



Theatre for Social Development presents gender violence in Zanzibar

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Zanzibar, Tanzania: As a UN Volunteer working with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Zanzibar, I am involved in activities on sexual and reproductive health, working closely with government institutions. Looking for new innovative methods to raise the awareness of young people is one of the things I have been working on during my assignment with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. Theatre is a good way to raise awareness of women-related issues.

In the course of a month, Theatre for Social Development (THESODE) will be performing gender violence in different places in Zanzibar, targeting the community and specifically young people. Tumbatu Island, where the group stops today, is somewhat isolated from the rest of the archipelago. It is a half an hour boat ride to the island, which is mainly populated by fishermen and small-scale farmers, Tumbatu has gained a reputation for an aloof and conservative but proud and distinct population, but we are warmly welcomed and the residents are present in large numbers.

The performances are part of UNFPA's support to the Zanzibar Aids Commission. It aims at community capacity enhancement to address Gender-based Violence (GBV) including sexual exploitation of young girls and HIV prevention. Research shows that incidences of both domestic and sexual violence are on the rise in Zanzibar.

THESODE uses drama as a development tool, usually in a community gathering place. The plays build awareness about critical topics. In this case, THESODE calls attention to the issue of GBV and the link to HIV infections. When the scene freezes during the play, spectators are asked for their opinions. This way, the performance provides room for the people themselves to provide possible solutions to address the incidents.

In a short time, the theatre group manages to bring forward several issues present in contemporary society as well as formulating solutions to the problems. A woman in the audience acknowledges that these problems occur in their community, urging people to "open and disclose what is done to them that might harm them in one way or another".

With UNFPA's financial and technical assistance, the Zanzibar Aids Commission provided training on alternative communication approaches for community service organizations such as THESODE. Through these kinds of performances, we hope to make a difference in the lives of women, young girls and families in Zanzibar facing problems like GBV and HIV, and enhance the knowledge on how to deal with these issues in their respective communities.

Bio: Joke Lannoye is a Belgian UN Volunteer with UNFPA, based in Zanzibar, Tanzania. She works on the identification, advocacy and follow up of youth-specific interventions supported by UNFPA. Being a volunteer, she assists youth organizations in ensuring that the rights and needs of young people are included into public policies and programmes. Different implementing partners have now started to involve youth from the planning of projects onwards, recognising the importance of young people's participation.



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