

Awareness Raising by Media Connection

Introduction

The paper/presentation is an explanation of a model community project that uses the media to raise awareness of people about their Fundamental Rights and Promotion of Democratic Value. The paper has a brief background about the origin of community sensitization program by media connection. In the background, the paper also talks about the historical background of the targeted community which played a great role in influencing the thinking of local people and their relationship with authorities. Under the same section, there is an explanation about problems that arose as a result of such relations.

After the Background, is a response to the challenges/problems that were arising. In this section, a clear explanation about the approaches used to address problems and actors involved.

Following that section is a clear and precise presentation of the achievements as a result of using media connection to carry out community sensitization.

Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion

Background

Twerwaneho Listeners Club (*Lets Struggle for ourselves*), Borne of a history of isolated efforts on fundamental Human rights is a local civic club bringing human rights activists together.

The major goal of the club is ***“To promote rights, freedoms and constitution awareness of the population in order to mitigate against unlawful suppression, impunity, enforced conformity and silence”*** and operates in the Rwenzori region- Western Uganda.

Twerwaneho Listeners Club has been mobilizing and educating people of the Rwenzori region about peaceful co-existence, their fundamental human rights, the meaning and functions of the constitution and the role of the monarchy system as enshrined in the constitution of the land.

The organization has over 500 registered members with an active Board of Directors

The club is a non Profit Organization registered and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee without share capital (2008) and has a membership of 500 people. Members are those that engage in activities of the Club and subscribe to its major goal. A person of high integrity in the community, registered members with no previous record of human rights abuses or use of violence can be elected on the “Board” of the club

Historical Background

Rwenzori region has a background of a traditional monarchial system with its characteristics of suppression, infallibility of leaders and absolute authority. Ancient Tooro kingdom covered the whole of Rwenzori region until early 1960’s when communities of Bukonjo, Busongora (current Kasese District) and Bwamba- Batuku (current Bundibugyo district) de-linked themselves through bloody revolutionary efforts.

In 1967, the then government of Uganda abolished kingdoms but in 1993, the current government restored them as cultural institutions without political and administrative powers. The communities of neighboring Ankole quickly mobilized themselves and

resisted the state supported restoration of monarchies in their region. Tooro kingdom was restored covering the districts of Kabarole, Kyenjojo and Kamwenge.

The stated constitutional role of the restored Tooro kingdom of promoting culture is criticized as not being observed at all. The kingdom is criticized as instead being an instrument of political mobilization for the ruling party using promotion of patronage and impunity as inherently enshrined in traditional royalty. The influence of the misdirected loyalty enhanced patronage, deception and impunity which conveniently married with political expedience to deny affected communities accessibility to democratic values of debate, demand for accountability and freedom of expression and association, thus political disempowerment and abuse of the rights of the affected communities.

As a result of the above, problems arose

This situation increasingly created unconstitutional suppression of freedoms of expression and association, suppression of media and access to information, acts of impunity by royals and party officials, lack of accountability and transparency and encouraged a culture of conformity and silence. The ruling party –royal alliance was enhanced by the fact that cultural acts of royalists are unquestionable, therefore politicians hid behind this belief to manifest themselves in the people and avoid modern values of democracy, accountability and equality before the law.

Freedom of expression and questioning authority efforts had been suppressed with a justification that such rights never existed in ancient traditional Kingdoms because they undermine the authority of the King and created hatred amongst the Kings subjects. As a result, all efforts geared towards the realization of the right of Freedom of Expression had to be suppressed. The form of alliance has created a culture of silence and conformity.

Over time, the masses had delinked themselves from efforts and issues that promote values of good governance such as freedom of expression, holding leaders accountable to mention but a few. Intern, Political leaders and royalists took advantage of the situation to

1. Not account for public funds
2. Grab land from people under the disguise of recovering Kingdom property.
3. Intimidate and harass individuals who attempted to question their acts.
4. Public servants had neglected their duties because local people were not empowered to question their acts.
5. Mismanagement of public tenders
6. Vote rigging and suppression of opposing members in the area.
7. Suppression of open public debate on issues related to governance

In general, there were no mechanism to check the actions of the royalists and the authority who serve the Public.

