



Ubuntu Community Theatre

Using theatre to
promote behavioural
change and address
health challenges
including HIV/AIDS
prevention, care and
treatment

A Guide for
Theatre Troupes
and
Troupe Managers

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Preface and Acknowledgements

South Africa Partners is an international, charitable nonprofit organisation dedicated to building mutually beneficial partnerships between the US and South Africa in the areas of health and education.

The Ubuntu Community Theatre (UCT) is a unique intervention that uses dramatic performance to encourage local communities to discuss critical health challenges and develop local solutions. Performance topics include the prevention, care, and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

South Africa Partners was first introduced to a magnet theatre intervention strategy during its work on the Khusela Project. The Khusela Project was an effort of PATH, South Africa Partners, the Health Information Systems Programme, and the Eastern Cape Department of Health to improve the quality, availability, and uptake of comprehensive prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services in the Eastern Cape Province.

The Khusela Project was generously funded by the Department of Human Services, Centers for Disease Control. South Africa Partners participated in the Khusela Project from 2007 – 2011. During this time, South Africa Partners adapted, developed, and implemented UCT in the Eastern Cape with highly successful results.

UCT has since evolved to be implemented in South Africa Partner's Strengthening Prevention Services (STEPS) programme, an effort to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in male correctional facilities.

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Thanks also to the South Africa Partners team

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
PMTCT	Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV
PPD	Post-performance discussion
STEPS	Strengthening Prevention Services
UCT	Ubuntu Community Theatre

Introduction

Ubuntu Community Theatre (UCT) is an interactive dramatic performance that facilitates community discussions about major health challenges. Through observation, improvisation, and reflection, a targeted audience is guided to recognize and change ineffective behaviours and to develop and adopt community-based solutions.

An intervention adapted and developed by South Africa Partners, UCT involves:

- * Acting troupe selection, training, and rehearsal
- * Script development
- * Audience mobilization and outreach
- * Performance and improvisation
- * Facilitated discussion
- * Monitoring and evaluation

UCT acting troupes are trained in health issues *and* the art of theatrical performance. Actors are also facilitators, encouraging audience members to improvise and contribute to performances as they take place. UCT performances are consequently customized and unique.

UCT's performances are easily adapted to suit community needs and address a wide range of health challenges.

This Guide documents UCT's programme strategies and performance techniques. It is intended to provide context, resources, and best practices for others who are interested in replicating UCT as a community-based intervention.

UCT is used to address health challenges in diverse communities.

Originally developed as an intervention for prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), South Africa Partners currently implements UCT to increase awareness and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in male correctional facilities through its Strengthening Prevention Services (STEPS).

For more information about South Africa Partners please see www.sapartners.org.

What is UCT?

Ubuntu is the essence of being human, our responsibility to support the well being of our communities and ourselves.

Ubuntu Community Theatre (UCT) is a highly interactive, improvisational performance that engages diverse audiences through **dramas** that portray health and life challenges. UCT facilitates the performance as a first step in changing behaviours and developing community-based solutions.

The UCT acting troupe is comprised of local community members who volunteer to receive training in artistic elements of theatre and health issues. UCT troupes engage in mobilization and outreach before each performance.

Performances include “stop action” moments when the actors pause for the facilitator, who leads the audience in asking questions and suggesting solutions to the **dilemmas** posed. Actors and audience members discuss and determine the characters’ next moves. Audience members may physically go on stage to act out suggested next steps. Audience members are thus able to incorporate their personal experiences and feelings directly into UCT performances as the dramas take place.

The actors, together with the audience, create performances that are educational, entertaining, and engaging. Performances provide audience members with opportunities to explore the impact of their individual behaviours and other potential barriers to health services. Performances also create a venue for communities to talk about providing support to others in need - *ubuntu*.

A **drama** is an artistic or literary performance composed through an artist’s imagination of characters, actions, and settings.

A **dilemma** is a situation when characters are forced to make a difficult choice between 2 or more alternatives, each alternative with advantages and disadvantages. The dilemmas posed in UCT performances reflect a major health challenge facing the community. These dilemmas are not easily resolved or dismissed.

The 4 Key Principles

UCT performances provide a safe and welcoming space where community members can talk openly and honestly about health challenges without fear or judgement, often for the first time.

1. **UCT requires participation and interaction.** Actors do not speak to the audience, but with the audience. Actors and audience members are empowered to exchange ideas and opinions, create and re-create the scenarios performed, and solve the dilemmas presented.
2. Each performance is **tailored to a specific audience.** UCT intentionally attracts and maintains an audience that is a targeted segment of the local population. For example, if UCT targets a young audience, performances might include music, dances, competitions or football – themes that are attractive to youth; performances targeting mothers might include a focus on child rearing or food security.
3. UCT **connects with the audience over time.** UCT is not intended to be a “one-off” performance but rather an on-going source for community dialogue. UCT keeps conversations active by returning to the same audience with new scenarios and dilemmas over weeks, months, or years. Performing multiple times to a target audience allows troupe members to: develop relationships with community members; stress key points of interest; and, provide support as individuals change their behaviours.
4. UCT performances **promote positive behavioural changes.** Because of the troupe’s on-going presence in the community, it is possible to identify individuals who participate in UCT and successfully adopt new healthy behaviors or attitudes. These audience members are then asked to share their experiences in future UCT performances. Hearing the testimonies, experiences, and successes of peers encourages others to explore and change their behaviours for the betterment of the community.

Interaction is the way the actors and audience members mingle, relate, and create rapport with each other during UCT outreach and performances.

Troupe Selection

A UCT troupe is created when individual community members are recruited or when an existing theatre group adopts the UCT framework.

