



Project Support Communications **Newsletter** • Information Division, UNICEF, New York, N.Y. 10017

## Can Puppets Be Effective Communicators?

*Primary Health Care and Community Development through Folk Media—  
An Experiment in the Colombo Slums*

**by Carol Aloysius, a Sri Lankan journalist and broadcaster who specializes in social development issues.**

The Vesak festival, a much looked forward to event by the largely Buddhist population of Sri Lanka, commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Lord Buddha. The festival, which falls on a full moon day in the month of May, draws large crowds of people to the capital city of Colombo. Overnight it is transformed into a fairyland of lights and decorations. Beautifully lit and imaginatively decorated pandals, depicting scenes from the life of Lord Buddha as well as from the Jataka tales which recount his previous births, rise majestically to the skies vying for attention with tastefully decorated lanterns which hang from every Buddhist home in the city.

Among the traditional and age-old rituals, that are enacted and re-enacted over and over again conveying the Vesak message of peace and goodwill, are the street plays and puppet shows. These popular Folk Shows not only entertain the large crowds who throng the streets to gaze at the decorations and to participate in the religious ceremonies performed in the temples, but act as an effective means of spiritual education.

This year a new kind of Puppet Show attracted the attention of Vesak sightseers. It was a departure from the usual Vesak puppet show for several reasons. For one thing it was not held in a conspicuously public place such as near a bus halt or market-place. Nor was it meant only to entertain and to offer spiritual education to the audience.

This particular puppet show was staged in a private 'Garden' hidden from the curious gaze of the public at large. The 'Garden'—in reality an untidy dirty stretch of land teeming with the city's poorest of the poor—lay close to the banks of a stinking canal where shanty dwellers had set up 'home'.

The 500 families occupying this single large slum garden at Vihara Lane has filled it to capacity on this Vesak day, having invited their neighbours as well from the adjoining slum gardens to witness this puppet show with a difference.

It was late evening when the play began. At a quarter to seven a loud speaker announced that the 'Show' was about to start. The stage, a tiny makeshift affair erected out in the open

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# Mixed Bag

Reprinted from UNICEF Intercom, Issue 16, October 1983.

From David Haxton,  
UNICEF-New Delhi

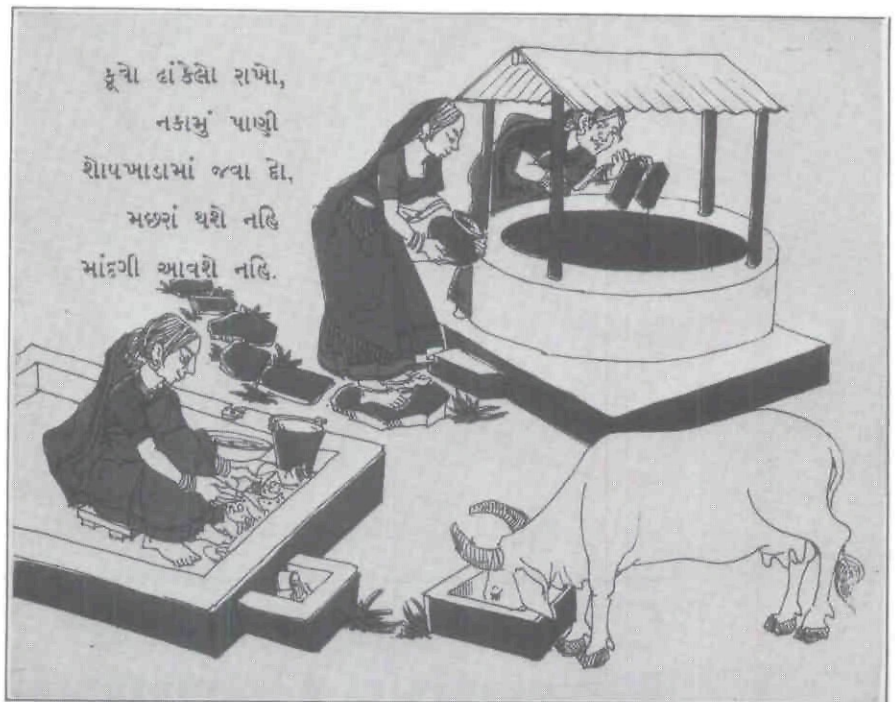
It comes in a small red cotton bag with a drawstring, easy to carry and easy to pack. "It" is a set of simple but imaginative teaching-learning materials on the management of diarrhoeal diseases and the improvement of environmental sanitation.

