

Case Study: Development of Artists and the Art Form Itself

Partner: Kenya Performing Arts Group (K-PAG)

Location: Kenya Cultural Centre/Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi, Kenya

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Introduction

Dance is the mirror of our life and beyond.

It reflects our links to the spirits,

our dialogue with the past

and our present feelings and thoughts.

(Jomo Kenyatta, Nairobi, 1964)

The performing arts sector in Kenya has been evolving since the mid-1980s. Theatre and dance, as an academic and theatrical category, are beginning to take root in the East African nation. Kenya Performing Arts Group (K-PAG) offers young people from all over the country a sustainable training programme on daily basis. K-PAG considers dance and physical theatre as the complete form of artistic expression. Youngsters are being trained by professionals to become professional performers, theatre-makers, teachers and educators.

K-PAG was founded in 2003 and is registered with the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services. Through an eight-month research project the founders concluded that in order for the artists and the art form to develop, more competition, quality, professionalism and exposure was needed. The research also gave insights into the lives of the artists, their expectations, mentality and creative skills in their art work. The young people saw the necessity of training (investing in their future), but sometimes they could not afford to attend the programme. They needed to earn money elsewhere in order to come for training the next day. This educational programme which could sustain as well as train the youngsters/artists was the inspiration for the development of K-PAG.

Activity

K-PAG wants to come forward as a 'producer' of culture and not as a 'consumer'. It is doing research into new artistic development in contemporary and post-contemporary performing arts. Each project year, K-PAG selects talented youth from across the country for a two-year training programme. Through a creative working process performances are developed, including the design of costumes, stage and lights. The trainees are involved in arts management, physio-massage, anatomy, art history and research, marketing and publicity. Required skills are transferred and knowledge exchanged through international exchange programmes, educational activities and event organisation. And through forums, discussions, symposiums and an interactive website K-PAG is able to communicate and address issues affecting young people, encourage and cultivate audiences and get involved with local communities, contributing to the development of the artists and the art form. Specific projects and programmes are implemented to create job opportunities for young people. The Health Module Programme supports young people and brings arts closer to the people, through promoting discussion about health-related issues. K-PAG Mix involves youth with a disability in the daily training programme.

Impact

The more than 70 young people who have been participating in the daily training programme have improved their skills and been able to make careers in the performing arts. Through the training programme, workshops, performances, exchange programmes and educational programmes the youth have improved their technical, artistic skills and their physical and mental condition. They have been part of a 'creation and production' process, performing, initiating creative processes and to creating their own artistic work. More 'down-to-earth' skills such as arts management, art history and research and anatomy have also been acquired (demanding networking, planning, producing, decision-making, publicity and organisation). Above all, their self-esteem increases tremendously and this contributes positively to their feelings of belonging and their pride to be Kenyan.

Apart from the 70 or so performances that K-PAG stages each year - both national and international - in schools, theatres, youth centres and elsewhere, K-PAG organises events which help create job opportunities for young people, and help build sustainable audiences, contributing to the long term development of art.

As a result of the *NIFTA Arts Festival* in 2006, K-PAG reached over 200,000 people in the informal settlements of Nairobi in with more than 3,800 participants in the cultural performances. This interactive youth festival brought together performing arts, visual arts, culinary, fashion and street urban art with the aim of partnering art with community development, social advocacy and awareness, youth mobilisation and entrepreneurship.

Da Factory Club is an open podium, organised by K-PAG youth, bringing together artists and different art forms to a live performance each and every Friday. The main aim is to promote local artists, promoting Kenyan culture in terms of music, visual arts, poetry and spoken word, dance and theatre. The press greatly contributes to the dissemination of the information on *Da Factory Club*, reaching as far as the remote places of Kenya. The Club attracts some 120 people in the audience, as well as participating and registered artists, every Friday.

Lessons

- K-PAG collaborates with and receives support from both non-governmental and governmental organisations. Above financial support K-PAG values the support that comes through collaboration.
- K-PAG collaborates, for example, with the Nairobi International Youth Hostel where the trainees are accommodated during the training programme. Through living together and sharing facilities, young people are exposed to risk factors and confront real life issues such as HIV/AIDS, peer pressure, disability, affluence, team-building and trust, mutual respect and discipline, teaching them the life-skills outside the training and performance programme.
- Dance and theatre educates communities and can be used to offer relief, for example for those affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS and related problems - especially orphans and patients. It can be used to eliminate the loopholes created among the young people by the judgemental approach of many campaigns against HIV and AIDS and related problems.
- Girls and young women need to be given particular attention; by being put in the spotlight they act as roles models.
- Exchange programmes are vital to the activities of K-PAG. They expose and develop artists and their art, opening opportunities for youth, artists, students, directors, critics and others. For more quality and depth these programmes need to intensify.

Visit www.kenyaarts.com and www.brain-fusion.info/kpag for more information.