Recruiting Individuals

When auditioning potential performers to join a UCT troupe, important characteristics include:

- * The ability to act or be trained as an actor
- * Good character and the ability to collaborate well with others
- * Magnetism, friendliness, and approachability
- * Written literacy and ability to read programme manuals and guidelines
- * Oral literacy and ability to speak in the target audience's dominant language
- * Familiarity with the health themes and dilemmas facing the community

If possible, troupe members will live in the geographic area where the troupe performs (even though not everyone is comfortable performing for their neighbors). Local actors are very important for UCT performances: community members are generally more responsive and participatory when engaged by a peer or neighbor.

Advantages to recruiting individuals for UCT include:

- * Recruitment of talented performers
- * Actors of different gender, age, knowledge and geography
- * Employment is with an individual, if termination of employment is necessary it is an individual matter and will not involve the whole troupe

Potential challenges to this approach include:

- * Time required to build a well-functioning troupe because individuals will not have previously performed together
- * Some individuals may not have been previously employed or have different expectations about working as an actor; developing a professional work ethic that matches the UCT framework can take time

Engage local community members in UCT performances.

Beyond individuals who volunteer as actors, plan to incorporate other local community members into UCT performances. This will increase the audience size and degree of engagement. For example, if a UCT performance includes a dance by a local group of young people, their family members and friends will more likely attend the and participate in the drama.

Recruiting an Existing Theatre Group

It is sometimes possible to create a UCT troupe by recruiting an existing theatre group to adopt the UCT framework and perform for the local community.

Advantages to recruiting an existing theatre group include:

- * Trained actors who understand expectations
- * An established fan base or following
- * Existing resources such as rehearsal venue, musical instruments, and costumes
- * Dedicated and experienced scriptwriter
- * Experience developing performances with themes that connect to the target audience

Potential challenges to this approach include:

- * Locating and obtaining a commitment from such a group
- * Avoiding conflicts due to existing programme scheduling
- * An existing theatre group may have its own well-established methods which may conflict with the UCT approach, for example, the need to maintain confidentiality and be non-judgmental
- * An existing troupe may have a management structure or existing dynamics which may or may not complement the UCT framework

Carefully recruit individuals or existing theatre groups when creating new UCT troupes. South Africa Partners considered recruiting HIV/AIDS support groups to participate as UCT troupes but did not end up doing so. HIV/AIDS support group members have in depth knowledge and experience with HIV/AIDS and can be seen as role models for the community. However, participating in a support group is very different from performing in a theatre group. Therefore it was decided that rather than recruiting HIV/AIDS support groups for UCT, individuals from the groups who were talented and interested in performing would be recruited individually to audition for a new UCT troupe.

Developing the Script

UCT **scripts** reflect the real and common health challenges that community members face in their daily lives. Scripts present a key question – a question that captures the theme or concern to be explored during the performance. Themes are intentionally accessible and based on reality, allowing audience members to easily understand and identify with the situations being portrayed.

Script topics can be as varied as the lack of access to clean water, flu, condom use and religion, breastfeeding, or sexual assault by a family member. While a large variety of these topics can be explored, the script must find ways to incorporate content about the specific health concern to be addressed.

Scripts may be written by a designated scriptwriter or collaboratively among troupe members.

Some level of collaborative work is always recommended especially when developing a theme from audience requests, questions, or comments. Different troupe members will remember and incorporate different elements of the audiences' response, making the script more inclusive.

Be aware that the artistic interests of the troupe may sometimes conflict with the performance content required by the community. UCT performances need to both engage *and* inform the audience. To resolve this tension, it is important that performers understand the both principles of UCT and the content needs of the community.

A **script** is the written dialogue, actions, and directions that actors follow during of a drama or theatrical piece.

It is important for the audience to contribute themes for future UCT scripts. During UCT performances, pay close attention to questions that audience members ask, the personal experiences they share, and the solutions they offer. Consider the audience's language, expressions, questions, and contributions. Choose a key question, one specific issue of interest, and use it to create the script for the next UCT performance.

UCT scripts are written to support performances that engage *and* inform the audience by portraying important health challenges.

8 Questions at the Heart of the Script

1. **What is an important problem or issue facing the target audience?** This will form the theme or topic covered by the script and the dilemma that needs to be resolved. For example, the problem may be the need for partners to jointly seek HIV Counseling and Testing so that disclosure to partners is not an issue.
2. **What is causing the problem?** Answer this question to identify how the target audience is involved in the problem. Then construct **dialogue** to reflect the dilemma. For example, within the target audience men are blaming their female partners for HIV infection and using that as an excuse to throw them out of the house. What causes this misinformation and attitude? The reasons could be lack of information about HIV/AIDS or guilt about having unprotected sex with many partners.
3. **Who are the key players?** 'Players' refers to all the people who contribute to or are affected by the problem. For example, the people affected could be a husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, older man and young girlfriends.
4. **Where does the action take place?** Each drama needs a setting. For example, does the action occur in homes or lodgings?
5. **What words and phrases does the target audience use to talk about the problem?** Using the target audience's language enhances local "ownership" of the drama and encourages engagement and participation.
6. **What are the myths, prejudices, beliefs, and attitudes associated with the issue?** The drama needs to incorporate the community's myths and prejudices so that audience members can better understand and consider how current behaviors may be obstacles to effective solutions.

Dialogue is the conversation or verbal exchange among characters in a theatre performance.

UCT scripts are intentionally respectful of all community members.

When writing a UCT script, develop neutral characters and avoid using real community members' names and titles. Do not identify script settings with actual place names or community locations within the community. This could imply that specific community members are being depicted even if names are not being used. The goal is to present the health challenges facing the community while staying respectful of individual points of view.

