

Drama Tips¹

16 Days of Activism against Violence Against Women

A community drama can be a powerful tool for engaging women and men on violence against women. The following are simple dos and don'ts for performing effective and ethical dramas in your community.

Dos

Do choose a facilitator who is dynamic, outgoing and comfortable speaking in front of a crowd.

S/he also needs to be knowledgeable about the issues in order to manage controversial discussions and reinforce the ideas of the drama.

Do conduct a discussion after each scene, as recommended.

We have found that it is better to ask questions throughout the drama as well as at the end, instead of saving up all the questions for the end. People often leave right when a drama is finished. Provoking discussion during the drama allows more opportunities to get people talking and involved.

Do work with local "actors."

The audience will be far more interested and influenced by actors from their own community than by perfectly polished professional actors. With local actors, your impact will go well beyond the drama itself.

Do raise the actors' awareness of the issues.

Don't assume that a drama troupe knows about power and violence. Take time to help them understand these issues. Visit practices and performances to ensure the key idea of the drama remains clear and focused.

Do encourage audience participation.

Dramas attract a whole range of people, and they become a captive audience. Talk to them! Ask people what they think. Spark debate and discussion. Encourage them to get involved!

¹From the *SASA! Activist Kit for Preventing Violence against Women and HIV*, 2009, Raising Voices, Kampala, Uganda www.raisingvoices.org/sasa/index.php

Do have a clear “take home idea.

Many people can watch the same drama yet have a different understanding of what it was about. Explaining the main idea of the drama at the beginning and the end allows people to have a shared language about what they just experienced. It also helps people feel more comfortable talking about the drama later, without fear of having misunderstood its meaning

Do portray all characters with dignity.

While the drama is meant to entertain, sometimes drama troupes do this at the expense of people's dignity. Portraying women as victims and men as monsters will not help any community members identify with the characters. Good drama helps people to see themselves in the characters and situations. Show characters that are thoughtful, capable and real.

Do role model the positive.

Dramas can inspire individuals and communities to change. You can use your dramas to show characters thinking about and responding to issues in new, positive ways.

Don'ts

Don't show extreme violence.

Performances are supposed to be dramatic, but sometimes this goes too far, especially when dealing with violence. Showing a woman being badly beaten or raped is dehumanizing to all women. Showing a man acting extremely drunk and violent is dehumanizing to all men. It is not necessary to show graphic violence. Use interesting dialogue and creative characters to engage your audience instead. Drama troupes can let the audience know that violence has happened by showing an injury, shouting off stage, depicting fear, referring to violence, etc.

Don't only reflect negative reality.

We all know that women experience violence and that women and men in the community are living with HIV. We all know that these situations are difficult, hurtful and sad. Showing only how bad things are in the community will not help anyone to think differently about the topic or to make changes. Introduce hope in the story, and portray positive attitudes and behaviors that show people claiming their power.

Don't cover too many issues.

Many times drama troupes have so many issues that are important to them that they try to pack them all into one drama! This is overwhelming to the audience, and they will go away wondering what it was all about. Stick to one main issue and try to avoid going into too many side stories or complicated twists and turns.

Don't offer overly simplistic solutions.

It is often tempting to act out a whole story from the beginning of a problem to its end. This is usually very difficult, because it is unrealistic. Change takes time, and if we show dramas in the community where all the problems are solved, seemingly overnight, it doesn't promote or support meaningful change in real life. It is okay to leave a story hanging, and not to solve all the problems in one short drama. The fact that a problem is left unsolved in a drama is an excellent way to involve the audience in discussion. Ask them for suggestions on how the characters should deal with the challenges. Ask how they might help the characters if they were their friends/ colleagues/neighbors.

