

# SINGING AND DANCING



Singing and dancing has always played an essential part in entertainment, rituals and celebrations of cultures throughout the world. Even today the rich cultural traditions of song and dance remain strong in most rural communities. The words of traditional songs often convey strong messages of folklore, religion or morality, and children learn these songs and dances from an early age.

## Advantages of Singing and Dancing

The familiarity and enjoyment associated with singing and dancing means it can be used as an effective communication method which community members will easily respond to, and are likely to remember if well know rhythms and music are used.

- Any kind of words can be incorporated into existing music.
- It is inexpensive.
- It can be understood and enjoyed by all people in the community regardless of educational or social status.
- The local language can be used.



*Women in Kenya using song and dance to promote energy efficient stoves*

## How to use Singing and Dancing

Often community members will be happy to become involved in devising and performing songs and dances based upon a development issue that concerns them. This can be a very informal way of working. Alternatively development workers can establish links with existing entertainment artists to produce more sophisticated performances, or to incorporate development messages into the artist's existing schedule.

- Ensure performers clearly understand the message being put across.
- Allow time to rehearse before the actual performance.
- Consider using rhythms of popular local songs and stories to disseminate messages. Sometimes messages incorporated into religious songs and stories can be effective.
- Use local language and local slang and humour.
- Publicise the activity in advance through posters or announcements.
- Make it engaging and lively by involving the audience and allow them to express their views on the issue.
- Consider distributing information materials after a performance or recording or videoing the performance.

## Constraints of Singing and Dancing

- It reaches only the immediate local audience.

## Real Life Story

### Hariyali Bhajan: Singing Their Way to Conservation

At first impression they look like middle class Nepali farmers. But Akal Bahadur Basnet and his 15 friends are something more. They sing traditional *bhajans* (Hindu hymns) at religious occasions in and around their homes in Nilkantha Village of Dhading district. Such *bhajan mandalis* (groups) are common enough in Nepal but what is unique about these men, the oldest of whom is 70 and most of them are in their 40s and 50s, is that for the past two years they have been spreading the message of environmental conservation through *bhajans*.

"The words might be different but the spirit and the melody are the same. The *Hariyali Bhajan* or Green Hymns as they are popularly known, will keep the bhajan tradition alive and might rekindle popular interest in the traditional *bhajan* itself," says 66 year old Basnet, who has been singing since he was 20.

The *mandal* (team) goes to any religious function they are invited to sing at and they make sure that a couple of the songs are *Green Hymns*. These days the



Nepal Forum for Environmental Journalists (NFEJ)

*mandal* is invited to non-religious functions also. They sing with traditional musical instruments and the songs are accompanied by dancing. The *mandal* has visited more than half of the villages of Dhading district and some neighbouring districts, including Kathmandu. They have also been featured on radio and television.

"If villagers are invited to listen to somebody talking about environmental conservation, they are sceptical and think that the speaker has some vested interest in the whole affair. But when they are invited to a song and dance programme, they readily come," says Basnet. "The words of the *hariyali bhajan* appeal to the young people and the old people alike."

*Real Life story by kind permission of Naresh Newar, Face to Face, Magazine for Development, July-August 1997*

## Further reading

*Storytelling* Practical Action Technical Brief  
*Community/Street Drama* Practical Action Technical Brief  
*Puppetry* Practical Action Technical Brief  
*Public Gatherings* Practical Action Technical Brief  
*Demonstrations and Training* Practical Action Technical Brief

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# technical brief