7. **What are the most important facts related to the theme?** Rely on UCT staff and other content experts to ensure that troupe members understand the problem and the best solutions correctly. It is also important to remember that the script is not a 'text book' of facts; it captures the realities of the community and contributes to solving a problem that requires urgent consideration.
8. **What has been done already to combat the problem?** What has been successful? What has been unsuccessful? Use these questions to create the context for the dilemma. Also use this information to help the community discuss the effectiveness of past strategies and the potential for new solutions.

Principles for UCT Scripts

Scripts pose a challenging question. UCT performances ask the audience a question – a question about a key health issue or challenge. The question is not answered “yes” or “no” but rather leads the audience to share opinions, feelings, and ideas. For example, a question a script might ask is, “what is the best way to deal with people who deliberately infect others with HIV?”

Scripts are brief. Ideally the script should take less than 15 minutes to perform. A longer script may cause the audience to forget important issues or lose interest.

Scripts make best use of a small acting troupe. Large acting troupes are complicated, expensive, and unnecessary. A UCT troupe should have 7 members or less.

Scripts summarize key information. What is the drama all about? The script should include a summary for the facilitator to present to the audience when introducing the drama.

Scripts describe the cast of characters and their profiles. Who are the characters in the performance? What is the relationship between the characters? What are their ages, social status, economic status, physical attributes, location, and personality?

UCT scripts describe the general attributes of the different characters involved in the drama. For example, 3 characters are briefly described for a UCT performance as follows:

Mandla 21-year-old footballer, Nonceba's boyfriend, and close friend to Khaya; unemployed and HIV positive.

Nonceba: Mandla's girlfriend and Khaya's neighbor; friendly, employed, and lives alone; has never had sex before and is under great pressure from her girlfriends to have sex.

Khaya: Mandla's closest friend and Nonceba's neighbor. Knows Mandla's HIV status but has sworn not to reveal it to anyone. Worried for Nonceba because Mandla confided his desire to have sex with her.

Scripts present a dilemma that the audience can help to resolve. The dilemmas are based on existing community health challenges, challenges that are not easily or quickly resolved.

Scripts require active audience participation. Audience participation is the most important success factor for UCT. A UCT script incorporates ‘stop action;’ a point when a character faces a dilemma and must decide about what to do. In this moment, the facilitator calls ‘freeze’ and all actors stop acting and hold their position for a minute; this is the point of audience intervention. The facilitator works with the audience to ask questions of or offer advice to the character. Sometimes an audience member replaces the actor to act out their ideas. The character’s dilemma becomes the audience’s dilemma. In all cases, the audience chooses the character’s response to the dilemma.

Scripts facilitate audience discussion and questions. Every UCT performance has a dedicated facilitator. The facilitator asks thoughtful questions that encourage audience participation. Questions that are prepared before a performance are used as a guide and then changed as needed based on audience interest and discussion.

Scripts are entertaining! It is important to engage the audience. The use of familiar and popular words and phrases, comical expressions, reference to target audience, and mimicry can be entertaining. Avoid gross and embarrassing comedy. Remember that the entertainment must be balanced with content and presentation of the question and dilemma.

Scripts avoid preaching. A good script provokes audience interest and involvement but does not tell the audience what to think or do.

Every UCT performance presents a dilemma for community members to discuss and resolve.

The dilemma creates advantages and disadvantages for possible next steps. It is not resolved through a “yes” or “no” answer. The following is an example of a dilemma used in a UCT drama. Thandi, who has been unemployed for 6 years, applied for a well-paying job with a local company. The manager approaches and asks her to have sex with him in order to be hired. Thandi’s parents are unemployed and her siblings are in school and in urgent need of school fees. Should Thandi consent to the manager’s sexual advances to get the job, knowing that she is risking HIV/AIDS infection? Or should she reject the manager’s advances, not get the job, and potentially let her family continue to suffer in poverty? This is the dilemma the audience must try to resolve.

Audience participation is critical for impactful UCT performances.

Training Troupe Members

It is very important to invest in training new UCT troupe members. Troupe training can be intensive and complex because actors must be trained on the content of the health issues being addressed and the art of theatrical production. It often makes sense for an existing and experienced UCT troupe to participate in training new troupes.

The primary objectives for training new troupe members are:

1. **Teach the content** related to audience's key health issues and desired behavioural changes. While this "book" training may be time consuming, it is essential: actors must be able to convey accurate information about the health issue to the audience.
2. **Learn the UCT approach.** Actors must be trained to on how to build audience participation. UCT actors implement a "stop action" technique to engage the audience in participating in the drama and developing potential solutions. Sometimes actors must also purposely portray common misconceptions or misinformation to help the audience recognize the problem and suggest potential solutions.
3. **Establish troupe dynamics.** Through the UCT training sessions, troupe members are able to integrate their previous performance experiences with other troupe members and the UCT framework. This ensures that the troupe is cohesive and aligned with UCT objectives.

UCT actors and facilitators must be trained to maintain a careful balance of content delivery and audience entertainment.

Rehearsal Meetings

After developing and writing the script for the UCT performance, the following activities take place during rehearsal meetings.

Cast troupe members into character **roles**. Though actor's roles are cast before each performance, remember that the actors also need to be ready to respond in a moment's notice to the audience's suggestions for character changes. Actors must always be ready to skillfully play a variety of roles.

Discuss background information about the community, for example, cultural norms, social economic status, or income – information that will help performers better understand and engage their audience.

Allow all troupe members to **read through the script** together. Ensure that performers understand the script's theme and dilemma. Answer any questions about content or intent that may be confusing.

Determine necessary props and costumes. The characters must be recognizable to the audience. Clothing and objects carried by the characters are important. Oftentimes a single prop, for example a cane for an elderly woman, will help the audience to identify the character.