The causes of the problems in the community were associated to ignorance of constitutional provision on rights, freedoms and roles of institutions, which leaders took advantage of to advance patronage, impunity and suppression.

The other root cause was remoteness and isolation of the community such that problems and existing limited local efforts cannot be linked to the rights movements and efforts.

Genesis of Questions

In order to understand how best to address challenges, a few members in civil society at that time had to ask themselves question. The questions were a cornerstone to the approach taken

1. What could be done to hold local leaders accountable?
2. What is the best approach to address the challenges the people were facing?
3. If the local leaders had absolute power and did not need local support, why does their term of office expire?
4. Why do people pay taxes? Is there need to find out what the taxes do?
5. Are people aware that in the process of voting and paying taxes give away two important things, power and money?
6. What are the constitutional provisions talking about the questioning authority, holding leaders accountable and excising Rights and Freedoms freely?

Because very important questions were being asked, this was a very important point to reflect on what was possible and not possible.

Members of Civil society in Rwenzori region stated addressing themselves with the challenges the area was facing.

A protracted struggle to focus on the causes was adopted. It was realized addressing symptoms was going to attract negative attention from the authority.

Response to the Problems (Mode of the programs)

In 2006, a group of local human rights activists, many from civil society started a radio talk show "Twerwaneho" meaning (*let's struggle for ourselves*) and Ensonga Ha Nsonga (*Issue on an Issue*) on local radios, Voice of Tooro and Life FM aimed at awakening people to debate issues of governance. The media was to be used as a medium of sensitizing masses about their rights, promoting values of Good Governance, exposing Human Rights abusers, representing the voiceless and fighting injustices in community

The most immediate action to take was sensitizing the masses to know their rights and obligations and how to defend those rights. By sensitizing the masses we were empowering local people with knowledge and skills of Promoting Values of Good Governance and Democracy

Amidst meager resources the most obvious, effective and cheap way to reach out to the people was use of radio.

The programs focused on sensitizing the masses on their constitutional rights and obligations.

Twerwaneho Listeners Club's community sensitization radio programs encourage participation of masses at the grass root in Democratic processes by promoting Good Governance Values. Through radio sensitization programs, the masses' capacity and local institutional capacity are being strengthened with themes on nation building, democracy, good governance, constitutionalism and human rights.

When Radio programs started, they made instant impact by stimulating people to engage in informal debates and raising questions on issues of governance and democratic values.

In Rwenzori region, many people use radios as a means of accessing information. It is the single most used channel of accessing information.

Use of radio to sensitize masses is very effective. For instance, a farmer can listen to a radio program while tilling his/her garden. Radio programs are user friendly because of their convenience. All our programs run at night when most people are at home. It is easy for one to tune in and listen to what is being discussed.

The challenge with radios is one must be well equipped with researched facts, something many institutions fear investing in.

A lot of research is carried out on a regular basis on governance issues in the area. Comparative studies are used for purposes of critically understanding and analyzing governance issues. Initial Case studies used were Ankole, Buganda and Rwenzori Region. Research findings form the basis of what is to be discussed on radio

It is very important to note that where as many programs in this region target literate people who can read or write, Majority of people in this region are illiterate. Majority of the people TLC targets and work with, live in remote areas and are illiterate. They cannot read, write or understand complex explanation of what peace, democracy or Human Rights mean, why one should vote without being given a sachet of salt or a handout. To effectively address the problems that affect people, we package messages that best relates with people's own living example in community. It is important to package information that is relevant and easily understandable by the targeted audience. The people we work with have unique and special needs that require special attention. The packaging of information to pass on to the masses is a very important aspect just as the means/channels used to pass on the information. For instance, while talking about Values of Good Governance e.g. accountability and transparency, explanations are done in such a way that reflects and relates to issues that directly affect people in the community using living examples. For instance, in one of the communities in Kabarole District, Kibiito Sub County, a certain NGO passed funds to provide free safe water for domestic use and funds were mismanaged by the head of that NGO who currently is a political leader. People's teeth are brown like rust iron because the water they drink is not safe for Human consumption. Even in the political office the above leader heads, there allegations that corruption is at its highest rate ever. No wonder Kabarole District is the 2nd most corrupt district in the country. While explaining such an issue, one can say "Because the funds meant to provide Kibiito with safe drinking water were mismanaged for personal gains, people continue to drink unsafe river water that destroys teeth color. We need to support each other to find out who is responsible and hold him/her accountable. This will prevent others leaders from mismanaging public funds for personal use. If possible we can recover the mismanaged funds". When you tell people that funds for water were embezzled, it will not mean a lot.

