Theatre for Healthy Living was created by Art and Global Health Center (AGHCA) in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) to empower communities to take action on issues contributing to food security, using Theatre for Development (TfD). This booklet shares stories from some of the people involved.

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Booklet designed by Zaluso Arts
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Participatory community research is conducted

Drama clubs receive intensive training in Theatre for Development, and use their skills to develop participatory plays on key issues

The plays are toured to surrounding communities

Communities develop and implement action plans
Introduction

Successive climate shocks left nearly 6.7 million people in Malawi facing critical food insecurity in 2016-17. Art and Global Health Centre Africa (AGHCA) created Theatre for Healthy Living in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) to empower communities to take action on issues contributing to food insecurity, using Theatre for Development (TfD).

Following intensive training, local drama groups created participatory plays addressing issues including dietary diversification, water and sanitation, as well as gender and protection, which they toured around surrounding communities. Each performance linked local people’s experiences with information provided by WFP, and culminated in the production of Community Action Plans, where community members developed solutions to the issues raised.

The project was successfully piloted in 2016 in Phalombe and Chikwawa. In 2017 it was rolled out to more communities in those same districts- with drama club members trained during the pilot project now training new groups- and also introduced in the districts of Zomba and Machinga. The project was run in close collaboration with WFP’s Cooperating Partners- Emmanuel International (EI), the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and World Vision International (WVI). In the 2017 project, 16 drama groups conducted 115 performances, reaching an estimated 85,000 people.

This booklet shares stories from some of the people involved.
Mrs. Joyce Chalula, known locally as Mai Joyce, lives with her husband and 9 children in Savala village. Problems of malnutrition among children there are very common.

“When I saw how in the play, they portrayed some of the problems that come with being malnourished, I was so afraid for my children.”

Joyce confesses that her family had previously done very little to improve their eating habits. After the play, however, she was committed to change before it was too late.

“I did not want my children to reach the stage of that child in the play, so I decided that maybe I could do a little more. I went home and I made a small garden in my compound, I planted a tree of papaya because they do not take too long to grow and I also bought chickens to rear, so my children could eat more meat”.

Joyce explains that with the drought that hit the southern regions of the country from 2015, gardens are scarce in her community and people rely mostly on food distributions. She is now determined not to depend on these, but improve her family’s situation by growing her own vegetables and fruits. “I have secured a small space to plant my own beans as well since they are in season now. I am excited about it”.

Joyce is happy with the improvements in her family. She is proud of the steps that she has taken to ensure their balanced healthy diet.

“If I had not been present at the performance that day, my life would have remained the same. I had no idea that I can source local food in my community and still manage to make the food groups available to my family. All along I thought it was only wealthy families that can afford to eat healthy”.

“It was as if the play was focused on my life.” - Mai Joyce
“Many of the children came home from school complaining of a stomach-ache, and when we inquired, we found out that both parents and children had suspicions that the porridge at the schools was not adequately prepared. We had to do something”
- Shodax Mukholi, Tithandizane drama group Chairperson.

Tithandizane drama group in Mpama village in Chikwawa created a play on the issue of uncooked porridge in June 2016. They invited parents, children, the School Food and Management Committees as well as chiefs from the surrounding areas.

“During the performance, there were discussions where we all took part. The children confirmed the problem and many of us were asked what we were going to do to address the problem, teachers, chiefs, parents and even the children” The Food Committee chairperson said.

“We agreed that parents contribute to firewood to make sure the porridge is properly cooked through. As the food committee, we also committed to make sure the porridge is properly cooked while the chiefs and headmaster would make random checks and report back to the community on progress.” he added.

“We were thrilled to see that the performance allowed the community to discuss and decide on the way forward.”

When the AGHCA team visited in April 2017, the Chief, Food Committee Chair and Drama Group Chair all confirmed that the plans had been realised and cases of stomach aches reduced.
Due to high levels of poverty, parents in Saopa village choose husbands for young girls to improve their financial status and to rid themselves of the burden of raising a child. Timvane Drama Club was invited to the school to create a performance intervention that could be used to engage the community in participatory conversation about the issue.

Following the performance, community members developed measures to help deal with the problem, which the Group Village Headman and his council endorsed as community action plans. Chiefs assured the communities that any parent or guardian found to be marrying off a young girl without her consent would be fined and reported to the police. Now school administrators are alerted when a girl misses school to be given away for early marriages, and relay this information to chiefs and community-based organisations. This has created close links between the people and other authorities in the community.

Timvane Drama Club is one local group that has been trained to use Theatre for Development to address social and behaviour change communication. Thanks to their intervention communities in Traditional Authority Ngabu in Chikwawa district are starting to speak out about child mar-

“Every month, we would notice that the number of girls in the classrooms was deteriorating. We had been informed that many of the girls were being married off by their parents”- Lovemore Thole, Head teacher at Changa Primary School
The performance was an eye opener to the community because it brought real life issues of sanitation and hygiene out in the open for the community to discuss.”
- Lucy, volunteer teacher.