Rehearse the play and **practice blocking movements, expressions, and voice projection.** Actors' movements and expressions are not arbitrary but purposely designed to help the audience understand the drama.

Establish the how the actors and facilitator will work together to make the performance a success. The facilitator must "freeze" the performance at the right moment and actors must respond by "freezing" immediately. This requires very good coordination and cooperation between the players and the facilitator

A **role** is the element and traits of a specific character that an actor "gets into" in order to have a convincing depiction of the part.

Blocking is the process of planning the physical moves that actors will make during the performance. Stage locations at the start of scenes are noted, as are all movements around the stage.

Select and practice icebreakers and theatre games that prepare the audience and actors for participation and interaction.

Assign tasks to troupe members. Determine who will be the facilitator, time keeper, manager for props and costumes, and other important tasks.

Use the final rehearsal, usually the day before the performance, as a timed dress rehearsal. Also use this rehearsal to test potential facilitation questions.

Selecting a Theatre Site

Characteristics of a good UCT site include:

- * Easily located by the target audience
- * Friendly and accessible for the target audience
- * Not intrusive to other community activities
- * Large enough to host the target audience
- * Secure
- * Will not support or cause disruptions
- * Inexpensive
- * Available when needed
- * Appropriate given the anticipated weather; shade for hot sunny days and shelter for rainy days.
- * If a public address system is to be used during the performance, has a power source nearby (e.g., a house or building) from which to use an extension cord

UCT performances are purposely designed to be simpler than other professional theatrical productions. UCT troupes provide just enough dialogue, props, and staging to communicate and engage the audience. An overly elaborate performance may actually intimidate the audience and discourage their participation. This said, high-quality acting skills are always required as poor acting will undermine the seriousness of the topic or project disrespect of the target audience.

UCT Performances are held in locations that are accessible and comfortable for the target audience.

In some geographic areas, choices for performance sites might be limited. But when there are multiple sites available, the following strategies can help troupes to choose their theatre location:

- * Meet with community leaders and members of the target audience and ask their guidance
- * Describe the characteristics of the target audience, for example, age, gender, and consider sites that are attractive given the characteristics
- * Identify 3 locations where the target audience gathers, explore accessible sites that are nearby
- * Consider other activities occurring in the community, for example, a health campaign, because UCT performances can sometimes tie-in with these activities and take place in the same location

Mobilization and Outreach

Before any performance, UCT troupes inform the community, gather the target audience, and physically and mentally prepare them to participate – this is mobilization.

Typically, the UCT troupe begins to mobilize the target audience 3 days before a performance. Flexibility and adaptation are required so that mobilization efforts are effective in reaching the target audience.

Use the following mobilization strategies on the days before a UCT performance:

Inform the audience of a set UCT location and schedule, for example, Mondays from 9:00 am to 11:00 a.m. every 2 weeks. Over time, the target audience will gradually remember where and when performances will take place.

If multiple sites are being considered, **test out possible choices** by organizing a performance at each site. Measure how many target audience members attend. Also analyze any other factors that influence the performance.

Urban and rural areas have different needs for mobilization. In rural areas, mobilization should be conducted over several days in neighboring communities.

In urban areas, density makes it easier to visit individual target audience members door-to-door. Handbills may be posted in shops and buildings and also distributed directly to people walking on streets. Community radio stations and newspapers may help to market performances.

Troupes mobilize their target audiences to attend and participate actively in UCT performances.

Avoid days and times that conflict with the usual activities of the target audience. Do not try to mobilize an audience on market days, worship days, community meetings, traditional ceremony days, public holidays, or during funerals. Remember that community members are busy with responsibilities and obligations. It is very important to understand and respect existing schedules.

Use song, dance, and theatre games to attract audience members to the site. These activities are fun to watch and can quickly draw a crowd that is ready to participate in a UCT performance. Many communities will respond to popular songs and dances. Musical instruments can add to the entertainment.

Visit the target audience house-to-house or door-to-door, if there is already goodwill between the UCT troupe and the target audience. Remember to be considerate and respectful of privacy. Do this in pairs, especially when female troupe members mobilize in communities where they do not live. A larger group, more than 2 people, can be intimidating and cause safety issues.

Individually invite one or more community leaders to attend. Especially in rural areas, this will make the performance more attractive to others. Also ask community leaders to announce performances at meetings and through other channels.

Use posters or handbills that list the performance theme, date, place, and time. Write handbills in the local language. Handbills can be posted in public locations or distributed directly to members of the target audience.

Spread information about UCT by word-of-mouth by encouraging the audience members at performances to tell their friends about UCT and bring them to the next performance.

Mobilization efforts are customized to attract the target audience to UCT performances.

When South Africa Partners conducted UCT focused on PMTCT, it was challenging to mobilise and attract male audience members. Performance audiences were overwhelmingly female even though men are also an important target audience. Several strategies dramatically increased male participation: more male actors were recruited and enrolled with the troupe; more male lead characters were written into scripts; and, more scripts featured dilemmas that needed to be resolved by the male characters.

Audience mobilization is sometimes affected by external factors, including bad weather, crime in the area, timing conflicts with other community activities, or political issues. **Plan to use several different mobilization strategies** in case one is not possible due to unexpected circumstances.

At the end of every performance, **announce the date, time, and location of next performance** and encourage audience members to attend.

On the day of a performance, conduct last minute mobilization activities near the location 2 hours before the scheduled start time. Go door-to-door and also use bullhorns to announce the performance to many people over a wide area. Play recorded music or announcements. Invite the target audience to the site.

