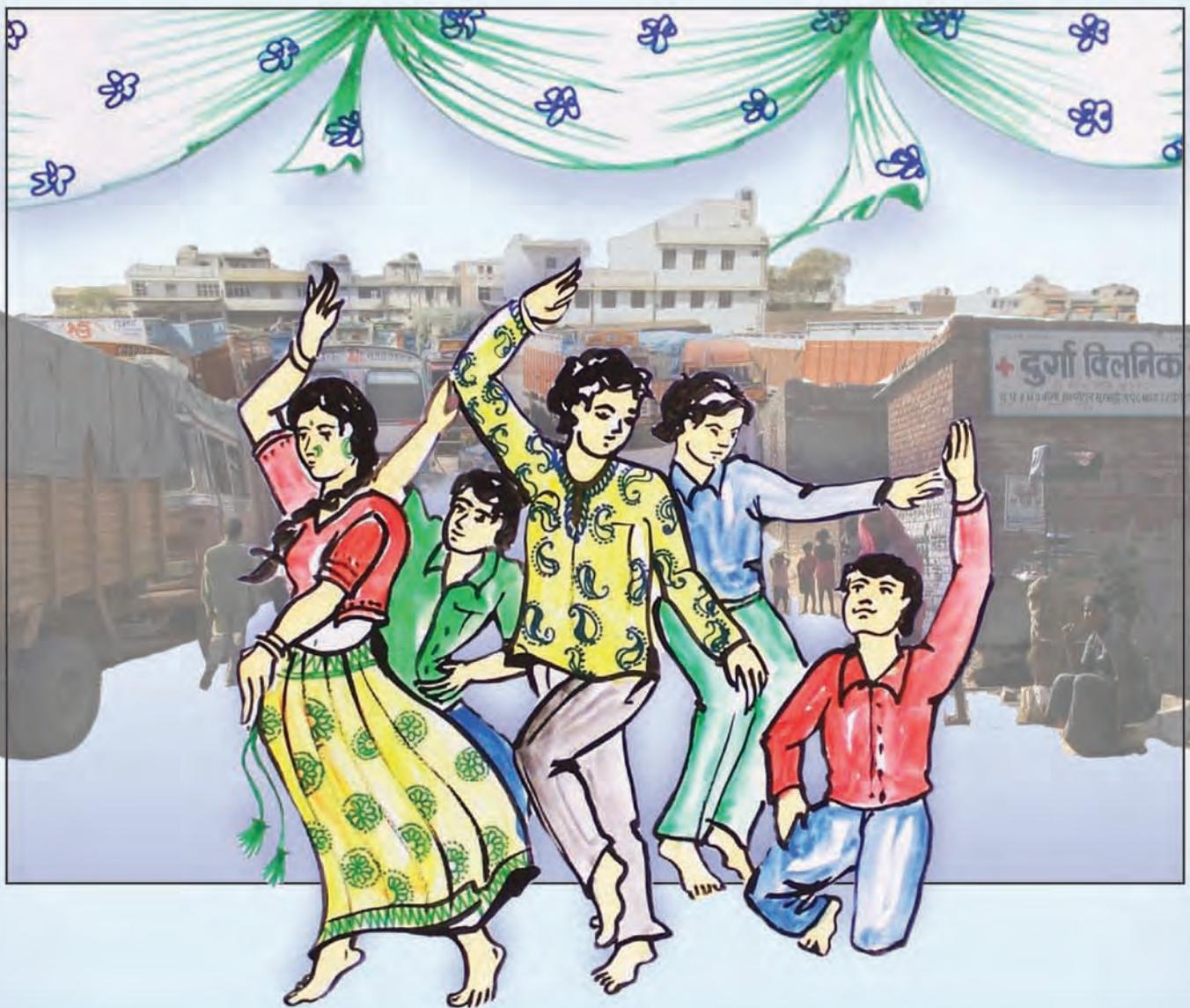


Magnet Theatre in India

A guide to using theatre to reduce HIV risk and promote an enabling environment for HIV prevention, care, and treatment



PATH is an international, nonprofit organisation that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, we help provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act.
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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
FSW	Female Sex Worker
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IDU	intravenous drug user
IEC	information, education, and communication
MSM	males who have sex with males
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
STI	sexually transmitted infection



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Introduction

What do we mean by “key populations”?

“Key populations” are groups of people most directly and acutely affected by HIV. Within the Indian context, they can include sex workers, males who have sex with males (MSM), intravenous drug users (IDUs), and people living with HIV.

Key populations are considered key to the dynamics of the epidemic, as they are (1) most likely to be infected and affected by HIV and/or (2) most likely to transmit the virus. Key populations are also key to the response to HIV, since evidence from around the world shows that if key populations are involved in designing and implementing interventions to prevent and contain HIV, the results are more likely to be effective and sustainable.

Aim of this toolkit

This toolkit aims to help key population communities use Magnet Theatre to reduce their risk of HIV and promote an enabling environment for HIV prevention, care, and treatment.

Who this toolkit is for

This toolkit was developed by PATH for key population troupes trained in Magnet Theatre, to use as a reference for their rehearsals and performances. It is also intended for organisations that provide technical and financial support to Magnet Theatre troupes.



Toolkit contents

Section A: Magnet Theatre

Describes what Magnet Theatre is, as well as the principles and structure of Magnet Theatre.

Section B: A Magnet Theatre Case Study

Shows how Magnet Theatre was put into practice in a project in Karnataka.

Section C: Components of Magnet Theatre

This is the longest section; it summarises how to select and train troupes and select a site for Magnet Theatre, and how to act and facilitate performance and post-performance activities. A detailed curriculum for training Magnet Theatre troupes is not included here, but is available from PATH.

