Singing for change?
Ugandan youth on music, self efficacy and agency

Key Findings

- Nearly 6,000 young people across five different regions of Uganda attended musical concerts organized around the theme of promoting young people as positive agents of change in their communities.
- 87% of participants recalled messages regarding contributions that could be made in society, and 84% recalled messages regarding young people having a role in making change happen.
- 93% of the concertgoers said that they had indeed learnt something from attending the concerts, among which most of the spontaneously mentioned messages were the core promoted messages.
- On the other hand, only 9% of the participants could recall the last part of the main slogan "We talked yesterday…" whose answer was "let's act today".

Introduction

In 2014 Twaweza Uganda engaged with a number of partners to execute a country-wide communication campaign promoting positive social change among youth (aged between 18 and 30). The campaign aimed to increase young people's sense of self-efficacy and to encourage them to start seeing themselves as agents of change in their communities. It also aimed to increase Twaweza's learning around using artists as role models to exert social pressure or persuasion, and to trial the use of specific calls to action alongside generalized messages about the power of individuals to make things happen.

The campaign dubbed *Ni sisi* ("It's us") utilized diverse and creative communication channels including musical concerts in five districts, distribution of posters and T-shirts, audio and video messages recorded by artists and aired on radio & TV stations as "celebrity ads" endorsing key messages of the campaign and calls to action. This brief is focused on highlights on the concerts which formed the core of the campaign.

The five *Ni sisi* music concerts were organized by Fenon Entertainment Ltd, a local entertainment firm, in the districts of Mbarara, Lira, Masaka, Mbale and Kampala. Entry was free. The idea was to try to balance between a commercial entertainment -only concert and conventional social-minded communication.

The concerts were widely advertised through television and radio spots and banners, and also had considerable media coverage given the popularity of the artists performing.

An unforeseen event affected the concerts: the second concert was shut down early by local police resulting in two of the organizers being held overnight. We believe the reason was a discomfort amongst the local police around the campaign messages that called on young people to act, though this was never stated formally. All charges were subsequently dropped, however the disruption had lead to reticence, particularly on the part of Fenon, to promote the calls to action from the campaign. The police also instructed organizers to promote 'softer' messages about how young people could act as agents of change resulting in the dilution of the original concept.

Another point to note is, aside from briefing the artists on the campaign and providing posters with the specific calls to action for distribution, Twaweza left artists to choose themselves how they would communicate the *Ni sisi* messages. This was to try to preserve authenticity, as we felt strongly that scripted messaging from artists would not come across as genuine and therefore not be as effective.

Given the jittery police response around messages associated with citizen action, and juggling the somewhat competing forces of unique artistic expression and clarity of actionable messages, what did young people really take away from these events? We polled a number of concert goers to find out.

Methodology

The aim of this exercise was to identify whether the core messages of the campaign were transmitted through the concerts. Specifically, the study measured recall of key messages young people were exposed to in the campaign leading up to, and also during the concerts. The data was collected through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) with concert-goers randomly sampled out of the database of registered concert-goers. An attempt was made to register as many concert goers as possible, with registration acting as a "ticket" for entry (so while some attendees refused or were missed for other reasons, majority were registered). The total number of registered attendees was 2353 for Kampala, 1468 for Mbarara, 921 for Masaka, 709 for Lira and 464 for Mbale, for a total of 5,915 attendees. For the feedback exercise, a quota of 50-55 respondents was interviewed from each of the 5 districts, giving a total of 256 respondents. No other quotas were imposed (e.g., gender or age), because no such data were captured at the time of registration at the concerts.

Main Findings

Figure 1 shows the four most popular sources of concert information in each of the five regions where the concerts took place. The use of radio for the promotion of the concerts was very effective, except in Kampala where most people had heard about the concert from a friend. In total, 46% (n=119) of all the concert-goers had heard about the concerts through the radio while a total of 36% (n=92) had heard about the concerts through a friend.
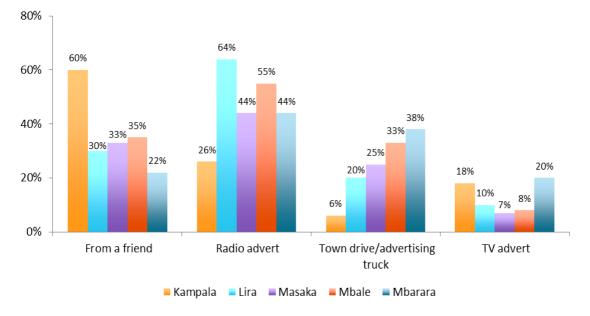
Figure 1: Main sources of information about the concert (n=256)