A Performance Checklist

UCT performances are customized to fit the needs of the community, the intentions of the troupe, and the performance location. While it is hard to describe a “typical” UCT performance, most involve the following tasks:

1. **Mobilize and gather the audience.** Audience mobilization activities (singing, dancing, drumming, distributing handbills, and making announcements using bull horns) carried out by the theatre troupe several hours before the performance helps attract the targeted audience to the site. **(See pages 17-18)**
2. **Pre-performance bonding activities and icebreaker exercises.** As the crowd gathers, use different approaches to get people connected with others in the community. Use Icebreaker exercises to reduce the audiences inhibitions and shyness. **(See page 20)**
3. **Introduce the performance theme, troupe members, and roles.**
4. **Perform the script.** The performance typically runs 15 minutes. **(See pages 21-23)**
5. **Facilitate discussion.** The facilitator guides the audience in a discussion of the health issues and behaviors highlighted in the performance. This is the

Always be prepared for emergencies at UCT performances. Bring a set of emergency supplies such as a phone, bottled water, a first aid kit, a blanket and an umbrella. Keep phone numbers on hand for emergency health services.

central activity of the UCT performance and takes the most time – usually 45 minutes. [\(See pages 24-26\)](#)

6. **Feature an expert or guest speaker.** Experts and guest speakers talk with the audience about local services, resources, and behaviours. Experts and guest speakers might be a nurse from a local clinic or a community member who has positively changed their behavior. Remember to announce an upcoming guest speaker during the preceding performance and also on handbills and other mobilization materials. [\(See pages 27-29\)](#)
7. **Post-performance discussion.** Following a UCT performance, some audience members will want to engage in a group discussion while others will seek opportunities to talk one-on-one with troupe members or staff. These post-performance discussions are good opportunities to identify individuals who are thinking about or have already changed behavior. [\(See page 30\)](#)
8. **Review of the performance.** Troupe members discuss the performance's successes and challenges: what went well or poorly; what improvements can be made; and, what are possible themes and topics for the next performance – usually based on the target audience's responses. This discussion also allows the troupe to analyze and improve the troupe's acting and facilitation skills. [\(See pages 31-33\)](#)

Icebreakers

Icebreaker exercises are facilitated activities used to break actors' and audience members' inhibitions, discomfort, and shyness at the beginning of UCT performances. Icebreakers include questions, songs, dances, theatre games.

Strategies for icebreakers include:

- * Choose icebreakers are fast, interactive, and fun
- * Icebreakers are respectful and not embarrassing, do not poke fun at audience members
- * Songs, dances, or other activities are carefully chosen and do not conflict with community morals
- * Icebreakers can be described easily so that the audience understands their role and wants to participate
- * Participation in icebreakers is voluntary, do not force audience members to join the exercise

Icebreaker exercises are strongly recommended to encourage audience participation, open communication, questions, and the sharing of experiences.

Icebreaker exercises help to prepare the audience for participating in the performance. Examples of

icebreaker exercises are to ask a question about a community service and offer a reward, e.g., the person who correctly guesses the number of people seen at the local clinic in the last month wins a small prize; or, select a song that is commonly sung in the community and ask a community member to lead everyone in singing.

Acting and Improvisation

Acting is the art of representing a character in a performance. Improvisation is the creation and performance of a drama without rehearsal – basically on the spur of the moment. For UCT to have real impact, both the “official” actors (troupe members) and the audience are engaged in both acting and improvisation.

Troupe members are trained in acting to honestly present their roles and clearly present the key challenge or dilemma. Actors may play characters of different age or gender. Throughout the performance, they remind the audience that the problem being portrayed is based on real situations. It is not easily resolved; there are advantages and disadvantages to all possible answers.

Troupe members also improvise their dialogue and actions to respond in real time to audience suggestions, feelings, and comments. This allows the audience to see their ideas and opinions and test the practicality of suggestions. Other benefits from using improvisation include:

- * Encouragement in audience participation and creativity
- * Reduction in the financial costs of a performance
- * Time savings especially with impromptu performances

With improvisation, troupe members often need to play a variety of roles without advance preparation. When the audience suggests that a new character join the performance, the facilitator may ask questions of the audience to create a character description for the actor. Actors then quickly improvise the new role through physical representation, gestures, accents, voice changes or other

Acting is a form of expression where an actor uses their body and voice to play a part or perform a role in a drama; to pretend to be someone or something else; to mimic the character or behavior of someone or something.

Improvisation works best when the actors and the audience listen to each other rather than focusing on what to say next.

Actors and audience members act *and* improvise to create meaningful performances.

techniques. Mimicry is useful though exaggerated or clownish acting should be avoided.

Sometimes improvised characters require props that are not available because they were not planned for during rehearsal. For example, an audience member suggests a character use a gun or pick up a telephone to call for help; these props are likely not available. In response, actors can mime the props, e.g., shape their fingers to suggest holding a gun or making a telephone call.

Audience Members “On Stage”

As a key feature of UCT, an audience member may improvise and physically join troupe members on stage to replace a character or act along-side the characters to solve the dilemma. The remaining actors continue in their roles and act out the drama.

When audience members are on stage, they should always be encouraged to examine the dilemma and craft a solution; audience members should feel comfortable sharing their opinions. They may change the character’s attitudes, behaviours, and feelings to solve the dilemma.

Troupe members should never be frightening, embarrassing, or intimidating towards an audience member. Troupe members should also not be overly stubborn or argue for argument’s sake. Rather it is important to agree with the audience member if the situation so demands.

At the same time, troupe members should not allow the audience member to manipulate the performance, lead it off topic, or confuse the message. Audience members should not change the setting of the dilemma, nor distract the audience from the real message of the performance or perpetuate a false belief the problem or dilemma is easy to solve.

