

Ndere supports Arrin in empowering farmers Drama and dance make people change

Drama and dance are ideal means to inform people and make them aware of what they can do to prevent HIV infections or how to plan their family. That is why Ndere theatre- and dance group from Kampala trains farmer groups all over the country to perform for their community. The farmer groups are coordinated by the Agricultural Research and Information Network (Arrin) that set up information centers, called info-pops, throughout Uganda with the ICT support of IICD.

A totally drunkard comes on stage. He shouts to his wife who complains that she has no enough to feed all his children. Moreover, she is pregnant again and she wants to be advised in the clinic on family planning. "There you don't go", her drunken man shouts. "That's where they kill children. And I want more children. I want you to fill up the whole house with my children."

"I'm not a factory", his wife shoots back. The audience laughs. The performers of the Adhola United Cultural Performers (AUCP) do a good job. Their play on family planning makes not only people laugh, but it makes them think as well. Towards the end of the play the drunkard visits the clinic, where he learns that there are no children killed and that he even will be a richer man when he has lesser mouths to feed.

"Do you know", the acting nurse adds to this information, "when you wife has to give birth to so many children, she grows very soon old." "So, you say that the beautiful women I see in the streets are planning their family?" the man reacts. "Yes, family planning gives a lot of advantages."

Making a fist

The AUCP is one of the 32 farmer groups around Tororo, who are trained by the Ndere dance and theatre group. Their performances, twice a month for the community, are very popular. "People love listening to stories, that's a traditional thing", Justine Ayo, coordinator of Arrin Tororo says, "So they like watching drama's, you really can kill them with it." But apart from entertaining, the plays aim to sensitize the public about subjects like hygiene and sanitation, animal-diseases and how to cure and prevent them, how to commercialize your farming, operation and maintenance of boreholes, domestic violence, family planning and HIV/Aids. The plays are based on the information Arrin gathers from farmers in order to sensitise and counsel them about important aspects in their work and life.

The ICT equipment provided by IICD proves to be of added value to store the data and share them with other 'info-pops' in the country. Justine Ayo and three volunteers work together with the leaders of about 100 farmer groups with a total around 3000 to 5000 farmers. Ayo does her work with seal and commitment. "We stimulate farmers to work together and help to organize themselves", she says. "Only together they can make a fist. That is necessary, because individual farmers work through middlemen and are always cheated by them. If farmers can share the transport costs and sell their products as a group directly to buyers, than they get good prices and everybody will do better. Until now we raised groups in groundnuts, cassava and oranges. It's still on a small scale, but we would like to go on a commercial scale." To reach that goal Ayo is looking for ox-ploughs. "With ox-ploughs the farmers will be able to dig and plant together on the right time", she says, "it will increase production and transport can be done in one big bulk. The middlemen can be removed by then."

Sweet oranges

On a plot next to an orchard full of green low orange trees, a group of about twenty farmers gather. They are the members of the Mudodo Orange Farmer Group, which started five

years ago with planting the first orange trees. Their dedication to the project is proofed by big yellow oranges dangling like Christmas balls from their trees. In the orchard are 36 orange trees which deliver about 30 to 50 kilo's of oranges the tree. The weight of two oranges is about 1 kilo, which they sell for 500 shilling. The taste of the oranges is surprisingly sweet and reflects the meaning of the harvest to these women: they could double their income and improve their lives. Thanks to the oranges they can buy clothes, soap, salt, sleeping mats, school materials and uniforms for their children. "It is good to share ideas and skills with each other", one of them says. "It eradicates our poverty and promotes cooperation and understanding amongst us." Another says: "Cooperation helps to endure the time of social difficulties and problems. By working together, we find support from each other." Cooperation is not always easy, but the women found their own solution for lesser behaviour in the group. When somebody is not coming to work, she will be fined by paying 100 shilling. Who comes too late for work, pays 50 shilling. Apart from the oranges, on a sustenance level the women grow groundnuts, maize, cassava, millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes and beans. Some women decided to start growing and selling together tomatoes and cabbage.

Asking about the performances they saw, the reaction of the members is one of enthusiasm. Chairperson Paul Ochari of the Mudodo Orange Farmer Group speaks for the whole group, when he is talking about the plays. "I saw a play on diseases and animals and how diseases affect them", he says. "I learnt that an animal must sleep in a clean place and that you feed it in a place free of ticks. You must grow enough grass or bring them to a place where it grows. And with any sign of diseases you act early. My animals are doing very well now. These are thing we learn by the plays"

Local government

Another impulse to organise the farmers is given by the Ugandan government that recently decided that extensive services for farmers, like the aid of vet doctors, are not any longer for free. Their services are demand driven and by contract and farmers have to pay them individually. "But how can you pay for assistance when you are a small groundnut farmer?" Ayo asks. "Only in corporation you are able to invite extensive services and share the costs" where possible Arrin works together with the local government. "Uganda depends for 80 percent on agriculture," Simon Peter Opio, district speaker Tororo local government explains. "So agriculture is the first priority of the government. We set up programs like the Program on Modernisation of Agriculture and the National Agricultural Advisory Service. On district level we look at grassroots level, collect the concerns and make plans for the next three years. But unfortunately, we only cover two or three sub counties of the eighteen, and than are not even all the groups in it involved. So, we are very happy with Arrin and we try to work together to expand the services to the people we are targeting."

No choice, no voice

A lot of attention by Arrin goes to the position of women. Women in Africa, like in Uganda, do all the farmer work. Research shows that 75 percent of the workload goes to women, only 25 percent to men. Most drama plays the farmer groups perform are therefore on the situation of women and 'negative cultures' like domestic violence and family planning. "By negative culture we mean a culture in which women are not allowed to speak in their own home or to attend a meeting and are forced to produce up to 15 or 20 children", Loyce Ogolla explains. Ogolla initiated the Mudodo Women Tree Planting Group and is now its chairperson. The group consists of 26 members who plant trees as a source of income. They sell firewood and grow fruit trees like citrus, mangos and pineapples. Ogolla sees music, dance and drama as very important to change the negative culture. "The reaction of men on the plays, are sometimes hard. But it doesn't keep them from coming and watching. Their attitude changes slowly. I remember a song about a man who went to the prostitutes and came back drunk, day after day. After the performance, a man approached me. He was angry and said: is this song about me? No, I said, it's not about you and I explained him what we were doing. The

man changed his behaviour later. Some still resist, but most men nowadays allow their wives to go meetings.”

“There is a law in Uganda which says that women, after men paid a dowry, are the property of their husband, “ Samali Osuna, chairperson Women Tororo and working with Arrin, says. “Women feel that men robbed them from everything. They have no voice, they have no choice. Men give 25 percent, but benefit for 80 percent. We tell the men: you can regard your wife as your property, but why not trying to see her as a gift? There is a proverb which says: when you invest in women, you invest in everything. That’s why women need to be empowered, to choose their own direction in economy. If you give them an ox plough and training, look what you’ll have after five years. They will be able to send their children to secondary school. Educated children will add to a better economy.”

Big satisfaction

Under the swelling applause of the public, the actors of the AUCP finish their play. They did an outstanding job. Their training in playing, singing and dancing, once in every two months seems to be fruitful. But especially their commitment and motivation for rehearsing four hours, two times a week, is what help to make them skilled performers. They love what they do, but what they prefer the most is acting. “Because”, Deo Okech, chairman of the AUCP says, “it helps a great lot to sensitize the people. People do change their behaviour, because they recognize situations and it makes them think like men who go to the prostitutes and refuse to use condoms. Sometimes they get offended. But we know men who really changed their life and we helped them. That gives us a big satisfaction. “