The kit has been produced by UNICEF-New Delhi for a non-formal education project for women and girls. Currently it is available only in the Gujarati language since extensive field-testing of the kit is being carried out in Gujarat State. Kits in other Indian languages are planned for next year.

The objective of the package is to introduce child-care messages into the Indian national adult literacy programme that presently covers about 25 million people.

The kit includes assorted flash cards, magnet boards, colour slides, and photo cards. A teacher's handbook, created out of the teaching experiences at Safai Vidyalaya (Sanitation Institute at Gandhi Ashram), helps the teacher to make the best use of the materials to generate discussion and locally-made teaching aids. Comparison cards show clean and dirty environments and are good starting points for discussions of various environmental sanitation issues.

One photo card shows the steps in the construction of a simple cardboard model of a latrine. The cut-out cardboard latrine pieces are attached. Another photo card dem-



Two flash cards from the New Delhi teaching kit show sanitary (top) and unsanitary conditions in an Indian village. (Language is Gujarati.)

onstrates the construction of a basic low-cost cardboard slide viewer. Cut-out cardboard sections for this modest device are included.

The "mixed bag" from New Delhi is an impressive example of how to combine the teaching of literacy with the wide dissemination of basic child health messages.

UNICEF-New Delhi plans to produce similar kits on immunization, pre- and post-natal care and birth delivery, goitre control, and infant feeding practices.

## Nutrition Surveillance Kit

This kit, printed with financial support from UNICEF-Lusaka, is a teaching guide for those involved in monitoring children's growth in clinics and rural health centers in Zambia. It is also aimed at the administrators who will use the information collected by the field workers in making plans, policies and decisions in their attempt to improve the nutrition status of their people. The kit contains information on the Weight-for-Age and Mid-Upper Arm Circumference indicators. Weight-for-Age is the method used on the Children's Clinic Card. Details on how to measure weight and plot the growth curves are included. It also contains information on the interpretation of the weight curve. The Mid-Upper Arm Circumference measurement is a useful way of finding out which children are malnourished at the community level, when those concerned do not have scales and clinic cards to record children's weights on a continuous basis.

For further information on the kit contact the National Food and Nutrition Commission, P.O. Box 32669, Lusaka, Zambia, or Mr. Billy Nkunika, PSC Officer, UNICEF, P.O. Box 33610, Lusaka, Zambia.



**MERRY CHRISTMAS**

from  
**PSC Service  
New York**

### Pocket calendar to promote breastfeeding

UNICEF-Addis Ababa has produced, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Nutrition Institute, a pocket calendar with a picture and message on breastfeeding: "Breast milk is the best for the baby; nothing can be compared with it." The original message is in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia. The calendar is on the back of the picture.



## Can Puppets Be Effective Communicators?

(continued from page 1)

in the middle of the garden, was lit up by a single fluorescent bulb with the light from the full moon shining brightly down further illuminating it. All of a sudden there was a slight commotion. Word has passed around that an unexpected visitor had arrived to watch the two plays that were being staged.

As Sri Lanka's Prime Minister, an ardent lover of drama and patron of the Arts, was ushered into the garden by the community leaders, a loud cheer of welcome greeted him. Smiling genially at the delighted audience, he took his seat in the front row. Just then a number of little children from nearby gardens who had crept inside to watch the play were seen being chased away by some adults. Requesting them to be allowed to remain in the garden and not be deprived of this treat, the Prime Minister bade them be seated near him. Then, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, surrounded by over 200 grateful youngsters, he waited with the same air of expectancy as the rest of the audience for the play to begin.