UCT performances rely on Improvisation to make the performance more real to the audience.

The following example describes how improvisation takes place.

The script describes a girl who had not planned to have sex who finds herself in a locked room with her boyfriend. The boyfriend demands that they have sex; the boyfriend is very insistent and ignores any pleas from the girl to wait. The question facing the audience is, what should the girl do in this scenario?

Several audience members suggest next steps:

- * The couple complete HIV testing first
- * The girl demand that the boyfriend use a condom
- * The girl screams and bites the boyfriend

The actors then improvise new dialogue, actions, and props on the spot that test out these different suggestions and their impact on the couple. An audience member may join with the actors on stage to act the part of the girl or boy, improvising the dialogue, actions and impact.

Improvising with the audience is hard. ‘Actors’ from the audience may need extra encouragement when presenting their ideas. The troupe must always be ready for unpredictable behavior and unusual performance styles. The troupe must also ensure that the theme, dilemma, and message of the performance stay clear to all audience members.

Once an audience member acts out their solution for the dilemma, the facilitator and the troupe show appreciation by saying, “congratulations and thank you,” and clapping.

Other Performance Challenges

UCT usually takes place outdoors and generally attracts a large audience. Performances may also be impromptu. This poses several challenges for actors:

1. Actors must strongly project their voice without shouting so that all audience members are able to hear; the audience will only participate when they can hear what is being said.
2. When performing outdoors, most audiences will naturally form a circle with some audience members behind the actors. To avoid this, the troupe and staff should guide the audience to sit in a semi-circle and, if necessary, move closer to the actors.
3. When performing indoors it is helpful to have a stage or raised platform but this isn’t always possible. When there is not stage, guide the audience to an appropriate seat where they can see and hear without blocking the actors.

When an audience member is on stage, the troupe should deliberately “under-act”

or tone down their acting skills so that they do not over-shadow or dominate the performance. Remember, audience members are not trained actors and their priority is to solve the dilemma, not act. This said, “under-acting” does not mean bad acting; UCT actors always need to present accurate content and engage the entire audience.

Facilitation

Facilitation is the act of guiding the UCT outreach and performance, enabling the audience and actors to contribute in the development of potential solutions to community challenges.

During and immediately following a UCT performance, a trained facilitator guides the audience through conversations, opportunities for asking and answering questions, improvisation, comments, and otherwise sharing experiences. The facilitator must understand the performance's structure, theme, characters, and dilemma. The facilitator must also be able to remain neutral while bridging topics and eliciting different points of view.

Facilitation Techniques that encourage participation include:

- * Maintain regular eye contact without overtly staring, look at the person speaking to show encouragement and respect
- * Head nodding indicates agreement and signals that comments are being heard
- * Adopt a smiling or content expression as a serious or frowning disposition will hinder participation
- * Verbally reinforce audience comments and be respectful, for example, "good point, thank you, my friend"
- * Ask thoughtful questions to help the audience consider the health issue and dilemma from a variety of perspectives
- * Create a safe environment for participation and discourage heckling, catcalling, name-calling, jeers, insults, or laughter directed at an individual
- * Avoid discouraging posture and body language, such as keeping hands in the pockets, folding them across the chest, fidgeting, or appearing indecisive or uncertain
- * Learn the names of the audience and call people by their names during conversations, this makes people feel recognized and appreciated

Think of the UCT facilitator as if they were a driving instructor who sits in the passenger seat while guiding the pupil. They follow a training plan and know what the pupil must learn, but also allow the pupil to proceed at their own pace, offering guidance when necessary or stepping in if the pupil strays too far from the main route. Once the pupil has learned how to drive, the driving instructor's job is done. The pupil is empowered to drive wherever he or she wants.

Steps in Facilitating UCT

A facilitator is involved in guiding the following parts of a UCT performance.

Introduction to the Performance

- * Introduce the facilitator and the troupe, briefly describe the troupe's work in the community, and introduce the agency or sponsor, if relevant
- * Introduce the theme or key question of the performance
- * Explain the audience's role during the performance, that audience participation is very important and there will be many opportunities to participate by discussing an issue, providing an opinion, sharing a real-life experience, asking questions, improvising characters' identities or actions, and joining actors on stage to contribute to the performance
- * Establish rules for participation
- * Clarify that everyone is welcome and encouraged to share their views but participation is voluntary – no one will be forced to participate
- * Explain that the performance presents a challenging dilemma, one that has no "right" or "wrong" answers nor easy solutions
- * Conduct an icebreaker to prepare the audience for participation
- * Welcome audience members who speak by asking their names and leaving time for them to express themselves

Facilitators must set expectations for how audience members will participate in the performance. Discuss potential "rules" with the audience. These might include, raise hands when one wants to speak, avoid embarrassing a speaker or fellow audience member, and refrain from using vulgar or violent words.

Facilitators introduce the performance theme and set groundrules for audience participation.

Audience Participation

Audience participation is essential for UCT performances; through active participation, audience members discuss current behaviours and discover new potential solutions for resolving issues that face their community. The facilitator encourages audience participation in several different ways:

- * Throughout a UCT performance ask the audience questions to help them explore various viewpoints and challenge their beliefs
- * Help the audience to ask questions of the actors or fellow audience members, for example, “Why are you doing that? What do you hope to achieve by that action? Would you do the same if it were a member of your family?”
- * Whenever an audience member asks a question, repeat it to the entire audience and allow the audience to answer each other’s questions

During a performance, the facilitator calls “freeze” at the moment when a character faces a dilemma and is about to make a decision. This is a critical time for audience participation.

Passionate discussions that divide the audience are encouraged. Debates allow audience members with different viewpoints an opportunity for discussion – discussion that might continue even after the UCT performance ends.