Section D: Managing a Magnet Theatre Session

This section shows what is involved in making sure a Magnet Theatre session runs smoothly.

Section E: Maintaining the Quality of Magnet Theatre

Gives a useful checklist to ensure the quality of the session.

Section F: Suggested Dilemmas to be Addressed in Magnet Theatre

Useful information for preparing a script.

A film about Magnet Theatre is included with this toolkit to help bring the process to life and for use in training and orientation.

Section A: Magnet Theatre

What is Magnet Theatre?

Magnet Theatre can be described as “a show that pulls”. It is an effective method of initiating and maintaining interactive communication with, and within, a community. Magnet Theatre is a form of community theatre that is tailored to enhance community interaction and participation by being audience-centred and attractive. Magnet Theatre is designed to help people discuss why risky practices occur and explore appropriate ways to reduce the risk of HIV infection, to address stigma and access to care, and to provide support and treatment.

Magnet Theatre principles

- 1 Magnet Theatre is participatory and interactive.** It does not speak to the audience and is not didactic. Magnet Theatre speaks with the audience and also provides its members with a forum to speak amongst themselves. Unlike conventional stage theatre or other forms of street theatre, Magnet Theatre is audience-centred, and invites the audience to actively participate. Through this involvement, audiences are empowered to create and re-create scenarios and solve the dilemmas presented. The actors and audience members interact by exchanging ideas and opinions—individually and in groups.
- 2 Magnet Theatre is audience-specific** and aims to ensure a **repeat audience**. It targets a particular audience and uses that audience’s popular approaches to attract them to the theatre site. A repeat audience allows troupe members to develop a relationship with the audience and to support them as they go through the process of adopting lower-risk practices.
- 3 Magnet Theatre is venue-specific** and follows a **regular schedule**. The fixed venue and schedule encourage participants to attend sessions regularly.
- 4 Magnet Theatre is a forum for magnifying positive changes in attitudes and practices.** The facilitation identifies those who have successfully adopted new, positive ways to reduce their risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and helps them share their experiences with the audience. Hearing about the success of a peer can encourage others to similarly adopt safer practices.

The structure of a Magnet Theatre session

A typical Magnet Theatre session follows the structure outlined below:

Gathering the audience: Audience-mobilisation activities (singing, dancing, drumming) by the theatre troupe attract the key population to the site. The entire troupe is involved in this activity, and the key population is welcome to join in.

Preparing the audience to participate actively during the session: Ice-breaking activities help the actors and the audience feel comfortable and ease the atmosphere for participation. They help people overcome their inhibitions. Ice-breaking marks the beginning of audience and troupe interaction.

Introduction: Here, the facilitator introduces the session’s theme, the dramatic presentation, the actors, and their characters. This is also a good time to present a summary of issues raised in the previous Magnet Theatre performance, which connects the earlier session to the current one.

Dilemma presentation and discussion: The troupe acts out the open-ended, problem-posing drama, and after the facilitator calls for a freeze, the audience is free to discuss the issue. This is a major activity of the Magnet Theatre session, and takes up most of the allocated time.

Post-performance discussion with a few members of the audience: This session provides an opportunity for referrals to relevant services and acts as a forum for those who need to further react to the issue of the day. This is also an opportunity to facilitate interpersonal communication and smaller group discussion, to take forward some of the solutions proposed during the Magnet Theatre session.

Session review: An assessment of session proceedings by the facilitator and the troupe to discuss what went well, as well as possible areas for improvement. This activity helps the troupe analyse the session with a view toward improving their performances by incorporating the key population's viewpoints and issues into their planning.

Scripting and rehearsal: A new script is prepared based on the questions and issues raised in the previous script. The troupe rehearses the new script before the next performance.

Providing feedback on issues for advocacy and action: Often, important issues are raised in Magnet Theatre sessions, which need to be relayed to appropriate nongovernmental or community-based organisations for advocacy and action. For example, audience members may talk about problems with services, which need to be resolved, or about harassment by officials.

Why Magnet Theatre is carried out by key populations

Magnet Theatre is directly implemented by key population members rather than by professional actors from outside the target population groups. This is done for the following reasons:

- Key population members best understand and empathise with their peers and are able to win their confidence so that information can be shared without fear or prejudice.
- They are able to communicate well with other key population members and use familiar, colloquial language.
- The use of key population members paves the way for the mobilisation of key populations and builds a sense of ownership of the project right from the start.
- Building the capacity of key populations to conduct Magnet Theatre results in the creation of a core group of committed resource people whose skills the project can draw upon to train others.

“Peer” is defined as anyone who accepts, respects, or follows the sexual norms and practices of a particular key population.

Section B: A Magnet Theatre Case Study

Introduction

With support from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), PATH provided technical support to develop key population capacity in Magnet Theatre to MYRADA. MYRADA is a well-known nongovernmental organisation (NGO) with a long history of development work in Karnataka state in India. Two Magnet Theatre troupes in Chamrajnagar district and four troupes in Kolar district were identified and trained intensively to perform Magnet Theatre amongst communities of MSM.

Methods and processes

Identification and selection of troupe members

A planning meeting was held with the MYRADA staff and key population representatives to decide a method for recruiting Magnet Theatre troupe members. A theatre consultant, PATH staff, experienced key population consultants, and NGO staff, were all involved in the selection process. More than 70 candidates were identified for selection, and from those, 48 people were recruited for the six troupes.

