

Case Study: Shadows Have No Voice  
Culture & Development

**Case Study: “Shadows have no voice”**

**Partner: Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Organisations (DENIVA)**

**Location: North and West Uganda**

**Introduction**

The Civil Society in the New Millennium project research in Uganda showed that people’s main concerns were corruption, political intimidation, unemployment, and the oppression of women. The launch of the national report led to a series of TV interviews and press reports. Despite these efforts, the extent to which the issues were discussed with the vast mass of local people, the ‘invisible’ of the research, remained low. In order to reach them, the Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Organisations (DENIVA) decided to dramatise the issues in a play to be called *Shadows Have No Voice*.

**Background**

The play was performed in the national capital, Kampala. As a result: “Two (further) plays were developed to meet a range of related local problems of domestic violence, defilement of young girls, corruption, and the lack of education for girls. The plays tackled these issues head-on. Local drama groups were identified to run the plays; two groups were involved in the acting: adults and school children.”

The plays were adapted from the original production, *Shadows Have No Voice* and sought to express popular concerns about corruption, political intimidation, unemployment, and oppression of women, and focused on how citizens can play a more important role in developing a good society. The plays alerted people to be more vigilant and urged them to participate effectively in decision-making processes and actions that affect their lives. One of the further plays was developed and acted by the URDT Girls’ School in Kagadi.

After the launch of the play school, it was performed in five different districts. Over 20,000 people watched the performances, including 8,000 women and children. After each performance, there was an hour of discussions that enabled the people to comment on the plays, to say what they had learnt and to share experiences. Discussions focussed on locally controversial topics, such as a housewife standing up for her rights against a cruel husband, a father forcing his

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daughter to marry a rich man who already had five wives, and corrupt police being arrested for accepting bribes from community leaders.

### **Impact**

The fact that the play was acted by girls provided real life scenarios and this made many women emotional to the extent of crying. Some spectator commented that, "When girls act, other girls and please learn easily. The realities are obvious."

Through the discussion, citizens become aware of their rights in relation to the issues presented. In a culture of violence, people are often angry. The objective is to move people "from anger to skills". Once this transition is made, people can act constructively.

The plays were also publicised on FM radio, a popular medium in Uganda, and were taped, and were shown on national television.

### **Lessons**

- These type of performances alert people to be more vigilant and urge them to participate effectively in decision-making processes and actions that affect their lives
- Follow up discussions help transfer performances into meaningful ideas and starting points for action.
- Plays and other performances are useful in communicating messages to mass audiences