Intervene in audience debates if the discussions turn violent or vulgar. Otherwise allow for in-depth discussion and refrain from interrupting those going into relevant detail.

If appropriate, ask an audience member to physically join actors on stage or take the place of an existing character. The audience member, speaking loudly for all to hear, can then have a one-on-one conversation with the character about the dilemma, telling them what they think. Following this conversation, the actors then continue the performance incorporating the advice from the audience.

If audience members have questions that are too complex, too detailed, or not quite on track with the intention of the performance, ask them to hold their question until the post-performance discussion.

Also ensure that as many people as possible are given opportunities to participate and continue the discussion until the audience determines the topic is thoroughly covered.

Remember that audience participation calls for courage and resolve. It reflects a bold decision by the audience to step forward and break a dilemma for their own benefit. This effort should be appreciated. Clap, give a pat on the back, shake hands, or give verbal commendation.

Transition to Speakers

After the performance and improvisation ends, ask the troupe members (who by now have discarded any props or costumes) to come forward and tell the audience the character they played and their real names. For example, I was acting in the play as Mzi Feliti but my name is....

Also after the performance, consider approaching audience members who participated actively and express your appreciation. Thank them and encourage them to participate in future UCT performances or post-performance discussions.

Introduce the Expert Guest Speaker

UCT performances sometimes involve audience discussion with an expert guest speaker. An expert will provide information and resources to address questions raised during the performance or in a previous outreach session.

- * Introduce the topic that led to the invitation of the expert
- * Establish the rules of interaction between the audience and speaker
- * Facilitate discussion
- * Give directions for audience members who would like further consultation or a referral to the speaker
- * Thank the guest for his or her time and willingness to share

When an audience member participates, **repeat key points loudly** and clearly to ensure all other audience members and actors hear the comments and understand.

Expert and guest speakers follow UCT performances to share content knowledge and motivate behavioural change.

Magnifying Behaviour Change

UCT performances sometimes include a presentation by or discussion with a community member who has successfully changed their behavior to address the health issue being discussed.

The community member serves as an example for others; their presentation is called “spotlighting” or “magnifying” behavior change.

By seeing and listening to a peer in the community who changed their behavior, others may be motivated to adopt a new behavior, creating a multiplier effect. If enough individuals change their behaviours and speak about it openly, a supportive and safe environment will be created for others to follow in their footsteps.

Before planning for a “magnification” session, have a frank conversation with the potential speaker to clarify:

1. Does the individual really want to be spotlighted?
Spotlighting requires speaking out during UCT performances about difficult challenges. Individuals should discuss this with close partners and others whose opinion they value.
2. A speaker’s participation is completely voluntary and unpaid; it is not an earning opportunity. Any out of pocket expenses, such as transportation, may be paid for against receipts but speakers do not earn salaries or speaker fees.
3. The speaker may change their mind; they are not bound by any contract to the program. Should they find participation too demanding or uncomfortable, they are free to say “no” at any time.

Once these parameters for the session are understood, also address the following issues before the performance.

Agree with the speaker about the details of how the spotlighting will take place. For example, it might be an interview with the facilitator, taking questions from the

When community members speak about personal behavioural changes, recognize their leadership and strength -

it is very challenging to be one of the first to adopt behaviour that differs from the norm.

audience, or telling the story of their behavior change experience.

Arrange with the UCT troupe for the performance theme and dilemma to relate to the behavior change being spotlighted.

Prepare to recognize and appreciate the speaker. Compose a very simple drama, song, poem, or theatre game that praises the speaker. This should be sincere and encouraging, not forced. Also distinguish the speaker during the performance by decorating them with a special hat, scarf or ornament, or creating a special platform where the individual stands when sharing his or her experience.

During the performance, introduce the session's theme and dilemma. Explain that the audience will hear from special guest who adopted and maintained a new behavior related to the dilemma. When it is time for the speaker, review the ground rules with the audience:

- * No heckling, jeering, or whistling at the speaker
- * All questions will be channeled through the facilitator
- * Audience members will cooperate and be quiet when the speaker is talking so that all audience members can hear and understand what is being said
- * No interrupting the candidate in mid-sentence
- * No asking deeply personal or embarrassing questions

Introduce the speaker and invite them to the stage. Ask the troupe, joined by the audience, to give a round of applause and present one of the prepared celebratory items if available.

Proceed with the presentation following the format previously agreed upon.

Ask the audience if they know others who have similarly changed their behavior and discuss.

Conduct the celebratory or praise activities, e.g., a song or chant. Encourage the audience to join in.

It is very important to show appreciation for speakers during performances.

Compose a very simple drama, song, poem, or theatre game that praises the speaker.

Distinguish the speaker during the performance by decorating them with a special hat, scarf or ornament, or creating a special platform where the individual stands.

All expressions of appreciation must be sincere and encouraging, not forced.

Closing the Performance

- * Summarize the key issues discussed during the performance, the solutions agreed upon, and any followup actions suggested
- * Ask the audience if anything was left out or if anything needs to be added
- * If relevant, announce the date, time, location, and theme for the next UCT performance
- * Give directions to those who have additional questions or would like to have one-on-one discussions with the UCT facilitators or actors after the performance
- * Thank the audience for their participation and close the session by inviting audience members to participate in a post-performance discussion

Post-performance discussion

A post-performance discussion (PPD) immediately follows a UCT performance or guest speaker session. It is a facilitated discussion with a small number of audience members to discuss issues and questions in more detail in a comfortable and private setting.