Training in Magnet Theatre

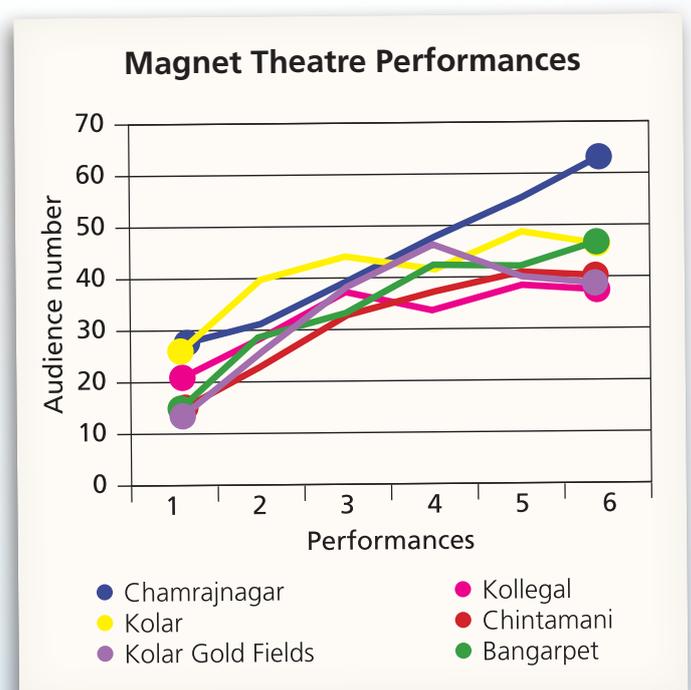
Six days of intensive training were conducted with the selected candidates. A specially designed curriculum was used, and the trainees found it useful to watch the Magnet Theatre film (included with this toolkit). The training was facilitated by key population members and PATH staff experienced in Magnet Theatre.

Rehearsals and Magnet Theatre performances

Performances were held on a fixed schedule (fixed venue, time, and day) every two weeks. Each troupe performed six times. The troupes rehearsed for three days, performed on the fourth day, and reviewed and planned for the next performance on the fifth day. Issues and dilemmas for the script were developed organically, drawing on discussions from the previous performance. These issues related to priorities identified by the MSM community, such as safe sex and condom usage, identity as an MSM, service utilisation, STI treatment, HIV testing, and HIV status disclosure.

Audience attendance and participation

Magnet Theatre attracted many MSM to come together and discuss the issues affecting their lives. In the beginning, friends of the troupe members came to observe the performances, and slowly, news of the performances spread to others by word-of-mouth, and the audience numbers began to increase. Performances were



staged in MYRADA's partner NGO Drop-In Centres, which increased utilisation of the services available there. Some troupe members organised beauty contests for MSM to attract them to attend performances. Beauty contests were held as ice breakers and proved an excellent method for mobilising the key population audience members.

Outcomes

Since the Magnet Theatre sessions, there have been reports of increased solidarity amongst the MSM communities in the area and a better understanding of services available to them. Demand for appropriate services has also increased, and one NGO has opened a centre exclusively for MSM. Other NGOs have also provided services as a result of Magnet Theatre, and many people have been motivated to find out their HIV status. MYRADA has now utilised Magnet Theatre to scale up MSM outreach in its interventions in all their sites in Karnataka, using existing troupe members to identify and train new troupes.

Key population members have reported that Magnet Theatre has helped to enhance their self-esteem and tackle social stigma. NGO staff reported that because of Magnet Theatre, they are better able to understand the issues and problems affecting the lives of MSM communities and how they become vulnerable to HIV.

"We have found magnet theatre to be the most significant contribution to community mobilization of MSM communities in our area, and we actively promote this concept in all our technical assistance work."

MYRADA Senior Management



Section C: Components of Magnet Theatre

Magnet Theatre is comprised of nine components:

- 1 Recruiting and training Magnet Theatre troupe members.
- 2 Selecting a site for performances.
- 3 Developing and rehearsing a script.
- 4 Mobilising key population audiences.
- 5 Acting.
- 6 Audience participation.
- 7 Facilitating discussions.
- 8 Post-performance discussion and review.
- 9 Feedback for advocacy and action.

Component 1: Recruiting and training Magnet Theatre troupe members

Selection of Magnet Theatre troupe members must be conducted on the basis of (1) representation by key individual populations, and (2) the profiles/skills required of the composite key population troupe. Usually a troupe consists of eight people. The following composite skills and characteristics are required of the key population troupe:

- 1 All troupe members should belong to the specific key population group with which it is working.
- 2 Troupe members must be credible to the key population and have the ability to mobilise different segments of the key population networks.
- 3 The members of the troupe must be representative of different socio-economic segments, with a focus on those who are more vulnerable and marginalized.
- 4 Troupe members should have sensitivity and commitment to key population issues, and a strong motivation to work as a team toward HIV/STI reduction.
- 5 The key population troupe must have theatre, song, and dance skills.
- 6 Some troupe members must have a strong capacity for facilitation—specifically, listening skills, flexibility and balance, and the ability to be non-judgemental and to steer a discussion toward specific constructive objectives.
- 7 At least two members of the troupe should have basic reading/writing skills and the ability to conduct monitoring activities for Magnet Theatre.

The team should possess the full range of abilities required of a key population troupe: performance, facilitation, community mobilisation, and monitoring skills.

Training is intensive, and often, an existing troupe can help train new troupes. The objectives of Magnet Theatre troupe training are to:

- Orient the Magnet Theatre key population troupes on sex and sexuality and the basics of HIV/AIDS.
- Orient the key population troupes about Magnet Theatre.
- Build the capacities and enhance the skills of the key population troupes in performing Magnet Theatre.
- Develop roll-out plans for Magnet Theatre in the sites.