We use such explanations to appeal to the masses.

While packaging information to be presented on radio we also consider aspects that **inspire people to take action/react. However, this aspect has a risk. Government sometimes can charge you of inciting Violence.** For instance, in 2008, when Life FM radio transmitter was burnt by suspected 2 Uganda People's Defense Forces soldiers, we used the radio to explain implications of burning the radio transmitter and what it will mean in future if Police does not act according to the Law. After two months of non action by Police, we used the same radio to organize a peaceful demonstration protesting police's failure to arrest suspects. Many people were bitter because Police had done nothing to investigate or arrest

suspects. Authorities realized the implication of the demonstration, organized, arrested and charged the organizers of the demonstration before it had taken place of inciting violence. The channels of communication are also important. It is in most cases difficult to call people to gather in one central place. The time and resource may not allow in most cases.

Daily arrangement of radio programming and panelists

While using living examples of what is happening in the region, we make a comparison to what is happening elsewhere. The programs base themselves on national, regional and international instruments that promote and protect values of Good Governance and Democracy.

Radio programs run on a weekly basis in the evening where most people are at home and can concentrate and listen. Panelists are drawn from across the region. Panelists are selected carefully after an assessment on their capacity to effectively address the topic of the week. Programs run for 2 hours and towards the end of every radio program, 30 minutes are reserved for listeners to call in and contribute to the ideas raised in the program or ask what they have not understood.

The radio programs are designed in such a way that everyone has any opportunity to critic or contribute to the views in the program. It is important to accept divergent views as one of the tenants of Good Governance in the process of nation building. Those who do not get an opportunity to call in, send SMS (Short Messages) or letters that are read on air and answers given where there questions.

Sometimes, a complete program can be dedicated to an issue raised by a listener in the previous program. Under normal circumstances, when a listener raises serious issues that undermine Fundamental Rights, a team of researchers from TLC carry out an independent investigation in to the matter, gather facts about the issue and use facts gathered to report the case to authorities. In the same way, facts gathered form the basis of the radio talk show the week that follows.

Most topics on radio are influenced by the listeners (local masses). Listeners ask the panelists to respond to certain issues.

Because, the masses have started questioning the royalists and political leaders' actions, the radio programs and panelists are targeted by authorities which pose a security threat to individuals and programs.

Effects of the Programs on Radio

Radio programs have contributed to considerable achievement in the fight against ignorance of the law, suppression of media, forced conformity and silence of the masses

- **Established rights education/debate forum (The weekly radio talk show)**

The weekly radio programs have contributed to the establishment of debate forums where members of the community can openly and freely express their views and concerns about Human Rights. Because these forums are open to everyone in community and carried out on a regular basis, there is increased awareness and understanding of roles and obligations of

citizen and leaders/authority amongst the local population. Local population know what to demand from their Political and Cultural leaders/institutions

In the same way, the radio programs have created room emergence of informal debate about governance issues. Views discussed on radio stimulate people at the local level to engage themselves in informal debates about governance issues that affect their society/community. In this way, there is increased/strengthened capacity of the local population to understand and address issues that undermine Good Governance such as Non participation in governance issue, conformity and silence.

- **Consolidated network of civic educators in the community.**

Twerwaneho Listeners Club is a membership organization that boasts of more than 500 members. All the members of Twerwaneho Listeners Club joined because of the radio program. The radio programs inspired many people to join the club. The new members of the club are inducted and intern became community civic educators. When one becomes a member, one of the roles he/she takes up is doing civic education and community sensitization at grass root level. This approach has multiplier effects that have enabled TLC establish a consolidated network of volunteer civic educators in community. The consolidated network of civic educators makes it impossible for royalists and authority to continue suppressing independent voices.