The purpose of the concerts was to deliver socially-minded messages that had been packaged in a creative and lively way. Its intent was to reach young people who might otherwise been turned off by this type of content. Figure 2 displays the percentage of attendants who had heard key messages about social change as promoted by the performing artists at the concerts (these were prompted, that is, the interviewer read out the message). We also added the category of "artist talking about her/his own music" as a comparison, since this is the topic most commonly raised by music artists during a performance.
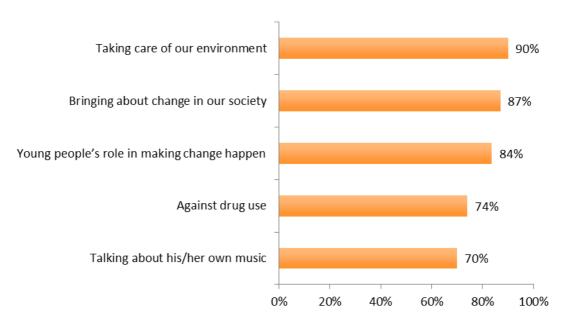
Figure 2: Messages heard by respondents during the concerts (n=256)

It is important to note that a majority of participants had indeed heard about the role of young people in bringing about change in society or about social change in general. Fewer respondents recalled artists talking about their own music, and messages about resisting drug use (this was one of the messages 'suggested' by local police). The findings suggest that the artists made a real effort to communicate the social messages.

At the concerts, the following were implemented
- Videos with artists promoting the calls to action and the general message of citizens being responsible for bringing change were shown,
- The slogan *Ni sisi* was repeated by artists,
- Posters were distributed (although less frequently after the police confiscated a number of them during the second concert) and
- The crew wore specially designed T-shirts.

Figure 3 provides an overview of how many respondents noticed these features.
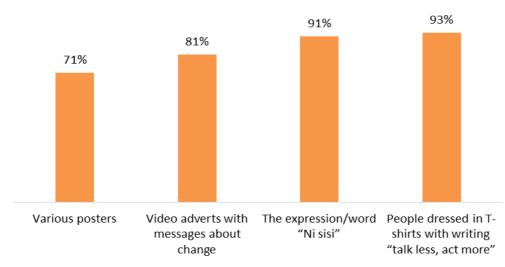
Figure 3: Respondents who saw or heard the following (n=256)

The recall was almost equal for all the districts, with the only significant outlier being Kampala where only 66% had seen the video adverts with messages about change, while 89% of the concertgoers in Masaka recalled having seen these videos (data not shown).

Among the participants 93% stated that they had learned something from the concerts, as shown in Figure 4. These were un-prompted responses (meaning that the question was asked openly, and the original answer was recoded; the answers were later coded into similar categories). The most frequent answer about what they learned was related to environmental issues, which also was the key message that participants recalled having heard during the concerts. Although environmental issues were not an explicit message of the campaign, we have continuously found that this is an often used example when communicating about citizen agency. Possibly, this is issue is usually phrased in non-controversial ways (such as "let's clean our neighborhoods") and therefore relatively easy to promote. Of the main topics from the campaign, the one most recalled was "working together to improve our community" which could be a catch-all phrase for both volunteering and speaking out; on the other hand, "listening to the news" was recalled by only a few.

Moreover, despite the high response among people who felt they had learned something from attending the concerts, only 9% of the participants could finish the main slogan "we talked yesterday…" that ended with the phrase "let's act today."
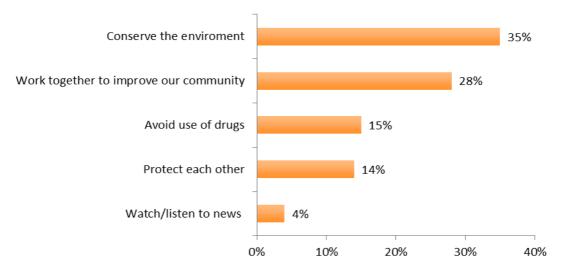
Figure 4: What people learned from attending the concerts (n=239)

Conclusion

In general, the concerts created a buzz and attracted high levels of participation. The participants definitely noticed that messages were being disseminated during these concerts. On the other hand, there was less recall of the core messages or phrases from the campaign than hoped. Earlier in 2014, Twaweza also conducted a baseline survey among young people, where we found that[1]:

- 93% of young Ugandans say that their favorite artist is an important role model for them, and 87% say that their favorite artist is a person like them.
- A large proportion of respondents (89%) say they like their favorite artist because of the issues that she or he brings up.
- An equally large proportion (91%) say that if their favorite artist encouraged citizens to organize to take care of problems in their communities, they would be more likely to join a group themselves.
- Three-quarters of respondents (75%) say that if their favorite artist encouraged citizens to vote in the next election, they would be more likely to do so themselves.

Combining insights from these two studies leaves us optimistic about working with artists as important influencers. In addition to this, they leave us hopeful that the NiSisi concert-goers went home with something more than just the memory of an enjoyable night of music. Moving forward, we hope to conduct qualitative research into what effects, if any, these kind of messages can have on young people's view of themselves as agents of change in society.

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[1] http://www.twaweza.org/go/monitoring-ug-young-people