What to cover in Magnet Theatre training

The following is an overview of the training curriculum. Please contact PATH for the full curriculum.

Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction and ice-breaking. ● Building trust and group dynamics. ● Sex and sexuality. ● Basics of HIV/AIDS.
Days 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding key population issues. ● Developing issues/dilemmas for production. ● Introduction to Magnet Theatre. ● Developing a story. ● Scripting and dilemma-setting. ● Drama practice.
Days 4 and 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitation in Magnet Theatre. ● Provocative questions. ● Facilitation practice.
Days 6 and 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Magnet Theatre checklist. ● Planning for Magnet Theatre field practice. ● Ice-breaking in Magnet Theatre. ● Rehearsal. ● Field practice.
Day 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of Magnet Theatre practice performance. ● Facilitation practice.
Day 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Planning for second Magnet Theatre field practice. ● Rehearsal. ● Field practice.
Day 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Planning for Magnet Theatre in the field. ● Selecting a Magnet Theatre site. ● Audience mobilisation. ● Reporting formats.

Component 2: Selecting a site for performances

Steps for choosing a Magnet Theatre site

- 1** Begin by defining the key population and its characteristics. This will help determine how comfortable the key population will be at a particular place or in a particular setting.
- 2** Talk with members of the community and the key population to find out where the key population is most likely to be found. This could be a place where they spend their free time, where they feel comfortable and uninhibited.
- 3** Explain Magnet Theatre to the key population and ask their opinions on three possible sites for staging performances. When doing so, consider not only the places that are suitable for performing Magnet Theatre, but also areas where the key population will feel comfortable participating in the Magnet Theatre session.
- 4** Analyse the key population's views to come up with a list of three possible sites.
- 5** Conduct test Magnet Theatre sessions at each of the three potential sites, and with key population participation, choose the best Magnet Theatre site.
- 6** Ask the key population members to suggest a name for the Magnet Theatre site.

Qualities of a good Magnet Theatre site

- Easy for the key population to locate and direct their peers to.
- Spacious enough for maximum quality and comfortable participation.
- Secure and comfortable, with no threats of disruption.
- Friendly to the key population and not controlled or uncomfortably patronised by authority figures.
- Inexpensive to maintain and available when needed.
- Not intrusive to other community activities.
- Generally acceptable and agreeable to the key population.
- Named appropriately with a catchy, easy-to-remember name/word.

Component 3: Developing and rehearsing a script

A script not only gives direction to the troupe, but is a good record of how discussions have evolved with a particular key population. Scripts can also be re-used or borrowed and adapted by other troupes.

Developing a script

Discuss audience participation during the previous Magnet Theatre session. Consider audience questions, suggestions, and contributions. It is important for the dilemma in the script to be directly related to the key population, to keep them interested and to encourage participation and discussion. Once this is done, consider the following questions in order to create the context for the dilemma:

- 1** What is a problem or issue facing the key population?
- 2** What is causing this problem?

- 3 Who are the key players in this problem?
- 4 Where does the problem take place?
- 5 What words and phrases do key population members use when talking about their problems?
- 6 What are the myths, prejudices, beliefs, and attitudes toward the issue amongst the key population?
- 7 What are the technical facts related to the theme that might be needed for facilitation?
- 8 What has been done to combat the problem? What has been successful? What has been unsuccessful?

“Players” refers to all the people who contribute to or are affected by the problem. These people will determine the characters for the Magnet Theatre performances.

Characteristics of Magnet Theatre scripts

Magnet Theatre scripts should:

- **Be open-ended.** The script should not be prescriptive or offer a pre-determined resolution of the dilemma, nor should it deliberately lead the audience toward a given solution. The script has to present a question to the key population for them to discuss and come up with as many solutions to the dilemma as possible.
- **Have a key question.** This question tackles the key issue presented during the drama. It cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no”, but should generate discussion and encourage the audience to share their opinions, feelings, and ideas. (See Section F for a list of suggested dilemmas.)
- **Have a summary.** What is the drama all about? The summary helps the facilitator introduce the drama to the audience.
- **Describe the cast of characters and their profiles.** Who portrays which character in the play? What are the relationships between the characters? What are the characters’ profiles (their ages, social status, economic status, physical attributes, and personalities). For example:

Cast of Characters



Character 1—Priya:

28-year-old sex worker; lives with her two children.



Character 2—Rajesh:

Visits Priya regularly and supports her whenever she is in a financial crisis. He is not only a regular client but also a close friend of hers. Priya never uses a condom with Rajesh, as she is emotionally attached to him.



Character 3—Shanthi:

A sex worker and Priya’s close friend. Knows about Rajesh’s other relationships.

The key population audience may change the names of the characters and can advise a character to change his/her character profile so as to achieve a given goal.

- Give stage directions. Although not as elaborate as in a conventional theatre script, Magnet Theatre stage directions explain how characters should act, move, or say their lines.
- Present a dilemma. A dilemma is a tricky situation encountered by a person, which forces him/her to make a choice between two or more difficult options, each of which has its own rewards and consequences. So, for example:

Priya is a sex worker who always insists on using condoms with her clients, but she never asks Rajesh to use a condom because of her emotional attachment to him. Priya is now infected with an STI and is worried about her health. Her friend, Shanthi, accompanies her to the hospital and tells her that she might have gotten the infection from Rajesh, and advises her not to have sex with Rajesh without a condom. The next time Rajesh visits Priya and wants to have sex with her, she is in a quandary: Should she ask Rajesh to use a condom and risk his rejection, or should she have unsafe sex and risk becoming infected with HIV or an STI?