Sharp to time the screen was drawn aside and a *Kavi Kola Karaya*, the traditional narrator of a folk play, entered the stage. Having chanted in singsong voice the gist of the play that was about to be staged, he made his exit. Now it was time for the play proper to start.

As the puppets dressed colourfully and appropriately to represent the characters of the play were introduced, the audience cheered heartily. Then, a hushed silence fell on the audience as the puppets began to 'speak' their parts.

Listening with close attention to the dialogue that had been taped, the

audience reacted spontaneously. When an actor said something that pleased them, they cheered loudly to indicate their approval. At times they were heard arguing amongst themselves over a certain remark made by another actor. And they listened attentively when a discussion arose on some important issues particularly relevant to them, such as morals, religious practice, education, environmental sanitation, and, most of all, Health Care.

Now it was time for the second play to be staged. This too received the same enthusiastic and spontaneous response as the first play.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister who had watched with close attention seemed deeply moved by what he had seen. Having waited until the end of the play, he commended the organisers of the two plays on both the excellent scripts and the imaginative presentation and expressed his wish to see more such plays being performed in other slum gardens in the city.

What sort of plays were these that could generate so much interest in the highest and the lowliest in the land? Why had they been performed

in a slum garden of all places? What had led to this miracle of a blossoming forth of hidden talent in one of the most neglected slum gardens in the city?

Explains the man who helped to perform this miracle, Simon Nawagattegama, a playwright and novelist with 20 years experience, "It is a new experiment that is being tried out to spread the message of Primary Health Care (PHC) to a population that knows very little about health and sanitation."

This novel Programme Support Communications approach, using traditional art forms to convey health messages to the target population, is aimed at supporting an on-going slum upgrading project—the Environmental Health and Community Development Project launched three years ago between the government of Sri Lanka and UNICEF. This is the first time that such a communication project has been formulated to be carried out systematically and comprehensively in Sri Lanka.

A ten-member Committee has now been set up of representatives of government departments such as Colombo Municipal Council, Common Amenities Board, and the Urban Development Authority, to monitor the project which will officially be inaugurated under the name *Jana Udava* (Awakening of the People).

Can drama be considered an effective medium of raising the overall quality of life of a people living well below the poverty line? Can an inanimate object such as a puppet be cast into the role of a communicator of health messages?

Simon, who is the UNICEF Consultant in this novel experiment, gives a positive reply to these questions. "Drama helps to put across any kind of message, especially to an uneducated audience, in a far more tangible and meaningful way than any discussion or film show can." But why Folk Drama? Why not a more modern form of drama? "Because,"





he explains, "this kind of drama belongs to the kind of people our messages are directed to and can be understood and appreciated by them. As for using puppets for this purpose it was just an experiment carried out to coincide with the traditional puppet shows staged at Vesak. The fact that it was a huge success proves that Puppets can be effective Communicators!"

The two puppet shows staged on Vesak day this year were based on the Jataka tales revolving around the life of Lord Buddha. The unique quality about them was that this was the first time that these religious stories were re-written in a modern context to give an insight into the living conditions and innumerable problems of the shanty population in Sri Lanka.

*Patachara*, the first play, was based on the popular religious tale of an unfortunate woman who falls from society and is finally saved by the Lord Buddha. In the re-interpretation of this story, a rich girl falls in love with her chauffeur and ends up in a slum similar to the shanty garden in which the play was staged. She endures trials similar to those of the slum folk in that garden. The script poignantly describes the extreme poverty and hardships she endures, and the deaths of several of her children through numerous dis-

eases which frequently occur in the shanties due to ignorance and poor sanitation. Finally she turns to prostitution to earn a living. Contracting a venereal disease she nearly ends her life but is saved by a Buddhist nun who helps her to enter the order and find peace of mind.

