

Theatre To The Ear: Exploring Community Participation In Gender Based Violence Radio Drama Interventions In Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of community participation in fighting gender based violence (GBV) through radio drama interventions. The Purpose of the study was to unpack community participation in efforts to eradicate gender based violence. Gender based violence especially against women has become epidemic in Zimbabwe and has destroyed homes and communities. The research is drawing its attention to radio, as radio allows listeners the freedom to listen, imagine, feel, critically think and consciously or unconsciously dialogue. A case study design was adopted as the operational framework for data gathering. Data was collected through Savannah Trust gender based violence radio drama intervention titled Remembering Maiguru Mai Reward. Savannah Trust with support from the Culture Fund and the Swedish Embassy came up with a seven-episode radio drama programme that sought to raise awareness and dialogue on issues of GBV on Star FM radio station. It then hosted panel discussions and live phone in and WhatsApp feed that allowed listeners and the panel to engage with issues raised by the drama. Interviews were also conducted with the drama cast and some of the data was obtained from the newspaper reviews. However, the limitation of the study is that Star FM radio does not cover most areas at or around the borders of Zimbabwe and because of that handicap, the study left out a significant percentage of the population. The paper aimed at interrogating the effectiveness of radio drama interventions in stemming the scourge of gender based violence in Zimbabwe especially against women.

Keywords: community participation; gender based violence; radio drama; interventions

INTRODUCTION

Violence specifically directed at women, girls, boys and adult males is referred to as gender-based violence (GBV). It first became a major focus of discussion and debate following the onset of the women's rights movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, eventually leading to a number of measures aimed at curbing the problem. UNFPA is one of UN's lead agencies working to further gender equality and women's empowerment and to address the physical and emotional consequences of gender-based violence. According to the 2011 Zimbabwe demographic and health survey, one in four women reported that they had experienced sexual violence and one in three women aged 15-49 has experienced physical violence since the age of 15. The News Day of December 2, 2013, posted the following statistics, "The violence against women baseline survey conducted by the ministry of women affairs in partnership with Gender Links and Musasa project in 2012 reported the prevalence rate of violence against women at 68 percent while the Zimbabwe demographic health survey of 2015 also point to high prevalence of GBV (physical violence at 31 percent, sexual violence at 13 percent and emotional violence

at 32 percent)". This delinquent to date is still prevailing and requires the government, policy makers, academics, communities and individual to take action in order to put an end to this menace. Thus, this paper seeks to explore the role of community participation in fighting gender based violence through radio drama interventions. As researchers we decided to explore gender based violence (GBV) as it is now an epidemic in Zimbabwe. It is destroying homes, communities and it is stalling national development.

In this paper gender-based violence (GBV) means physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence carried out against a person because of that person's gender. Gender-based violence includes a range of acts that may be subtle or obvious including but not limited to the following: physical violence: slapping, kicking, hitting or use of weapons. Emotional violence: systematic humiliation, controlling behaviour, degrading treatment, threats. Sexual violence: coerced sex, forced sexual activities considered degrading or humiliating. Economic violence: restricting access to financial or other resources with the purpose of controlling a person

(Adapted from the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 1993). Gender-based violence is used interchangeably with “sexual violence” and “violence against women”. It includes any act or threat by men or male dominated institutions to inflict physical, sexual or psychological harm on a woman or girl because of their gender. The adverse consequences of GBV extend to family, community and even to national, social and economic development. A study in Zimbabwe also showed that 60% of murder cases that went through the courts were due to GBV (Getecha et. al 1995).

The high prevalence of GBV demands that it be addressed hence use of radio dramas. Unlike the television and newspaper, radio has a wider appeal in Zimbabwe as reaches the biggest percentage of the population including people living in rural areas. Radio allows listeners the freedom to listen, imagine, feel, critically think and consciously or unconsciously dialogue. The paper draws its case from Savannah Trust’s seven episode gender based violence radio drama interventions titled “Remembering Maiguru Mai Reward”. Savannah Trust with support from the Culture Fund and the Swedish Embassy came up with the radio drama programme that sought to raise awareness and dialogue on issues of GBV on Star FM radio station. It then hosted panel discussions and live phone in and social platforms that allowed listeners and the panel to engage with the issues raised by the drama.