Consolidated networks act as security covers for Human rights activists in the Club

The networks own the club. It is easy to attack and silence individuals but difficult to silence the cause represented by close to 500 members. Members of the club are voters, public opinion leaders in their villages and most of them command respect from fellow village mates. Political leaders sometimes fear attacking opinion leaders of people who vote them. In the same way, a collective voice of members sometimes limits attacks from authorities. For instance in 2008, when activists under TLC were arrested, members of the club expressed their solidarity by peacefully demonstrating their anger by sitting outside the detention centre where their colleagues were detained. Police had no option other than releasing the arrested members on Police bond

- **Increased institutional capacity of rights community groups.**

Increased capacity in measured in terms of people's ability to understand and freely address issues of Good Governance and respect of Democratic Values. An informed community that upholds democratic values is a national asset. Knowledge and ability to defend and promote values of Good Governance through peaceful democratic processes reflects the capacity of community to promote democracy. The radio programs have emphasized on the need to know values of good governance and promote them as well. People are encouraged not to stop at knowing the value but also promote them. Some communities for instance can detect and report corruption cases to authorities, report rights abuse to relevant authorities and solve conflicts at community level through peaceful measures, plan and organize peaceful demonstrations.

- **Increased debate on rights and roles of institutions in the community**

After four years of community sensitization radio programs, the number of people in the region who know their rights and obligations has increased. This has also contributed to increased awareness about the role institutions play in the promotion and protection of Fundamental Human Rights. As a result, many people are able to engage in informal and formal debates about democratic principles, practically hold local leaders and public institutions accountable for their actions, hold public servant accountable for public funds and make independent and informed public decisions. The number of court cases where the state is sued are increasing. People have a belief in the channels of redress when aggrieved

- **Increased community awareness on good governance and human rights issues.**

The most important achievement has been increased community awareness on Good Governance values and Human rights. Today, the number of people who know why they vote, pay taxes, hold leaders accountable has increased.

Many corruption cases reported at police, Regional IGG offices and Anti Corruption NGOs are reported by local people. In the same way, Human Rights Violations reported to police, Twerwaneho Listners Club and other Human Rights organizations are reported by the local people. The level of increased participation of local people in actions that promote Good Governance reflects a positive trend towards addressing the culture of conformity and silence.

- **Increased confidence to expression, opinion and questioning, reducing silence and conformity**

Radio programs have inspired and built people's confidence in addressing issues of Good Governance. Because radio programs continuously emphasis the need to promote values of Good Governance, the number of people who understand why it is important to respect value of Good Governance has increased. Through formal and informal debates, many people freely discuss issues of Governance that they are well conversant with. In the same way hold leaders accountable for actions taken.

For instance, in 2008, after several concerns expressed on radio about shoddy work on Fort Portal-Kasese high way, residents of Maguru Village in Fort Portal organized and staged a peaceful demonstration demanding Government to explain why a Chinese company was allowed to continue construction on a High Way yet it was doing shoddy work. Because of this demonstration, Officials from the Ministry of Works were compelled to supervise work done. The Chinese company was advised to re-construction shoddy work on the road to required standards. Informal debates on what is a right or wrong decision in the interest of the Common Good are common today in the region. Sometimes, issues discussed during informal debates are escalated to radio programs for more advise and correction.

- **Reduced suppression, deception and patronage**

Local People are aware of their rights and obligations and also know their non participation puts those rights at a risk of being abused. Many people are able to report all forms of crime to legally existing authorities for redress.

Conclusion

The best way to deal with a certain community's challenge/problem requires a unique approach that best suits the problem, culture and levels of literacy. In the process of community sensitization by media connection, an approach used for county A may not necessarily work in county B.

More so, ownership of the project by local people lives longer amidst so many challenges. If people own the project/program the programs will survive in times of trouble. But if the programs are very good but community does not have a sense of ownership and involvement in program implementation, effects of the programs will always be short lived. These approaches are all inclusive. One building on another