- Indicate the freeze moment. The facilitator calls for a “freeze” just before the main character makes a decision. The freeze moment is indicated in bold—FREEZE—in the script. A freeze indicates the point of audience participation. The audience will make a decision for the character and explain their reasons for making that choice. For example, in the story above, the freeze is called after the Rajesh’s request for sex and after the dilemma is presented to the audience. Priya’s dilemma now becomes the audience’s dilemma. The decision that Priya will make (through the audience) will drastically affect her future.
- Include facilitation points or questions for the facilitator to use in order to encourage audience participation. The questions are a guide and do not need to be read verbatim. They are designed to help the facilitator initiate participation.
- Be entertaining. Use of familiar and popular words and phrases, comical expressions, unexpected twists and turns, reference to the key population, and mimicry of known persons and offices can achieve entertainment. However, avoid gross and embarrassing comedy.
- Not preach. The Magnet Theatre script should avoid using programme jargon and also avoid preaching programme issues to the key population.
- Be short. Ideally, the script should be timed to be no more than 15 minutes long. A lengthy script may make the audience lose interest and forget important issues.
- Have a small cast. A script should avoid a big cast. It is difficult to perform with a large cast. Crowd scenes should also be avoided. A cast of more than seven members should be considered too large.

Rehearsal for Magnet Theatre

Once the theme and the dilemma have been agreed upon and an open-ended script written, the troupe can prepare for the Magnet Theatre session and allocate tasks and roles, including:

- **Casting:** Cast troupe members in the character roles. All troupe members should be willing to play any role and play it well.
- **Script reading:** All troupe members should read through the script. Find appropriate ways to do this effectively for troupes in which there are different levels of literacy.
- **Props/costume selection:** Select props and costumes for the performance. Create the set. Rehearse the play in order to perfect expressions, block movements, and improve voice projection.
- **Facilitation:** Establish the relationship between the performance and facilitation. The facilitator must freeze the performance at the right moment, and the performers should freeze immediately. This calls for good coordination and cooperation between the players and the facilitator.
- **Rehearsal of ice breakers and improvisation techniques:** Select and rehearse ice breakers (songs, theatre games, chants) that will prepare the audience and the actors to participate in the Magnet Theatre session.

Component 4: Mobilising key population audiences

Mobilisation is the process of attracting the key population to the Magnet Theatre site. Mobilisation is important for informing the audience about the Magnet Theatre session and preparing them to participate in the session. The troupe may mobilise audiences the day of the session, or make an announcement during a previous session. They may also create a reliable schedule that is known to the key population.

Mobilisation techniques

- Avoid scheduling Magnet Theatre on days and at times that conflict with the chores or activities of the key population.
- Use song, dance, and theatre games to attract the audience to the site. They should be participatory as well as fun to watch—a quick and easy means of creating the perfect mood for a Magnet Theatre session and allow the key population to become involved in audience mobilisation. Several communities and key populations have popular songs and dances that can be used in this mobilisation technique.
- Musical instruments and accompaniments can also play a major role in enhancing mobilisation. The use of song and dance is one of the cheapest forms of mobilisation.
- Use pamphlets or posters that highlight each session theme, date, place, and performance time. Pamphlets are effective because they can be given specifically to members of the key population. Posters may be seen by every member of the community; however, they can be expensive to produce, and if not taken down following the performance, could litter the environment.
- Disseminate information through word-of-mouth by asking the audience to tell their friends about Magnet Theatre. This method can be used effectively to bring “hidden” populations to Magnet Theatre performances. If a Magnet Theatre performance is successful with an



audience, they will be eager to bring their peers to the next performance.

- At the end of the theatre session, the troupe should remind the key population of the date and time of the next session.
- NGO outreach staff and peer educators can also play a major role in mobilising the audience members, as they have a wide range of key population contacts.

Once the audience has gathered, use ice breakers to prepare them to actively participate in the Magnet Theatre. Ensure that the games are interesting, interactive, and fun. Ice breakers that poke fun at people should be directed at the troupe members—not at the audience.

Component 5: Acting

“Acting” is the performance of a prepared or improvised drama during a Magnet Theatre session. Both troupe members and the audience participate in the improvisational dramas that test solutions. In Magnet Theatre, acting serves several functions:

- To present a dilemma to the audience. The character’s dilemma needs to be portrayed clearly so that the audience is able to understand it fully.
- To facilitate the audience’s attempts to deal effectively with the presented dilemma. A member of the audience joins the actors in acting out his/her proposed solution to the dilemma.
- To encourage audience participation. The acting is deliberately designed to be simple so as to encourage audience participation in the enactment.



Acting with audience members

A member of the audience can participate in the Magnet Theatre session by joining the actors on stage, replacing a character, and acting with the other characters to solve a dilemma. The audience members are not professional or experienced actors, and their only concern is solving the dilemma.

At times, an audience member might take the place of the character who is facing the dilemma. The remaining actor(s) should continue to play their parts in the drama. The troupe should honestly present their positions, without exaggeration, whilst reminding the audience member who has just come in that the problem is real and not easily solved.

The actors have to take a stance that encourages the audience member to deal with the problem and come up with a solution. They should not be stubborn and argumentative, and should agree with the audience member if the situation demands.

The actors’ manner of interacting with the audience member should not be frightening, embarrassing, or intimidating. This person should be made to feel comfortable sharing his/her opinion so as to encourage other audience members to participate. On the other hand, actors should not allow themselves to be manipulated by the audience member into creating a false belief that solving the dilemma is easy.