Overview of Community Participation

Community participation is a notion that means different things to different people. Community participation is when a local people organize themselves and takes responsibility for managing their own problems (Chambers, 2000). Taking responsibility includes identifying problems, developing and implementing actions that need to be followed up. It can be understood as a two way process which involves promoting public understanding of processes and mechanisms through which problems are investigated and solved. This explains why there is an understanding among developmental practitioners that community participation is best seen as a process, rather than an outcome of an intervention. The broad aim of participation in development is to actively involve people and communities in identifying problems, formulating plans and implementing decisions over their own lives. In recent years however, there has been a convergence of opinion as to the importance of participation in community development and there now exists a widely shared set of participatory approaches and methods.

Participatory approaches have been widely incorporated into policies of organisations from

multilateral agencies like the World Bank and bilateral agencies, to the smallest people’s organisations. Indeed, some observers have argued that, in terms of thinking and practice about community development, we are currently in the ‘age of participation’ and it is the ‘paradigm of people’ Oakley (1991), meaning to say that community participation is human centred, meant for the people and by the people. Thus, it is important to assess the extent to which Savannah Trust radio dramas have upheld the notion of community participation in a bid to achieve community development.

What is a Community?

Coles and Knowles (2001:11) define community as “cluster of individual lives that make up communities, societies and cultures. To understand some of the complexities, complications, and confusions within the life of just one member of a community is to gain insights into the collective”. In other words, a community is simply a group of people who have something in common. This paper embraces the definition of a community as postulated by Roberts and O’Reilly (1979) who argues that a community is “a collection of people who have become aware of some problem or some broad goal, who have gone through a process of learning about themselves and about their environment and have formulated a group objective”. In this case, the community comprises of those affected by gender based violence, perpetrators of gender based violence, families, policy makers, activists, organisations of change and advocacy and most importantly the radio listeners.

Savannah Trust

Savannah Trust is a non-profit theatre organisation based in Harare, Zimbabwe. It has been in existence since 2006 and acknowledges the power of theatre as a medium for social transformation. The organisation is being run under the leadership of Mr Daniel Maposa who rose from a theatre performance background. The organisation depends on donor funding to run a variety of theatre for development projects (TfD). The organisation places emphasis on Community Theatre for Development which we refer to as Theatre for Development (TfD) in this paper. By design, Community Theatre for Development provokes and provides communities with a platform for dialogue, collective involvement and resolution of challenges. It seeks the empowerment of communities through the acquisition of information on various socio-economic and political dilemmas. Savannah Trust focuses on Theatre for Development because they perceive it as a means of cultural expression that enhances a sense of ownership within the community. Savannah Trust applies Theatre for Development in community interventions as an artistic genre through which diverse and sensitive issues can be addressed without fear of victimization.

Savannah Trust also approves the use of Theatre in Development Communication because theatre acts as a medium to make people not only aware of their problems but also active participants in the development process by expressing their view points and acting to better their conditions. Savannah Trust has been working in Domboshawa, Hatcliffe, Karoi, Hurungwe, Bindura and Shamva from November 2013 using theatre to raise awareness and create dialogue on GBV and women's rights. While working with these communities, it was realised that issues of GBV were real and entrenched. The organisation realised that many people, particularly women and young people were suffering in silence as a result of GBV and there was also a realization through different reports and media that many people were losing lives and livelihoods as a result of GBV. This prompted Savannah Trust to initiate a project that would see these issues discussed at national level, using a medium with a wide reaching appeal hence the choice of radio drama.

In an effort to contribute to the reduction of gender-based violence, Savannah Trust through the support of Culture Fund (Zimbabwe) and the Swedish Embassy came up with a seven-episode radio drama programme that sought to raise awareness and dialogue on issues of GBV. Its core objective was to engage citizens, raise awareness of the societal factors perpetuating GBV, identify social and cultural tools to prevent the violations and inform communities on best practices to handle GBV cases. The programme was split into a 15-minute drama that explored various issues of GBV. Their radio programme started on December 24 while the community theatre outreach part started way back in November 2013.

