

Art and creativity in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Empowerment Among Young People in Uganda

Project Background Information/Introduction:

The dramatic reduction of HIV/AIDS infections in the 1990s placed Uganda at the global helm of fighting the dread epidemic by far. Today, however, the epidemic landscape has greatly changed, and HIV infections are on the rise again especially among young people. This worrying increase, the general lack of research into levels of awareness and the inadequate efforts on how to tackle the epidemic and its related social problems- poverty, social stigma and discrimination etc., makes it a matter of urgency to address perhaps through strategic local context-specific creative interventions, particularly in marginalized settings of the informal sector- industrial areas occupied by artisans. I argue here that public health response alone is insufficient to address this devastating epidemic. Considering the level of its complexity, I seek to explore possibilities of utilizing art and creativity through applied sculpture to address HIV/AIDS and its related problems by placing greater emphasis on the creative process through collectively engaging and collaborating with young artisans (affected and infected) and focusing on the barriers to prevention, awareness and livelihoods. This research will be done mainly in collaboration with a local selected artisan community (engaged in wood and metal fabrication- carpentry, welding, Forging and so on) in the informal settings of Kampala - Bwaise, Katwe and Ndeeba. Specifically, I seek to explore possibilities of using applied sculpture through interactive participation with young artisans to generate and co-produce new knowledge and art forms that might help tackle HIV/AIDS and economically empower them. It is set to focus on:

- (1) Stimulating conversation and dialogue that can inspire and inform applied sculptural theory and practice to facilitate social change by drawing from stories and narratives emanating from everyday experiences of young artisans engulfed by tough economic precarity and HIV/AIDS.
- (2) Exploring social engagement and co-production through interaction and participant observation with young artisans in Kampala forefronting local conditions, local skills and knowledge, harnessing talents for the empowerment of marginalized artisan communities in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Research Aim/Objectives/Questions/Hypotheses:

This research focuses on engaging with young people working as artisans in the marginalized industrial settings of Kampala. It seeks to observe, share and learn from their lived experiences in order to inform and inspire applied sculptural practice that will:

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- (a) Raise awareness and lower stigma associated with HIV/AIDS among young artisans.
- (b) Equip them with the social, moral, and economic capacity to improve their lives, reducing economic dependency that makes them vulnerable to risky behaviors that perpetuate the spread of HIV/AIDS in marginalized industrial communities

The overarching aim of this research, therefore, is to engage applied sculpture to co-produce knowledge about experiences of HIV/AIDS and develop strategies for social economic empowerment among young artisans in the marginalized industrial settings of Kampala.

Specifically, it will:

- (a) Use participatory applied sculptural practice with young artisans to generate knowledge about their everyday experiences and how they relate to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.
- (b) Initiate collaborative partnerships between the researcher and artisans to co-produce functional forms and explore their potential in improving HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention and socio-economic empowerment in marginalized industrial settings.
- (c) Demonstrate the value of applied sculptural practices in generating information for policy makers and providers of health and services concerned with HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention among young people.

Research questions:

This research will seek to explore and answer the following questions:

- (a) How can engagement with, sharing and learning from everyday artisans' experiences and practices inform a better understanding of the challenges young people face in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic?
- (b) In what ways can collaborative partnerships between artists and artisans be created to enable the co-production of functional forms that are communicative about HIV/AIDS for social transformation and remain relevant to the economic empowerment of young artisans?
- (c) How might applied sculptural practices inform policymakers and providers of health information, and advance new approaches to improve HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and empowerment among young people in Uganda?

Data/Methods/Analysis:

This research will focus on three methodological explorations as follows;

- (a) Stimulating conversation and dialogue- emphasizing the art of thinking together and a living experience inquiry within and between young people to generating stories and narratives. I will attempt to utilize art in for of applied sculptural theory and practice to initiate conversations

that provide the opportunity of discussing the personal, cultural and socio-economic challenges of HIV/AIDS and how young artisans deal with issues such as stigma, denial, disclosure, discrimination, self-pity and low-esteem, work exploitation and reject in artisan communities in Kampala.