“Following our training we decided to develop a targeted participatory performance to engage the communities to take action. The themes of the performance ranged from hygiene in the school, hygiene in the homes and also community participation in early childhood development.”
Timvane Drama Club member

Saopa Community Based Child Care Centre (CBCC) is the only community based child care centre in Saopa, with six volunteer teachers, who take turns to teach the 250 learners from 12 surrounding villages. It has always run without learning materials, furniture, toilets, waste disposal facilities and a kitchen for cooking the children’s meals.

Good hygiene in child care services is essential for reducing the spread of infections between children, while helping children to develop hygiene habits that they can use throughout their lives.

In response, communities began to realise the significance of working together to improve the learning environment of children in the community. Currently, the community has managed to build two toilets with handwashing facilities, a pit for waste disposal, a dish drying rack locally known as Thandala; and are now building a kitchen where food for the children can be prepared and stored safely.
Charles and Iness share a small home with their 8 children in Namisoko Village in Phalombe.

His family is also well known with the Chief and elders in their village; Charles is regularly called to the Chief’s court to settle arguments with his neighbour, who happens to be his brother.

For years, Charles’s family had been using the pit latrine in his brother’s compound because they did not have a toilet of their own. “It was tough. Imagine having the need to go, but the owners say you can’t because they’re using it. I got tired of fighting with him [his brother] so I let my wife and kids use it, while I found somewhere to ease myself”.

Previous interventions on sanitation and hygiene had been implemented in Namisoko village but Charles was reluctant to change, despite the countless efforts by his relations and the Chief to get him to build a toilet in his compound.

After under-going Theatre for Development training with AGHCA, the Namisoko Village Drama Group were provided with information and messages from WFP on sanitation and health. Combined with their knowledge of sanitation in the area, the group developed participatory performances to engage their own and surrounding communities.

“I have been a drama group member in this village for years, and I speak for all of us when I say, that the training we have received from AGHCA on TfD has not only equipped us with a more effective way to engage the community in our performances, it has also personally made me accountable for the things that I preach to my fellow community members”

Today, Charles is proud of his new toilet structure and waste disposal silo he has built in his compound.
Reflecting on the performance of Phunziro drama group in Phalombe, Village Head Namutho continued, “As agreed during the performance, me and the chair of Village Development Committee met with the chairperson of the market place Mr Masambira and explained to him what we as the community had decided. We demanded that a toilet be built to serve the market place.”

“Mulomba market is perhaps one of the biggest markets here in Phalombe and yet it had no provision of a market toilet... apart from the one toilet they as a community had constructed years ago which fell through last year.” explained Area Civil Protection Committee Chairperson, Mr Ligomeka

Village Head Namutho takes up the story “We asked the market chair to allow us to collect market fees for two weeks so that we could use the collections for the construction of the toilet. When the response delayed, we went as far as the District Council, and now the council has started constructing a public toilet for the market. This is the first time this has happened and we are very happy”

By June, Phalombe District Council had completed the work of erecting a toilet structure at Mulomba market.
Mayaka drama club in Zomba focused their play on the dangers of unsafe sanitary practices, following community research that revealed this was a pressing issue for communities in the area.

Having watched the performance, the village headman Mitawa decided to carry out a close assessment of the levels of hygiene in his area and the results showed that a total of 65 households had no access to hand washing facilities.

The Mitawa Chiefs Council has since put across rules and guidelines for placement of locally crafted handwashing facilities in all domestic toilets in the area. The Council has also taken to using local community meetings as platforms for raising awareness on the issue of handwashing; working in collaboration with health surveillance assistants and other health committees to provide adequate information on the importance of handwashing facilities in the homes and around the community.

“The people in my village had never understood the value of the mpondagiya (local handwashing facilities) after using the toilet, before eating, and for some, after coming from the fields. They had seen it before, but had no information on its purpose or its importance” - Village Headman Mitawa, Zomba District
In Matache village in Zomba district, the performance of the local drama club opened a space for discussion on the limited availability of the food groups needed for a balanced diet—particularly the ‘foods from animals’ group. A Community Action Plan was developed, including the creation of a chicken pass-on project. Each community member with chickens loaned a female to another community member, who would then raise that chicken’s hatchlings. Once they are mature, one further female can be passed to another community member, with the eventual aim that everyone has an available source of protein to supplement their diet.

Prisca Khobwe, who donated her own chicken as part of the project, pointed out the importance of the concept being developed collaboratively within the formal community structures.

“We find it easy to give away a chicken to another home because when the chief called for the meeting as agreed during the performance, we decided together that those of us who have the chickens should share one with our friends.”

Maria Miliuka, a widow in her early 50s, living with her six children, received a chicken which quickly produced eight offspring, one of which she will pass on to another community member. Showing her appreciation, she said, “This chicken pass-on project will be very helpful because the foods from animals group, which was very difficult to find here in my home, will be easily accessible.”
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