Once an audience member has acted out his/her solution, the facilitator and the troupe should openly appreciate the participation by clapping or by verbally congratulating the person.

To improvise with an audience member in a realistic way, it is essential that Magnet Theatre actors are familiar with programme issues. They need to know the cause and effect of the dilemma within the context of the community in which they are performing and the mechanisms with which the key population has already tried to resolve the problem.

Under-acting

The troupe should deliberately tone down their acting skills to accommodate the inexperienced performance of an audience member. Their act should be harmonious with that of the audience member, whose interest is not so much in acting as it is in finding solutions to the dilemma.

The principle of under-acting is not to suggest that there is no acting talent amongst the audience. It seeks to unify the collective talents of everyone gathered at the Magnet Theatre session and bring them to a level that facilitates participation.

Under-acting does not suggest or encourage poor acting.

Magnet Theatre acting challenges

When Magnet Theatre takes place outdoors, it usually attracts a large audience. This poses a challenge to the actors, who have to be seen and heard by everyone gathered for the session. Theatre generally depends on the body and the voice, and the actors must project their voices without seeming to shout. The audience can participate effectively only if they can hear what is being said. The facilitator can help by working with the audience to establish norms for maintaining silence.

Typically, the audience will seat itself in a circle around the Magnet Theatre arena, which would present a challenge for the actors, because at any point in the performance, they would have their backs to a certain section of the audience. This can be resolved by the facilitator asking the audience to stand or sit in a semi-circle.

Improvisations can be challenging; the actors are required to listen keenly to the participants' views and suggestions and then translate them into dialogue and drama. The interpretation has to effectively convey audience members' thoughts.

Also, performing with "strangers" can be a major challenge, especially during early sessions. The audience members may need to be encouraged to present their views and solutions. In addition, the experienced actor must be ready for unpredictable behaviour and unusual performance styles.

Improvisation

Improvisation is the creation and performance of a drama without preparation, planning, or rehearsal. In Magnet Theatre, actors and audience members are often called upon to act out and incorporate participants' comments into the drama. The actors improvise their performance based on audience suggestions, feelings, and comments. Improvisation allows the audience to see their ideas and opinions and test the practicality of suggestions.

Improvisation can also involve the use of available resources to create additional props and costumes. For example, a girl who had not planned to have sex finds herself in a locked room with her boyfriend who demands that they have sex. The boyfriend is very insistent and ignores any pleas from the girl to wait. What should the girl do in this scenario? Several members of the audience may suggest that:

- The couple go for voluntary counseling and testing first.
- She demand they use a condom.
- She scream and bite him.

When audience members offer suggestions, the actors must be prepared to improvise dialogues or actions. During this time, an audience member who gave a suggestion may join in and enact a part and improvise based on the suggestion given.

Listen

Improvisation works best when participants (actors and audience) listen with an open mind. They should focus on listening to the suggestion being conveyed rather than concentrate on preparing what to say. In case of any confusion, the facilitator can seek clarification from the audience member who posed the suggestion.

Be prepared

There are times when actors may be required to play a variety of roles without preparation. It is common for the audience to suggest that a character who was not part of the earlier drama help solve the dilemma presented. This means that a new character has to be added to the cast. The Magnet Theatre actors should be able to add new characters quickly through physical representation, gestures, accents, voice changes, or other techniques.

An actor might also be called upon to play a character of a different age or gender. At times, the facilitator should request that the audience describe the new character in order to help the actor with his/her improvisation. Mimicry is useful, but exaggerations and clownish/comic acting should be avoided.

Component 6: Audience participation

Audience participation can be passive or active and both are important. Passive participants are those who come to the Magnet Theatre site to observe and listen to what is going on. Active participants will involve themselves in the identification of the problem, offer suggestions for issues to be tackled, generate solutions through discussion, ask questions, act, give feedback, and share experiences. Participation during the play is especially important to the success of Magnet Theatre. It leads participants toward finding solutions to the problems with which key populations are grappling.

Ways in which an audience member can participate

- 1 Stepping into the shoes of a character.** Members of the audience take over the role of a character in the play and enact their views on what that character should do when faced with a certain dilemma. They should be allowed to express themselves fully when acting. If another member of the audience feels that the person did not make the right decision, he/she should also be given a chance to take over the character's role. Several people representing different viewpoints can take turns stepping into the shoes of the character. They might make changes to the character's attitude, behaviour, and/or feelings in order to resolve the dilemma. However, audience participants should not change the setting of the dilemma or the age, gender, or circumstances of the character.
- 2 Hot-seating or questioning the role of a character.** The key population audience members ask a character to explain the actions or behaviours enacted in the play. By doing this, the audience also shares their opinions and discusses the advantages and disadvantages



of the solutions offered to the dilemma. This technique helps the audience engage with a problem and make informed decisions when faced with a similar situation in real life. In this form of participation, the audience uses questions to encourage the character to consider the consequences of his/her actions. The character being questioned may be a troupe member or a member of the audience who has stepped into the shoes of a character.

Questions may include:

- Why are you doing that?
- What do you hope to achieve by that action?
- Would you do the same if it were a member of your family?
- Have you considered X or Y alternative?
- How long will you be able to maintain that practice?

3 Offering advice. A member of the audience comes forward and has a one-on-one conversation with the character and offers suggestions on how he/she can solve the dilemma. The audience member may assume that he/she is the character's brother, sister, parent, teacher, friend, girlfriend, boyfriend, or workmate. The character then continues the performance, following the person's advice. The other characters should not be party to the advice being given.