(b) Social engagement and co-production; This will involve collaboration and discussion through interactive participation with young artisans not only to generate new knowledge, skills and approaches to tackling HIV/AIDS but also the creation of tangible functional objects/forms such as gates, tables, chairs and so on creatively rendered with communicative symbolism that could facilitate HIV/AIDS awareness and empowerment of these young people in industrial communities in Kampala. The project seeks to demonstrate that the energies, creativity and enthusiasm of young people are a potential resource in all areas of HIV/AIDS awareness, care and prevention (UNICEF, 2002)

(c) Situating applied sculpture within an interdisciplinary discourse; applied sculpture as an art-based discipline is traditionally alienated from the mainstream social science and social research largely because it is categorically placed in the realms of fine art. As empirical researches have proved, art has a social value and a significant contribution in facilitating social change and in particular HIV/AIDS contexts (L.M Nabulime 2007). Using applied sculpture to tackle HIV/AIDS and its associated challenges in marginalized communities interweaves both social anthropology and social geography into an enriched social research context which is could be culturally appropriate (Reason and Bradley, 2006).

To realize the success of the above methodology, the following methods will be used in collecting the necessary data;

Following a pilot study that was carried out from July to August 2019, the researcher was able to touch base with the potential gate keepers and participants for the research. They include the partner organization in Uganda- NGEN+ (National Guidance and Empowerment Network for persons living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda), Young artisans in three selected research sites namely; Bwaise, Ndeeba and Katwe will provide a total of 30 participants (affected and infected) sought to constitute the action groups that will engage in the co-production session during the field study of the project. Currently, the methods employed to collect the data include;

(i) Face-to-face interviews

(ii) Participant observation

(iii) Photography and photo-voice (to capture action moments, production processes and discussions. (to be taken with participant's prior verbal consent)

(iv) Digital voice recording and videotaping (backed by prior oral consent)

(v) Co-production- (a) developing and harnessing the creative talents of young artisans through co-producing forms with the researcher, informed and inspired by everyday experiences, stories and narratives in the context of HIV/AIDS: (b) Identifying, articulating and sharing knowledge about the economic and social barriers that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS within the informal artisan communities.

Having embarked on collecting field data, the need to protect and disseminate study findings becomes be crucial to address;

(i) Data Protection

All data will be stored in password protected files in three locations; on my computer, hard drive and in an on-line storage environment (One-drive-Durham University's on-line drive)

Contributions to the SDGs:

Contributes to:

(a) SGD 1; through partnerships for co-production artisans will be empowered to earn more by way of improved skills and knowledge on how to deal with challenges related to HIV/AIDS thus strengthening the fight against poverty.

(b) SDG3; ensuring good health among young artisan communities as applied sculptural practice will help minimize stigma and discrimination, hence facilitating social change.

(c) SDG 8; Increasing the potential of young people to earn and work in decent positions in workshops with improved skills and applied knowledge; Minimizing work exploitation due to inadequate skills.

(d) SDG17; Promoting collaboration for empowerment and social change through partnerships between Applied artists and artisans meant for improved production to induce improved and sustainable livelihoods.

Lessons learnt and key takes/reflections:

Marginalized setting in Urban setting as those in Kampala are highly susceptible to increased spread of HIV/AIDS because most young people are highly illiterate and desperate, making them most- at –the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Being vulnerable due to casualized work, low and unreliable pay ignorance, declining levels of awareness and high levels of complacency has perpetuated the spread of the epidemic in industrial areas in many urban industrial settings.

It would be satisfying when such an art-based project demonstrates that the energies, creativity and enthusiasm of young people as a potential resource in all areas of HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and socio-economic empowerment with a significant impact across urban Uganda and the Sub-Saharan region at large

Project Information:

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