Participants in the PPD may include:

- * Audience members who were asked to hold their comments or questions during the performance until the PPD
- * Audience members specifically invited to the PPD by the facilitator
- * Audience members who requested to participate in the PPD with the facilitator

Convene the PPD and guide the discussion, ensuring respect for participants' opinions, feelings, and experiences. If participants in the PPD require professional follow-up or services, refer the participants to the appropriate service, for example, to get an HIV test.

Use the PPD to identify participants who are thinking about changing behavior or have already changed behavior. They may be appropriate guest speakers at future performances.

Use the post-performance discussion to **identify audience members who are thinking about changing their behavior or have already changed behaviors**. They may be appropriate "magnification" speakers at future performances.

Facilitator's Space

The facilitator carefully uses physical performance space to encourage and support the audience in UCT performances.

The facilitator balances their physical location between the 'acting' and 'audience' spaces. They move freely across the space to reach all audience members, even when the audience is large. They close the physical gap between the actors and the audience; they do not stay only in the 'acting space.' Facilitators are also careful not to block the audience from getting a good view of what is happening on stage – that causes alienation from actors and feelings of 'them and us.'

At the same time, the facilitator will not stay too close to the audience. They do not want to be perceived as intimidating or violating personal space.

Through this careful balance and movement during UCT performances, the facilitator physically bridges the audience and actors, empowering all involved to participate and fully utilize the performance space.

Facilitators use physical space and movement to bridge the divide between actors and audience members.

Recording Performances

It is very important to record information about UCT outreach, performance, and impact. Such recordings may assist the troupe to improve their outreach or performance strategies and also communicate with other stakeholders about UCT's process and framework.

Documentation and recording of UCT may be done through still pictures, video, or written notes.

If pictures, videos, or other recordings are taken during performances, the audience must be informed and provide their consent. Any photography or recording processes should be discreet and not hinder audience participation.

Reporting and Evaluation

UCT encourages the use of reporting and the keeping of written records about the UCT performance and its results. This documentation systematic providing a description of what happened, who was there, and any follow-up that might be needed.

It is also important to routinely evaluate how UCT programs are achieving goals and maintaining performance quality; evaluation helps theatre troupes to understand what is working and what isn't. Evaluation involves collecting and analyzing information, then comparing results with the goals and objectives.

Before starting reporting or evaluation, UCT troupe members must discuss the following:

- * Why is UCT being offered? What are the goals and objectives?
- * Who is the target audience?
- * Is the target audience being reached?
- * What changes or actions will result from UCT?
- * What information about performances will be collected? Why?
- * How will information be collected?
- * How will information be reported?
- * What measures or indicators will be used to show progress and success?
- * Are UCT activities achieving goals and objectives?
- * Are UCT activities being carried out correctly?
- * Are there any improvements or changes that should be made?

Other specific data collection might include:

- * Number of actors involved to troupe
- * Attendance at meetings and training
- * Outreach to community organizations for outreach and recruiting
- * Theme of performance
- * Date, time, and location of performance
- * Duration of performance (minutes)
- * Number of of people in audience

Reporting and evaluation strategies will be customized by the UCT troupe to provide information to troupe members, community members, and other stakeholders. It is to let stakeholders know there are systems in place to consistently collect information - and that progress and results will be presented periodically.

- * Number of audience members who are the targeted audience
- * Gender composition of audience
- * Age of audience members
- * Name and expertise of expert speaker
- * Name and subject matter for “Magnifying Behavior” speaker
- * Number of attendees for post-performance discussion
- * Number of referrals to health facility or direct services (HIV/AIDS testing and counseling)
- * Number of questions generated from audience
- * Topics of audience questions or concerns raised
- * Total number of UCT performances for target audience

The Appendix includes South Africa Partners’ reporting form for UCT in the STEPS programme.

Conclusion

Ubuntu Community Theatre is a structured intervention that engages community members in addressing the most pressing health challenges through dramatic performance. The theatre relies on community members to volunteer as actors, facilitators, and guest speakers. Actors are trained in both the content relating to the health issue *and* the art of performance; UCT audiences are both informed *and* entertained through performances.

Throughout UCT performances, the troupe engages the audience to participate, improvise, and shape the stories that are portrayed. Careful facilitation bridges the needs of the community and intentions of the actors. Expert and “magnification” speakers provide content and motivational experiences to encourage change.

Together the UCT staff, actors, community members, experts, and other stakeholders present this model as a means for communities to develop new solutions and improve their health and well being.

For more information about this guide or the UCT programme, please contact South Africa Partners at info@sapartners.org or see www.sapartners.org

Appendix: Sample Data Collection Form



Target group: _____ Department/Section: _____

Date: _____ Start and End time: _____

Facilitator: _____ Contact details: _____ Date: _____
Signature *dd-mmm-yyyy submitted*

Troupe members: _____
Signatures:

Coordinator: _____ Cell no: _____ Date: _____
Signature to confirm verification *dd-mmm-yyyy verified*

Key question: Tick relevant box. Describe if needed.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Advocacy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prophylaxis and treatment of HIV |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Confidentiality | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cultural & religious practices | <input type="checkbox"/> | Stigma |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Disclosure | <input type="checkbox"/> | HCT |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Gender dynamics | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other _____ (<i>specify</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Myths / Beliefs | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Nutrition | | |

Estimated Total Audience Size: _____

Questions harvested: _____

Referred: _____

Appendix (continued)

Summary (Give a summary of the drama and the dilemma presented to the audience)

Audience participation (Describe participation and interaction with the drama and the actors. What percentage of the audience participated actively?)

Concerns raised (What were the issues and concerns raised? What were the attitudes, opinions and views that emerged? What were the reactions? Was there a need for information sharing?)

Conclusion (what were the conclusions made or solutions reached? If there were no solutions, what did participants agree to discuss among themselves after the outreach?)