Throughout the play attention is focussed on the common problems of the Garden population—their dire poverty, malnutrition, the unsanitary living conditions, their lack of education, ignorance of basic health care, and the almost total lack of opportunities to better themselves. It also draws attention to the constant exploitation of these unfortunate people by the society around them.

*Kisa Gothami*, the second play, revolves around the story of a mother who is unable to reconcile herself to the death of her child until she is finally shown the truth by the Lord Buddha, when he sends her out to find a house in her village where no young child has died. She returns with the sad knowledge that every mother in her village had endured the same tragedy.

In the re-interpreted version of this popular Vesak play, the authors sought to highlight the prevalence of child mortality and morbidity among the slum population.

No wonder these plays had touched the heart of the Prime

Minister as well as the UNICEF officials who also watched them. The fact that the plays had been re-written by members of the target audience, who had also been responsible for the entire production, was considered most encouraging since this voluntary gesture of the garden population indicated that an awareness had been created.

Even before the plays were staged, the UNICEF Consultant recalls, the people in this shanty garden had opened their hearts to him, and would discuss their most personal problems. A woman with a family of five told him how she was a heart patient which prevented her from undergoing sterilisation, while her husband, an epileptic, was also unable to undergo sterilisation. The result was that she and her husband were forced to live as strangers with no physical relationship between them for fear that she would conceive again, adding only to the large number of mouths they had to feed.

The plays had taken only three weeks of intensive preparation. Within that brief period, the UNICEF consultant was able to gather together the most talented youth of the garden and its immediate neighbours, guide them in writing the scripts, let them introduce their own ideas and problems into the plays, and then show them how to assemble the puppets and manipulate them.

This team of 'dramatists in the making' not only prepared excellent scripts complete with the taped voices of about 25 persons in the garden who voiced the different characters in the plays, they also assembled the stage and the sets. Inspired by their newly acquired self confidence, this enterprising team went to the extent of sending out handwritten invitations and selling handwritten copies of the narrator's synopsis of the plays to the audience for 50 cents each. The sale raised a

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# TECHNICAL NOTE SERIES

*produced by the Center for International Education*

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1. **THE ECUADOR PROJECT:** discusses the basic goals, philosophy and methodology of a rural nonformal education project.
  2. **CONSCIENTIZACAO AND SIMULATION GAMES:** discusses Paulo Freire's educational philosophy and the use of simulation games for consciousness-raising.
  3. **HACIENDA:** describes a board game simulating economic and social realities of the Ecuadorian Sierra.
  4. **MERCADO:** describes a card game which provides practice in basic market mathematics.
  5. **ASHTON-WARNER LITERACY METHOD:** describes a modified version of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's approach to literacy training used in Ecuadorian villages.
  6. **LETTER DICE:** describes simple, participatory letter fluency games which involve illiterates in a non-threatening approach to literacy.
  7. **BINGO:** describes Bingo-like fluency games for words and numerical operations.
  8. **MATH FLUENCY GAMES:** describes a variety of simple games which provide practice in basic arithmetic operations.
  9. **LETTER FLUENCY GAMES:** describes a variety of simple games which provide practice in basic literacy skills.
  10. **TABACUNDO: Battery-Powered Dialogue:** describes uses of a tape recorder for feedback and programming in a rural radio school programme.
  11. **THE FACILITATOR MODEL:** describes the facilitator concept for community development in rural Ecuador.
  12. **PUPPETS AND THE THEATER:** describes the use of theater, puppets and music as instruments of literacy and consciousness-raising in a rural community.
  13. **FOTONOVELA:** describes development and use of photoliterature as an instrument for literacy and consciousness-raising.
  14. **THE EDUCATION GAME:** describes a board game that simulates inequities of many educational systems.
  15. **THE FUN BUS:** describes an NFE project in Massachusetts that used music, puppetry and drama to involve local people in workshops on town issues.
  16. **FIELD TRAINING THROUGH CASE STUDIES:** describes the production of actual village case studies as a training method for community development workers in Indonesia.
  17. **PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN NONFORMAL EDUCATION:** describes use of simple processing techniques for information-sharing, formative evaluation and staff communication.
  18. **BINTANG ANDA: A Game Process for Community Development:** describes an integrated community development approach based on the use of simulation games.
  19. **USING CONSULTANTS FOR MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT:** describes an approach to selecting and utilizing short-term consultants for materials development.
  20. **DESIGNING AND USING SIMULATIONS FOR TRAINING:** outlines steps involved in designing and conducting simulations. Presents two simulations in detail.
  21. **Q-SORT AS A NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE:** describes how a research technique can be adapted for needs assessment in nonformal education.
  22. **THE LEARNING FUND: Income Generation Through NFE:** describes a programme which combines educational and income generation activities through learning groups.
  23. **GAME OF CHILDHOOD DISEASES:** describes a board game which addresses health problems of young children in the Third World.
  24. **ROAD-TO-BIRTH GAME:** describes a board game which addresses health concerns of Third World women during the prenatal period.
  25. **DISCUSSION STARTERS:** describes how dialogue and discussion can be facilitated in community groups by using simple audio-visual materials.
- Price: 1-15 \$1.00 each  
16-25 \$1.50 each

