**The Use of Episodic Dramatics in Promoting Uptake of Behavioral Measures for Prevention of COVID-19**

**Team Members**

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**Introduction**

Uganda is comprised of over 50 culturally diverse ethnic groups, with different beliefs, cultures, traditions, norms and behaviors. Many of these (beliefs, cultures, traditions, norms and behaviors) contradict significantly the advice being given by the technocrats on the prevention of COVID -19, like social distancing, and avoidance of physical contacts. If not managed properly, the COVID-19 regulations can be construed as anti-social and hence detrimental to Ugandan cultural fusion.

**The Project**

This project sought to use episodic dramatics for promoting uptake of behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19.The strategy consisted of composing songs and writing plays, recording and producing videos for the music and filming the skits. The project team therefore had songs, plays, pantomimes and choreographies, made up of tag lines, symbolic interpolations, juxtapositions, jokes, exaggerations, incongruities, grotesque displays, reversals, and other artistic means on selected behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19 that are deemed important in encouraging uptake of those behavioral measures. T then availed these materials to the main stream and social media for community consumption.

**Problem**

A number of dissemination approaches to communicate measures against contracting COVID-19have been developed. These include, WHO guidelines, webinars, zoom and other e-conference engagements, fliers, booklets, telecommunication network enabled messages, media messages, among others. However, there is a wide prevalence of illiteracy and inadequate access to these methods of communication, hence, the communications have been too technical and too remote and sometimes with pronounced inconsistencies to cultural beliefs, traditions, norms and behaviors to be appreciated by the local communities. With high prices of data, using the internet and associated services also remains a major stumbling block to meaningful deployment of ICT in socio mobilization. Low literacy levelsof interest in reading and inadequate access to reading material are other limiting factors for the current modes of communication of the COIVID -19 prevention measures. Also, many Ugandans perceive more effectively through storification, mimicking, visualized expressions, and demonstrations/enactments.

Also, many of the prevention strategies of COVID -19 like social distancing, avoidance of handshaking and embracing, frequent washing of hands, (let alone sanitizing), sneezing and coughing in tissues are aliento Ugandan cultural expression and behavior, yet, with no vaccine and complications in treatment of COVID-19, these prevention measures are a very important remedy. This calls for mindset change towards uptake of these behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19. The National Planning Authority (NPA) acknowledges the importance for community mobilization and mindset change for development to occur and sets it as a strategy in NDP III (Chapter 18, pp.173-77). The chapter outlines the opportunities for national development but acknowledges the difficulty faced in achieving it and proposes Community mobilization and mindset change as one of the strategies for attaining requisite national development levels as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the international level and coalesced into Vision 2040 at the national level. Likewise, in the prevention of COVID-19, despite the preventive measures taken (c.f. the 35 guidelines on the prevention of COVID-19 in Uganda) there is wide spread non-compliance of the regulations, leaving many persons in prison and others in very compromising situations towards contraction of COVID-19. Cases in point are the people who horde together in great numbers against the advice of social distancing, sneezing and spitting in public with no consciousness on the dangers this can cause to others, many persons riding in same vehicles against the set Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), ladies continued entertainment of track drivers, and continued resistance to the stay-home directive, among others. This therefore necessitates formation of strategies to mobilize communities towards promoting uptake of behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19. This would be akin to the proposal by NPA of forming a Technical Coordination Committee for Community Mobilization and Mind-set change programme for realization of the strategies set in NDP III.

**Activities**

The project comprised a composition and production of audio visuals of 4 Songs and writing of4 episodic skits, filming them and distributedthe prototypesof CDs and DVDs containing 4 songs and 4 episodic skits to stakeholders and media.

**Process**

The project started with a meeting of the team members to strategize on how to implement the project. The strategies included identification of song writers and performers, skit writers and performers, song producers, video producers and other relevant human resource requirements. We then had brain storming meetingsfor song writers and writers of episodic skits**.** Behavioral measures and the elements of art that were to be emphasizedfor the prevention of COVID-19 were outlined. We also discussed how the different stages of project implementation would enhance efficacy of episodic dramatics towards promotion of uptake of the behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19.

**Efficacy of the Method**

Use of episodic dramatics allowed the cognition to connect with the physicality and actions of the persons and rallied all Ugandans towards uptake of behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19. Based on the theory of embodied cognition within neuroscience, the episodic dramatics ensured that Ugandans observe the behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19 as they were presented. By observing the situations, the embodied body and the changing body postures and enjoying the artistic interpolations in the dramatics, the community rehearsed the process of up-taking the behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19. It hence became easy for them to practice the behaviors and later on live the learned behaviors, which resulted in deepening the uptake of the behaviors and adequate prevention of COVID-19.

Thesongs and the episodic skits were very effective in the promotion of uptake of behavioral measures for prevention of COVID-19. Four (4) songs, 'NaabaMungalo’, ‘New Normal', ‘Kisoboka’ and ‘WakyaliwoEsuubi' were produced in both audio and visual form with well-assembled lyrical and instrumental fusion; giving a feel of inforpedatainment. Emphasis has been put on appealing to a wide range of audiences across the demographic spectrum employing easy-to-sing-along, everyday elements in majorly English and Luganda; with some lines in Kiswahili and other languages.Kisoboka by DinaroOgie was uploaded on BLUSKY MAGIC Youtube platform with 348,000 subscribers and has hit 12,958 views in just one month. One of the outstanding comments on the same from Tumunirwe Dorothy: goes thus: The message is clear. Many ppo (sic) have made songs about the situation but this one? So impressive and sensitising. The New Normal by Anne B also gets pampering commendation from Sserunjaba George who suggests that "Ministry of Health , come see what to use and thank me later", while DOROTHY NALUBEGA is awe struck and comments thus, "Wow wowwow ????!This is amazing! Government should use it!"

The informercials have been produced with a range of colour photography, text and voice-overs on four topics (wearing a mask, self-isolation, social distancing and sanitising surfaces). Through setting, character and overall dramatic presentation, the informercials target a multi-dimensional audience and relayed in elaborately simple, thought-provoking and succinct audio-visual messages intended to offer emotional connection and encourage uptake preventive behaviours in the fight against COVID 19.