Radio Drama Interventions in Zimbabwe

Radio drama is not new in Zimbabwean radio history; it has always served as a tool for social, political, economic and cultural intervention. Playwrights like Aaron Chiundura Moyo through Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC) Radio Zimbabwe presented several radio dramas on Radio Zimbabwe among them; Kudzidza hakuperi and Regai Dzive Shiri Mazai Haana Muto. These were set to address social issues in communities. NGOs like Action Institute for Environment, Health and Development Communication (IEHDC) in conjunction with Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC) Radio Zimbabwe produced 'Yellow Dust' which explored the complexities around relationships, sex, secrets, lies and love in times of HIV and AIDS. However, since the inception of Star FM in 2012, Savannah Trust is the first to produce a drama for development capitalising on the popularity of Star FM. Richards (1991) describes radio drama as an act that comes out of silence, vibrates in the void and in the mind and returns to silence. Savannah Trust chose radio

because it is versatile coupled with its ability to make rapid transitions in time and space, between speech and unspoken thought. With radio drama, the actor and the audience exist on different levels. Richards (ibid: 33) adds that "radio evokes rather than depicts an experience." The radio performance invades the listener's own privacy and recreates the illusion inside the listener's head. Radio Drama is thus a pastel reflection of the legitimate stage, given that stage plays are meant to be seen and radio plays to be heard. Radio is not a visual art form as such. It starts from silence and to this silence the writer must add-through the use of sound effects all that is necessary to provide settings, periodic characters and everything else that is essential to present dramatic story. Radio gives a tremendous opportunity for the Avant-garde writer, the experimentalist and the creative artist to explore dimensions and ideas that are impossible in live theatre. Radio drama is a creative cultural activity. In radio drama feelings, emotions and philosophies must be honest because the radio provides direct emotional communication between the writer and the listener.

Radio plays educate the community by sharing experience and creating a context for reflection and action. Radio drama draws out participation and expression of popular concerns and analysis, overcoming people's fears and rationalisations and building confidence and identity, stimulating discussions and a critical understanding of problems, contradictions, and structures underlying everybody's reality; clarifying the possibilities and strategies for action string people's emotions and eventually mobilising them for action. Radio drama is therefore suitable to be used as a medium of social change conflict resolution, discussion on human rights, democracy and gender issues. Radio plays can thus be used to develop awareness on Gender based violence as it gives voices to the voiceless.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transformative Participation

Transformative participation is when a community determines its own needs and priorities and takes collective action to achieve them. This is seen as a practice of empowerment (Cranton, 2002). It is a process of effecting change using familiar frames of reference. The process is a rehearsal for change by the people, with the people and for the people. This type of participation was demonstrated in Kenya under the Kamirithu Community Theatre project (Wa Thiong'o, 1997). The community realised the need to resuscitate its creative vibrancy and to learn more about its history and how it could overcome the forces against it. It was not the facilitator or development agents imposing their ideas on the community. Here with Transformative Participation, the developmental goal is of secondary importance but the process is regarded as more essential and

meaningful to community development. The community takes full responsibility of their own development. It leads to greater consciousness of what makes and keeps people incapacitated and leads to greater confidence in their ability to make a difference. Transformative participation is about consciousness-raising which can be facilitated by exposure to information, knowledge, insights and the ability to see familiar things from a different perspective, thereby increasing one's self-awareness (Abah, 2007). The community owned the process from problem-identification to the implementation of the project.

A cause for concern in transformative participation in theatre for development projects is where the name is used but there is little substantive participation occurring. It has become a buzz tool that development agencies, governments and theatre groups are using more often without including some of the core elements of genuine participatory practice. Cornwell (2005) argues that this has been a common trend in community development, words that once spoke of politics and power have come to be reconfigured in the service of one-size-fits all development recipes, spun into a politicized form that everyone can agree with. The process that is taken on an intervention project impacts on the participatory nature of the project (Adams and Goldbard, (2001). Thus, this paper also questions whether Savannah Trust and its partners have lived up to the expectations of transformative participation in the radio dramas aired on Star FM.