4 Debating or discussing the issue. An issue may divide the audience, causing some to support a certain viewpoint whilst others oppose it. This form of participation gives audience members with different viewpoints the opportunity to debate and discuss them. Such deliberations have a way of continuing in the community even after the Magnet Theatre session has ended. The Magnet Theatre activity seeks to encourage the community to openly and critically discuss issues and practices that affect their vulnerability to HIV infection. The Magnet Theatre session provides the audience with facts that enrich their discussions and help them discard myths.

5 Manipulating the freeze or still-life depiction. The actors freeze at a certain point in the drama, when the protagonist might be faced with a dilemma. The facilitator then asks the audience to try to resolve the dilemma. The still-life portrayal can present a conflict, dilemma, or question for the audience to consider. The audience members are encouraged to come forward and rearrange the still life to depict their desired solution. Use the following questions to guide the audience into rearranging the still life:

- What could be the issue of conflict in the still life?
(Allow several suggestions and then ask the audience to settle on the most suitable explanation.)
- Who is involved?
- Why has the issue reached this point?
- What must the characters do to deal with the issue that has arisen?
- Are there any real experiences in the community that are similar to this scenario?

Finally, ask the audience members to come forward and rearrange the characters to reflect how they would like the still life to look.

6 Real-life experience-sharing. Members of the key population come forward to share their experiences or those of someone they know well. This form of participation is usually encouraged after the audience has participated in the dramatized account and has suggested

solutions to the dilemma. Real-life experience-sharing tests or corroborates the solutions suggested by the audience.

Thank you matters!

It is important to applaud the audience members who actively participate in the Magnet Theatre session. It is not easy for them to come forward and be the centre of attention, especially in a public gathering. Participation calls for courage and resolve. It reflects a bold decision by the audience to step forward and problem-solve a dilemma for their own benefit. This should be appreciated.

Obstacles to audience participation

- Poor Magnet Theatre site selection that interferes with the concentration of the participants.
- Poor timing of the Magnet Theatre session; for example, holding a session at a time when the key population members are busy with other activities and chores.
- Irrelevant theme or issues imposed on the key population.
- Presence at the theatre site of strangers or figures of authority who make the key population feel uncomfortable, which could lead to poor participation.
- Poor or no ice-breaking, which could create an environment less conducive to participation.
- Poor facilitation. The facilitator is the “glue” that binds the participants of a Magnet Theatre session. If this aspect is weak, the entire session could fall apart.
- Boring drama or poor enactment. Lack of seriousness when performing before the audience or a poorly rehearsed drama could lead to a lack of audience participation.
- Elaborate and sharp enactments that make the audience feel incompetent to enact their viewpoints through impromptu performance.
- Language barriers, such as use of terms that are not understood universally by the key population or putting on an accent that is difficult for the audience to decipher.
- Rowdy, intimidating, and/or drunk members of the key population who make the rest of the population feel uncomfortable, and thus, discourage their participation.
- Routine and monotony. This refers to the repetition of an issue over and over again. Sticking to one topic or theme makes the Magnet Theatre monotonous and boring to the key population, which has a negative effect on their participation.

Component 7: Facilitating discussions

Facilitation is the act of guiding the Magnet Theatre session and creating a safe environment for the audience and actors to interact and explore solutions to the dilemma presented in the drama. A facilitator is not the most important element of the Magnet Theatre session—the audience is. A good facilitator should disregard his/her social status, opinions, attitudes, and personal pride and connect with the audience so as to create a facilitative environment for participation.

A good facilitator enables the key population to lead the discussion through their questions, responses, comments, and experience-sharing. The facilitator is the “neutral” person who acts as a bridge between the drama, the actors, and the audience. This person is responsible for guiding the interaction between the troupe and the audience.

Principles of facilitation

- 1 **Impartial.** Facilitation empowers the audience members to exercise their abilities to deal with an issue. As such, the facilitator will not seek to impose his/her opinions and will not try to garner support for one suggestion at the expense of another. In Magnet Theatre, the facilitator is advised to refrain from giving his/her opinion, lest it influences the thinking of the audience and undermines ownership of the solution by the audience. (However, when called upon, a facilitator might negotiate his/her point of view in order to correct misconceptions.)
- 2 **Trusting.** Facilitation relies on the belief that the audience is capable of facing the problem at hand and coming up with a practical solution to it. People are usually scared to face up to a problem, and this is when the facilitator should help them. The facilitator should have faith in the essential goodness of people and believe that they will want to do what is right. In Magnet Theatre, the facilitator is encouraged to throw the audience’s questions back to them because of a belief that someone will have the answer. The facilitator appreciates that he/she is not there to solve the audience’s problems for them.
- 3 **Provocative.** Facilitation employs a creative use of questions that will help the audience bring out the answers to their problems. A facilitator must be able to stimulate the audience through in-depth questioning that is non-threatening. In addition, the facilitator should be a good listener, who encourages the audience by being attentive to them.
- 4 **Audience-centred.** Facilitation works in the best interest of the audience. It helps maintain the self-esteem of the participants by giving everyone an equal chance and by shielding them from potential or actual harm, bullying, labelling, or insults from others.
- 5 **Nonjudgemental.** Besides being impartial, facilitation is not judgemental. Facilitation encourages, welcomes, and accepts the opinions of individuals, but does not use these opinions to form prejudices about the person who brings them up. A facilitator should not use words that betray a judgemental attitude. By stating that no response will be considered wrong or right, the facilitator assures the audience that none will be judged. All the audience’s views are valued, which creates an environment of safety that makes them feel comfortable about participating in the Magnet Theatre session.
- 6 **Flexible.** Facilitation is not a rigid affair; innovation is a critical part of it. In Magnet Theatre, the facilitator is expected to be alert to happenings around the Magnet Theatre site and to the body language and nonverbal communication of the audience, and adjust the pace or style of facilitation to suit the audience’s needs. The facilitator must be sensitive to people’s feelings, thoughts, cultures, and fears. Sensitivity here implies empathy—the facilitator’s ability to put him or herself into the shoes of the subject. The facilitator should also be able to appreciate the fluid nature of situations and adjust accordingly.
- 7 **Diverse.** In an audience that consists of diverse individuals, facilitation means accepting that there is no single answer to a particular problem. Audiences should be encouraged to



come up with as many solutions to the problem as possible. Therefore, the diversity of the audience may be proportional to the diversity of solutions to an issue.

