

Using media to promote children's rights

The issue of children rights has been attracting a global attention recently. This encouraged many organizations to work on promoting children rights in different countries. Unfortunately, the mechanisms used to promote these rights are not quite effective and participatory, which urges us to use new ones. This article suggests using media as an effective mechanism not only to entertain children but also to promote their rights and encourage them to make a difference in their lives.

Media can be a very effective tool in promoting children rights. This is because media has a lot of types which can be used to convince different levels of people and raise their awareness regarding a certain idea. For example, we have TV with all its series and talk shows that can cover many issues and reach a wide range and a variety of people. TV series and shows has discussed many problems before such as drugs addiction and domestic problems, and proved to be more effective and convincing for people than the orientation sessions or the ordinary way of delivering a message or an advice. Usually people feel bored when you give them a piece of advice or information in a direct way but they get attracted to it and convinced by it when it is delivered to them through a TV show or a TV series. There are also the edutainment programs which have proved its effectiveness in educating children through entertainment. "Sesame Street" is a very successful and strong example of the edutainment programs. The success of "Sesame Street" has encouraged many countries to produce their own version of this TV show, for example there is "Alam Semsem" (Sesame World) which is the Egyptian version and "Eftah ya Semsem" (Open your doors Sesame) which is another version produced by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This example encourages us to use edutainment programs in promoting children rights. Also news papers are very effective if you want to give a certain issue a great importance and turn it into a public issue.

Moreover, there are other types of media that could give a similar effect in promoting children rights such as plays, conferences and documentary movies.

Using media to promote children rights can also be very powerful in the mean time since the whole world has turned into a small village because of the modern technology with all its satellites, satellites channels, internet, computers and mobile phones. So using media can give us the chance to present the problems children are facing within their communities and advocate for their rights not only on the national level but also on the international level. BY this way we will deliver a development education message to the other countries in the whole world regarding the problems children are facing and the violation their rights are subjected to. Also we will receive support from various international NGOs working in the field of human rights and the UN itself which can give us power to change the situations and policies affecting children rights.

In order to promote children rights through media in an effective and successful way many parties must combine their efforts to achieve this target. Those parties can be the government, international NGOs, the private sector and the communities. Each one of these parties has a very important role to play that completes the whole circle. They can provide technical support, qualified human resources and funds through their various sectors. For example, the government can provide technical support through it s

National councils such as the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) and can provide professional volunteers through its universities such as students from the Mass Media department. The government can also support the media activities done to promote children rights by airing them through its national TV and Radio channels and by mentioning them in its national newspapers. Also the private sector can support this concept by funding activities related to it and by providing production companies that will help in producing certain media activities. As for NGOs they will be responsible for turning this concept from its abstract form into a concrete one by establishing projects that combines several media activities that promotes children rights. The local development associations will share this responsibilities with the NGOs at the grassroots levels.

As important is the roles of the prementioned parties we have to state that without the participation of the children the whole process will be missing its vital component because no one can talk about a certain idea or a problem or convey a message better than its owner. So children has to be at the heart of the whole process of turning this concept into reality. They have to be involved through the whole process stages starting from planning upto evaluation. We have to take their opinions into consideration and to share with them the responsibility of implementing the various activities. Children can be so astonishing and can provide amazing idea if are given the chance.

Yet we have to build the capacities of these children and enhance their skills to enable them to participate effectively. This can be done by training them on the needed skills such as media skills, leadership skills, train the trainers, interviewing, photographing and story writing skills. They can also attend seminars to orient them on their rights and their obligation towards themselves and other children within their communities. Moreover, children can benefit from the experience of their peers who have previously participated in activities related to promoting children rights through media.

Some organizations have adopted the idea of using media within their work strategies and proved to be very successful. For example, there is the "Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communications"¹ which has used media as the base for its two projects "Soul City" and "Soul Buddyz". Soul City project was directed to adults whereas Soul Buddyz was directed to children. In both projects the organization used different types of media to deliever its message to as many people as possible. This was done by producing TV and Radio drama series, publishing information in the ,ajor newspapers, conducting publis relations and advertising campaigns and other media related activities.

As a result the Soul City project was reachable by 79% of the South African population and Soul Buddyz was reachable by 68% of children. (as mentioned on the organisation's website www.soulcity.org.za on February,13th 2008).

The two projects have acheived a great success as many independent studies stated that Soul City organisation has become known more than the Coca Cola brand. Moreover, numerous evaluations proved the effectiveness of the two projects regarding social change. For example, young men used to

¹ The Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication is a social change project which aims to impact on society at the individual, community and socio-political levels.

change their girl friends just to surprise each other without giving much care to AIDS. After watching Soul City they realized that AIDS issues are true and decided to stick to one girl friend. Another example was the change that took place in the women's life after watching Soul City. They knew more about their rights and became more independent and capable of controlling their own lives.

Soul Buddyz was also able to raise the children's awareness regarding the issues related to AIDS and sexual harassment but in a child friendly way.

Plan International is another organisation that stepped into the field of using media as a mechanism to achieve its goals. One of its branches which is Plan Egypt has established a child media project. This project aims at raising awareness of children's rights and changing attitudes and behaviours towards children through the Egyptian media. This is being achieved through the creation and broadcasting of a national TV show called "Isamouna" (Hear us out) which is linked at the community level to youth media clubs that is led by trained youth leaders (chosen from the community itself). Those youth leaders, with the guidance of adults, were given the responsibility of deciding the main themes of the TV show and developing the content and format of its episodes.

Five episodes have been aired on the national TV till now and their impact have started to appear already. For example, one of the fathers refused to let his daughter participate in the project because he thought it was a loss of time. After watching the TV show he realized the important role children could play and became aware of children's rights. He regretted not allowing his daughter to participate in the project and started to encourage her to participate in other activities related to the project.

All the previous examples show us how effective media can be in achieving a certain goal. It also shows that children media should not be related purely to entertainment like in "Tom and Jerry" and "Mickey mouse" but is also related to learning and education as in "Sesame Street" and "Ismaouna".

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