Remembering Maiguru Mai Reward

Remembering Maiguru Mai Reward is a seven episode drama with each episode exposing a form of gender based violence that is prevalent in Zimbabwean. These include sexual (rape, violation of a woman's body, physical (beating, punching, burning), psychological and verbal abuse. **Episode 1** exposes physical, verbal and psychological abuse. Baba Paida who is one of the perpetrators of gender based violence demonstrates the elements of abuse by beating, burning with oil and verbally assaulting his wife. The community members are split with some wishing to report the case to authorities while others are trying to conceal and protect the crimes of the perpetrator. The abused (Mai Paida) also is hesitant to report the crime as she is afraid that the children will lose their father. The episode exposes how women in communities try to hide and conceal perpetrators of GBV.

Episode 2 elaborates rape as a form of abuse where Jontso drugs and rapes his girlfriend. It exposes how perpetrators use drugs and substance to lure the victims of abuse. It also exposes the plight of those who are physically challenged who are constantly falling victims of gender based violence. **Episode 3** exposes how baba Paida abuses his wife, Mai Paida

through coerced sex soon after giving birth which is a violation of women's body and undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of the victims.

Episode 4 presents women abusing each other as Baba Paida's girlfriend destroys furniture while everyone is at Mai Reward's funeral.

Episode 5 brings in another dimension as it presents women also abusing men verbally and/or financially by blackmailing. **Episode 6** exposes how the judiciary system sometimes fails the victims as there is high level corruption that disadvantages the poor and the marginalised in society. The system is dominated by patriarchal ideologues who believe that women should not report men but submit and discuss issues in their homes. In **Episode 7** the drama elaborates how unemployed and underpowered women find it difficult to report abuse as they are afraid that in cases of arrest the children will suffer.

Targeted community

Gender-based- violence (GBV) is a human rights violation, a public health challenge, and a barrier to civic, social, political, and economic participation. It undermines not only the safety, dignity, overall health status and human rights of the millions of individuals who experience it, but also the public health, economic stability and security of nations. Thus, the drama intervention led by Savannah Trust firstly targeted women of all ages who are victims of Gender based violence giving them a platform to dialogue and highlight their plight making their individual cases a platform to rehearse change. The drama empowers women by giving voice to the voiceless. As shown by statistics, women are highly affected by gender based violence. The intervention was designed to reach out to women of all races, colours, creeds and classes.

We conducted interviews with the drama cast who represented different people in the Zimbabwean society. The cast elaborated on how they engaged in extensive research concerning their characters by reading widely and drawing from the communities' feedback on how GBV has rocked the nation. From our interview with Nyasha Chagonda who acted as the victim of GBV as Mai Paida, she expressed her gratitude in being able to make a contribution to the fight against such a dreadful issue that is affecting individuals, communities and the nation. From the discussion we had, she felt the medium that was used was an effective tool for communication and conscientization as it has a wide coverage. She also praised the interactive WhatsApp, face book and cell phone platforms. Although the audience in radio drama unlike forum theatre is not able to jump onto the stage nevertheless the audience has an opportunity to change and even re-write their own scripts. As researchers we had access to the drama through sound cloud which is used to store recorded episodes and managed to transcribe from listening.

Consultation

Savannah Trust did not just assign a professional script writer; Mr Leonard Matsa to draft the script on Gender based violence without community participation. After being confronted with disturbing statistics on GBV, Savannah Trust felt it had to intervene by incorporating the community at the different stages of the dramas. Thus, the voice of the perpetrators of GBV, the victims, affected family members, affected communities were consulted through workshops that were held in Domboshawa, Hatcliff, Karoi, Hurungwe, Bindura and Shamva. Some of the community members were consulted through social media platform concerning GBV. Consultation included formats in which discussion and questioning could occur. The venues for these discussions were in the homes, community halls and other public spaces that included churches and offices. Many times, these discussions provided valuable input on community needs. They also led to increased interest in the project and community members decided to become more involved in the dramas finally when they were aired on radio.

