed to problematize and spark group discussion around the issues of controversy emanating from HIV/AIDS issues. Creative *ngoma* pieces were about 2-3 minutes. Each episode triggered a heated debate that lasted between 15-20 minutes. The group members were asked to respond in any of the agreed language(s) as long as it was intelligible to the others. *Wachemshangoma* also prompted the next creative *ngoma* piece after the discussion seemed to “loose steam”. Researcher coordinated and facilitated direction of the dialogue when needed. Efforts were made to represent themes/areas related to HIV/AIDS familiar to the youth so that the club members could easily recognize the situations and hence their own relation to them e.g. Mother-daughter conflict, Matatu mania, boy-girl relationships etc. There were various kinds of creative *ngoma* pieces presented in English and Swahili ranging from short skits, songs, poems, parables, drama etc.

Here below I capture a scene of the Matatu-mania creative *ngoma* piece during the video filming session (all creative *ngoma* pieces were filmed during one session of about five hours in each school):

Preamble: Dance song started with calls from dancer and responses from the audience members. This was used to set the mood for discussion. The song came from the Giriama community. Central idea is that some one had been infected by AIDS and the need for the girls to be careful about the disease.

Matatu-mania: Scene one (A three episode creative *ngoma* pieces in Swahili)  
Scene starts with the matatu tout shouting destination of the matatu (public service vehicle in Kenya) in characteristic fashion of the trade. A beautiful school girl in uniform appears and the tout stops to admire. The tout approaches her. Greetings are exchanged and he goes ahead and tries to seduce her. There is the usual exchange and the short episode ends with the tout asking the school girl to meet him the next day (runs for about 2 minutes).

The actors pause to trigger discussion by asking the participants what they think will happen next. Whether the school girls showed up the next day for the date and give a reason for their answer. It was made very clear that there was no correct answer and all that was required was a personal opinion. To imagine themselves, being school girls who might be faced by such situations, what would they have done-they were expected to role play in this particular case. A heated discussion ensued and the striking thing about most of the statements made was that they started with *kama angelikuwa mimi*, meaning “If it were me” which I feel put them in the position of actor, forcing them to critically think of appropriate action(s) that they would have to take in such a scenario thus enhancing self efficacy. Consider some of the statements made and the ensuing dialogue:

*Mimi naona hangeenda, ana mwambia ili mambo yaishe.*

I do not see her going, just bluffing the guy to leave her alone

*Mimi naona vile msichana alikuwa anajibu alikuwa anamwambia atakuja ili mambo yaishe.*

I think the way the girl was answering she will not up, she just want to get it over with and that is why she is said yes.

I think she will go because she wants money. Touts have a lot of money

She will go because she wants to get free lifts from the tout

She will go so that she can boast to other friends

She will go because school girls are always easily influence by *manamba* (touts)especially Tudor *manambas* who put on designers clothes

Facilitator: *Kwa nini manamba aende na mtoto wa shule? Kwani wana, kinawanavuta wasichana wa shule?*

Why do touts tend to easily lure school girls into having sexual relations with them. What attracts school girls to them?

Response: Great cars, new cars, good music, fashion, designer clothes, school girls want to be associated with touts. Touts have money, for the quick cash

The dialogue goes on for about 15 minutes before the second episode comes in for about two minutes. During this episode, the tout is seen waiting for the school girls. He is cursing and wondering why the girl was taking too long to show up and then she shows up. There is the usual exchange. They agree to go somewhere as long as it does not take long because the school girl says she does not want to be late. They leave the stage and the trigger question is posed thus: what you think they had gone to do and give reasons of why you think so. There is another discussion for about 15 minutes before episode three. Episode three is a doctors-patient scene. The school girl is seen coughing and looking terrible sick. The doctor takes some tests and calls in the mother. The mother wails and

the episode ends. The trigger question is why do you think the mother of the girl wailed after getting the results from the doctor?

### **Recording of Ngoma dialogue circles and viewing of tapes**

Recording of *ngoma* dialogue circles for research analysis was done during a one day session. Another day was set for viewing the recorded tapes, celebrating the end of the research project and giving of small tokens to all club members. There were photo sessions and it was general a fun day to eat, drink and be happy. Then there was the viewing of the tapes and this is what my field note book indicates about the reponses:

Participants revealed that the tapes were more interesting to watch and compelled attention since they could relate to them. Excited to see themselves on tape, themes and messages resonated with them as the creative *ngoma* depicted the social world/AIDS in a manner intelligible to them. Felt that this could be an efficacious strategy to reach other youth because they could see their peers on tape, relate to the message, it is more sensitive to their feelings, entertaining, non-threatening and thus can make them open up/candidly discuss to enrich the discourse.

Some of the comments by the participants quoted in verbatim tell it all:

I believe that this presentation will really help other youth especially the skill dealing with family matters. I hope parents will start understanding us youth and also give us the freedom we need. The advice we get will help us and other youths. Thanks you so much Mr. Mjomba for giving us the chance to air out our view (sic). Have a nice time!