For information on ordering procedures, please write to the Center for International Education, Hills House South, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003, USA.

# Pamphlet on Flies

by Leo Fonseka, UNICEF-Colombo

This is a Health Education pamphlet produced by the Colombo Municipal Council of Sri Lanka.

The pre-testing of the pamphlet debunked some of the middle class attitudes of the designers. The following were some of the interesting comments:

- a) "The big chunk of meat on the plate on the pamphlet cover makes us feel that we are privileged to read this pamphlet because we thought the pamphlet was meant for those who could afford such expensive meals!"

The result was that we made the plate look like a poor man's diet.






- b) "Your language is erudite. Some of us don't understand it!"

The result was that the language was made bluntly literal.

- c) "The picture on the third page shows a bin with a lid. How nice if we could have a beautiful garbage bin like that. But the fact is, it is with difficulty that we obtain a discarded bin or tin. If we are to use a bin to collect garbage, we have to beg for one from the boutique-keeper. Therefore, don't be so presumptuous about us. Be happy if we collect garbage. Don't expect us to use a bin with a cover like what you have in your bungalows!"

The result was that the lid was omitted from the picture, while the text says that they should close it.

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 <p><b>LIVING WITH FLIES, YOU'LL CONTACT A LOT OF ILLNESSES</b></p>	<p><b>On Your food the fly excretes, vomits, devours what it vomits, spits.</b></p> <p><b>It will spread on your food the muck and germs that it carries in its legs.</b></p> <p><b>It will communicate to you Typhoid, Cholera, Dysentery, Polio, and Hepatitis.</b></p> <p><b>It is a dangerous creature. To avoid it, you should totally prevent its breeding.</b></p>
<p><b>The fly breeds when: you and your environment are dirty and unclean; animal carcasses, excreta, urine, muck, and other garbage are in your house or in the compound.</b></p> <p><b>You can get rid of this danger. Keep your house, compound and yourself clean. Bury your garbage. Space permitting, burn it, or keep it in a covered bin overnight and drop it in the roadside garbage bin for collection and thus co-operate with the municipal scavenging services.</b></p> 	 <p><b>The fly is attracted by stink. Therefore, always keep your drains, kitchen, latrines, bath, and area around the standpipes clean.</b></p>  <p><b>Train your child to use the latrine instead of soiling the drains or the compound.</b></p>  <p><b>Always cover your food with a clean lid. Otherwise, you may eat food full of germs and muck carried to it by the fly.</b></p> <p><small>Issued by the Colombo Municipal Health Education Unit, with UNICEF assistance.</small></p>

