

THE ARTS AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN UGANDA

JILL SONKE



The arts have long been used as a means to educate the public, foster community engagement, and influence behaviors. Arts-based health promotion has its roots in traditional cultures where storytelling, drama, and music are primary means for enforcing belief systems that guide behavior. In many low-resource and low-literacy regions, the arts are indigenous forms of social learning and are deeply woven into the fabric of daily life. In these areas, the arts have been shown to be a highly effective and efficient means for health communication and social mobilization.

With support from a Research Tutorial Abroad (RTA) African Multidisciplinary Field Research Program grant and the UF Office of Research, I have undertaken a set of studies in East Africa focused on use of the arts for health messaging in low-resource and low-literacy regions. These studies investigate

public health and other programs that use culture-based arts practices, aesthetics and design, performance, and mass media to engage target populations and convey health information.

I have been researching best practices in using the arts to promote health in East Africa since 2009. This investigation led to the recognition that Uganda is unique among nations in its longstanding investment, leadership and effectiveness in using the arts in health literacy campaigns. With RTA grant support, I traveled to Uganda in May/June of 2014 with project co-investigator, Dr. Virginia Pesata and four undergraduate research assistants. We engaged four additional research assistants and a third co-investigator from Makerere University and undertook two studies. The first included interviews with 25 public health and Ministry of Health leaders as well as professional artists who work in public health. The second study involved

interviews with community members in three villages focused on how they get health information and how they make health-related spending decisions. In addition, along with Dr. Pesata and our team of research assistants, I conducted a full systematic review of the literature on use of the arts for health messaging in low-literacy and low-resource regions.

These studies, in addition to their individual findings, resulted in the development of a set of guiding principles for using the arts for health messaging and serve as the basis of our *Evidence-Based Framework For Using The Arts For Health Messaging*. The studies also informed the development and publication of a concept brief focused on use of the arts for health messaging to stop the spread of Ebola in West Africa and the development of an international network that is working to promote evidence-based use of the arts in the Ebola response. The *Arts and Health Messaging Concept Brief* and *Evidence-Based Framework For Using The Arts For Health Messaging* are available online through the Center for Arts in Medicine website.

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