I had a great time. I learnt a lot and was taught a lot. It was actually my first time to act and be taped. I think that what the youth are doing is great. We have to get things out in the open and create awareness. We youth have to get our priorities straight. I am glad you gave us that opportunity to air our views.

According to me the whole thing was fun and I learnt a lot. It was a life time opportunity to have the youth to share ideas in a cooperative way. My main prayer is that his play may educate many youths because this kinds of things happen all over the world and destroy many youth. I hope you will also enjoy the whole tape

I t has been wonderful for the exposure you brought to us. Some like me was able to get courage that I can do something despite all circumstances i.e. whether a big crowd of people is present or not. I have been able to believe in myself that I have confidence and also I have realized if I can perfect the talent then I can be a better placed in such activities. Thanks for your exposure.

There are many advantages that I feel could emanate from these tapes. One is that they can be used for further training in other schools. Secondly, they could also be used as catalysts/triggers for dialogue/*ngoma* circle.

The purpose of these tapes is not to describe the HIV/AIDS situation and provide a how-to-manual to be memorized by the youth in other schools but rather to “problematize” the HIV/AIDS situation for critical self-reflection. These are supposed to embody a challenge in themselves for rousing critical consciousness, and as such should be regarded dialectically by the learners and facilitator. In studying the videos, other group members would be studying discourse that evolved from *ngoma* circles where a number of youth issues and HIV/AIDS prevention were discussed. The group members should further discuss on the issues raised in the videos and not merely watch it for entertainment but critically reflect on the discourse. In this way they delve into the video’s meaning and establish the relation between a passage of the video under discussion and various aspects of the young people in the world of HIV/AIDS. These reflections, carried out through *ngoma* dialogue circles, could also be taped to give rise to new videos proportionately more critical and pluralistic and richer in their themes. This will go a long way into the development of young people’s self expression on HIV/AIDS and other issues that impact their lives so that it can be critically introduced into the environment.

Finally, since creative *ngoma* is not a new concept among the rural communities in Kenya, there is immense potential for it to be used to impact the communities within the schools through outreach programs. The *wachemshangoma* could be asked to get out there in the villages to perform for their parents and other villagers so as to trigger and

sustain stimulating dialogue on a number of issues. I believe this could kick start processes of bridging the ever increasing gap between schools and the communities they serve as well as adults and the young.

### **Findings**

From the data so far analyzed from this participatory research project, I feel there is plenty of potential for *ngoma* to be used for grassroots organizing and mobilizing for social change especially as a communication tool for conscientization and empowerment of youth in Kenyan schools to own the fight against HIV/AIDS. This could be done through:

1. High level inventiveness that makes *ngoma* able to take in new social change messages on HIV/AIDS without distortion, exaggeration or trivializing the facts
2. Making it entertaining to the youth. There is a lots of potential buried in the youth thus there is need to let them come up with ways of making it entertaining for their peers.
3. Full involvement of the youth at all stages of development of the creative *ngoma* is imperative-Use of peer educators/*wachemshangoma*
4. Packaging it as a parable (akin to a two minute well-thought advert) that stirs imagination of the youth so as to kick start processes that lead to discovering of facts/truths on their own. They can easily relate to parables since these have been used in African societies by the old to engage the young in figuring out social issues. Problem-posing is an important component that must be incorporated into *ngoma* to furnish it with the stimulus to mobilize.

## **Conclusion: Lessons Learnt**

There are a number of lessons that could be derived from this exercise and for purposes of this paper I will mention just a few

- **Valorizing of African-centered Communication:** One of the major lessons learnt is that there is immense potential for *ngoma* as a participatory communication strategy that valorizes thoughtful practical application of Afro-centric traditional media/cultural resources to boost grassroots community's capacity to solve its own problems. This is because it is a communication process that is not alienating or threatening but biased towards local content and ownership.
- **Democratizing:** Emphasis is on dialogue, debate and negotiation rather than persuasion and the transmission of information from external technical experts. It makes the intervention program more participatory at all levels of development: educates, entertains, stirs thinking toward mobilizing for action (problem-posing), and utilizes peer educators basically handing over the means of production to the people in accordance with Freire and Boal's work.
- **Empowerment:** Believes in the innate potential of young people (in Kenya) as being key to controlling and bringing about their own change in response to HIV/AIDS thus attempts to provide resources/activation energy for them to actualize their gifts. Puts greater emphasis on getting the target audience involved in perceiving HIV/AIDS as their problem, rather than a government agenda. It starts the communication processes within the experiences of the target group, gives full respect to their values and is out to empower individuals as well as the collective so that by their own action initiate their own change.

- It utilizes target groups' cultural resources as a framework for designing intervention programs.
- Provides skills for social change agents: Social change agents need to have the ability to understand target audience in terms of the context and culture in which the people live. This means the capability to effectively decoding the local cultural manifestations which requires being an active listener, one who keenly observes what is happening within and without the target audience and ready to be a co-enactor. Who is doing what to whom and how is this affecting the group. Ability to communicate clearly and effectively. This requires a thorough knowledge of the local conditions, community issues and cross-cultural issues.

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