Partnership

Partnership in development processes allows stakeholders to work, talk and solve problems with individuals who are often perceived as masters. Whitmore (1998) identified a set of principles for collaboration in a variety of settings and situations. These include nonintrusive collaboration, mutual trust and respect, a common analysis of what the problem is, a commitment to solidarity, equality in the relationship, an explicit focus on process and the importance of language. The intervention by savannah Trust showcased high level of partnerships. The project was driven by Savannah Trust, funders; Culture Fund and Swedish Embassy, the radio station, Star FM and the community. Thus, transformative participation was demonstrated.

Implementation

The project was implemented in the form of radio drama interventions. Savannah Trust through a theatre troop which included actors, directors and script writers presented drama that captured the voice of the community. The community then took part as the listeners, their voice represented at the panel by social activists. According to the expectations of transformative participation, some of the victims, perpetrators and the affected community members with the help of professional actors are supposed to be part of the cast because the implementation stage is the most participatory domain in which community members can function as partners in interventions Partnership implies shared responsibility. For community members to feel responsible, their ability to actually conduct research must be recognized, encouraged, and facilitated. For a partnership to function successfully, partners must be able to

communicate openly about accountability. By planning and working together, research professionals and community participants can develop a relationship in which performance can be evaluated in a nonthreatening manner. The implementation mode of participation suggests that capacity building should be an important outcome of a project. In the case of these radio dramas the actors that included Teddy Mangawa and Nyasha Chagonda among others represented the grassroots community members. Also, although they are professional actors who were hired by Savannah Trust they too are not immune to GBV. They have experienced the ravages of GBV in one way or another just as everyone has experienced HIV and Aids in one way or another. So, the representation was fair and permissible.

Dialogue as Participation

Unconscious cognition is the processing of perception, memory, learning, thought and language without being aware of it. Though the actual level of involvement of the unconscious brain during a cognitive process might still be a matter of differential opinion, the fact that the unconscious brain does play a role in cognitive activity is undeniable. Several experiments and well recorded phenomena attest to this fact. There have also been several experiments suggesting that the unconscious mind might actually be better at decision making than the conscious mind when there are multiple variables to take into consideration. The community listened to the radio dramas in their homes, cars and on their phones as individuals as well as families. As one is listening the participation process begins, first in the mind, then they respond by speaking out suggested solutions to the problem posed. The mind is a powerful tool that makes critical decisions. After all, there were dedicated platforms for immediate feedback using whatsapp and phone-in programme. This is called Social Media Spect-acting. As the programme was being aired people in their homes, offices, taxis and cars going back home from respective work places started discussing the dramas thereby suggesting what should and should not have been done by the actors involved.

CONCLUSION

The organisation's quest to fight gender based violence on a national level in line with the expectations of Theatre for Development and transformative theatre where it is by, with the people and for the people was realised to a greater extent. Radio was an ideal instrument as it covered the greater part of the country. Technology came in handy as it allowed wide community participation through social platforms. Participation was well handled as the construction of the script involved the voice of the community, the perpetrators and the victims of Gender Based Violence. However, there are barriers of participation that the organisation and

the funders of the project need to take into cognisance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender based violence is a national crisis and interventions should be designed for all. Zimbabwe is a cultural hub that comprises different cultural groups who speak different languages: Zezuru, Ndau, Manyika, Ndebele, Kalanga, Nambia, Chewa, Tonga among others. Thus, to increase community participation there is greater need to diversify in terms of language of command to be used. The drama was mainly in Shona, yet for a nation to develop it should take into consideration different cultural groups that exist in the country and incorporate them in rehearsals for change. There are some places in the Zimbabwe where radio waves are not accessible. Thus, there is need to physically stage the same drama as theatre or performance in such places especially areas that are close to the borders in all the four corners of the country. Stakeholders such as funders and the government must also realise the need for documentation and archiving of such dramas. And, Gender based violence affects all men and women and this should be clear in the dramas.

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