## Can Puppets Be Effective Communicators? (continued)

handsome 700 rupees (about US\$32) some of which was used for assembling the sets, lighting, etc. They were able to save 400 rupees. From these funds they hope to reorganise the Community Development Council and moot an Art circle in the garden. This Art circle, implemented through the Community Development Council structure with the help of the Health Wardens, will be one of many which are planned. Together these pilot Art circles, once mooted in the gardens, will revive as many traditional art forms in the

country as possible, among which are puppetry, poetic drama, dance drama with North Indian influence, folk theatre, ballad, and folk songs. There will be variety entertainment shows organised by the garden community using the talents of the community only. "I hope," says the UNICEF consultant, "these shows will serve not only to entertain the people, but educate the garden community at large on important issues such as health, child care, safety of public property, and arouse their civic consciousness!" "We also

want to promote self-help, collective action, unity among the people, and help them to help themselves," a UNICEF spokesman says. Ultimately, it is expected that there will be around 200 such circles expanded later on a District basis.

Despite initial problems and obstacles, this communication project is already being successfully operated in some of the gardens. Gauging by the ready acceptance of this particular approach to health education, it is clear that this innovation is indeed a step in the right direction.

## Pamphlet on Flies (continued from page 7)

Whether we liked it or not we had to accommodate these responses. Otherwise the pamphlet would have become a middle class designer's dream, seeking an ideal sanitation effort to combat the fly menace. Even the decision to print it on a thick Manila board was taken by the people. They said, "If you give us a durable pamphlet, perhaps after reading it, it may go into the hands of another; but, if you print it on a flimsy newspaper, our people would read it and use it to wrap something. So, why don't you spend a little more so that it could pass from hand to hand?" We heeded that advice. Thus, we present to the people a pamphlet designed to suit their taste and needs.

## Slide-Sound Presentations

UNICEF-Beirut has recently completed an adapted Arabic version of the "Breaking the Cycle of Diarrhoea and Malnutrition—ORT" slide set. It is also in the process of producing an adapted Arabic version of the "Why Breastfeed?" slide set. For more information, write to Ms. Suha Bisat Majdalani, Acting Regional Information Officer, UNICEF, P.O. Box 5902, Beirut, Lebanon.

UNICEF-Mexico City has recently completed an adapted Spanish version of the ORT slide set. For more information, write to Ms. Pia Hallonsten, Assistant Information Officer, UNICEF, Ave. Presidente Masaryk, No. 29, 8<sup>o</sup> Piso, Mexico 5, D.F. Mexico.

## Breastfeeding Guide

Health workers, whether they be nurses, dietitians, medical assistants, doctors, or village health workers, all help mothers in their decision to breastfeed. While breastfeeding is the natural way to feed babies, there can be difficulties due to mothers' employment, health, attitudes, and cultural beliefs. This booklet, published by the Ministry for Health and Social Welfare, and the National Food and Nutrition Committee of Fiji in cooperation with UNICEF, provides information which will better prepare the health workers to help mothers breastfeed successfully. For more information, write to the Representative, UNICEF, P.O. Box 7429 ADC, Pasay City, Philippines.

### Feeding Babies With Love



a breastfeeding guide  
for healthworkers  
in Fiji





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Notes

**Lead article: Can puppets be effective communicators? An experiment in the Colombo slums, by Carol Aloysius, Sr Lankan journalist;**

**Other contents: Mixed bag, from David Haxton, UNICEF, New Delhi (set of teaching materials, flash cards, aimed at women and girls, on environmental sanitation and oral rehydration); Nutrition surveillance kit; Pocket calendar to promote breastfeeding; Technical Note Series, produced by the Center for International Education (various games intended for village level education); Pamphlet on flies, by Leo Fonseka, UNICEF, Colombo; Slide show presentations; Breastfeeding guide.**

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