- 8 Honest.** The facilitator should admit to the audience if he/she does not know the answer to a question. The facilitator should be knowledgeable on the subject matter, but not impose that knowledge on the key population. Instead, he/she should guide the audience through a process of understanding the issues based on the audience's own experiences, capacities, and environments. The facilitator should be able to help the audience analyse different solutions and critique and challenge each other's suggestions in a positive way.

Role of the facilitator

- Responsible for the Magnet Theatre session, including its overall management and conduct.
- Acts as a bridge that connects and guides the interaction between the audience, the actors, and the drama.
- Introduces the troupe, the drama, and the theme of the day to the community. Explains the topic of the session for participants to understand how it relates to them.
- Assigns and clearly explains the role of the key population during the session.
- Works with the audience to determine rules for the smooth running of the session.
- Encourages audience involvement by asking questions and relaying doubts to help them consider the issue at hand and make practical decisions.
- Identifies individuals who have adopted risk-reduction practices and helps them to share these practices.
- Censors the use of unacceptable language. Protects participants from vicious personal attacks and/or references.
- Clearly summarises the discussion and analysis of solutions offered by the key population during the Magnet Theatre session.

Facilitation techniques that encourage audience participation

- Good listening. The only way to encourage others to talk is to listen.
- Communicating effectively. When the facilitator speaks, each audience member should feel as though the facilitator is talking to him/her individually. The facilitator should be audible, articulate, sensitive, interesting, and honest, as well as open and trustworthy.
- Maintaining eye contact. The facilitator should maintain eye contact without staring. To look away whilst a participant is talking can be discouraging.
- Assuming a relaxed demeanor. The facilitator should demonstrate his/her ease of manner through open body language. Nodding one's head in encouragement can indicate to the audience that they are being listened to and can promote further participation and sharing. Hands in pockets or arms folded across the chest, however; a bored, tired, or disinterested posture; or an edgy, confused demeanor all negatively impact participation. Smiling is important. A serious or frowning facilitator hinders audience participation.
- Providing positive verbal reinforcement. A facilitator encourages participants by using words that create a desire to participate (e.g., good, thank you, my friend).
- Asking questions. Appropriate questions can guide the audience into a deeper interrogation of an issue. Questions help participants consider all angles of a suggested solution.

- Respecting the participant. If the facilitator is seen to be disrespectful, resentment will set in and the whole exercise may suffer.
- Creating a safe environment for participation. A facilitator needs to ensure that participants are not heckled, jeered at, insulted, called names, or do not become subjects of mirth.
- Calling participants by their names. People feel good when they are referred to by name. A good facilitator will learn the names of audience members who participate repeatedly and consistently use their names in conversations with them.

Role of provocative questions in facilitation

Provocative questions coax people to consider their thinking by highlighting gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions. These questions should motivate people to think and urge responses.

The provocative questions tool helps the facilitator address/challenge common myths and barriers. For example, if an audience member speaks about “condoms breaking” or “condoms reducing pleasure”, the facilitator can use provocative questions to urge people to reconsider such beliefs and gradually dispel these myths and stereotypes.

Typically, provocative questions begin with **What, When, Who, Where, Why, and How.**

Tool for asking provocative questions

The following sentence is a mnemonic tool that can aid the facilitator in coming up with thought-provoking questions during the session:

For Children Growing Rapidly, Vitamins Deliver Terrific Strength

Frequency: How frequently does this happen?

Constituency: Who? Where? And to which part does this happen?

Generalise: Are all of them like that? (Are all IDUs thieves? Are all thieves IDUs?)

Reverse: Is it not something good?

Validity: How do you validate? Who says this?

Definition: What do you mean by that?

Timeline: How long have they been doing this? When did this happen?

Scope: How often? How many?

Component 8: Post-performance discussion and review

Post-performance discussion

The post-performance discussion takes place immediately after the Magnet Theatre enactment and facilitated audience discussion have finished. The post-performance discussion includes a small group of audience members, assisted by the facilitator, who discuss issues in greater detail in a comfortable and more private environment. Either the facilitator can invite audience members to the discussion, or the audience members themselves may request to meet with the facilitator after the performance. This is a good opportunity to use dialogue-based interpersonal communication

with small groups to follow up in more detail on some of the solutions suggested during the Magnet Theatre session.

Post-performance review

This marks the final stage of the session, when the troupe, the facilitator, and all the actors gather to review the Magnet Theatre. They identify and discuss aspects that worked and those that did not. They also plan for future Magnet Theatre sessions, including rehearsal and scripting activities.

The session review needs to be conducted in a cordial, open, and critical manner, always with an eye on improvement. Good practices need to be noted and applauded. Mistakes ought to be reviewed and solutions determined. The following reporting format and the checklist in the following section may be of help to the troupe in its session review.

Reporting questions

To be completed immediately after each Magnet Theatre session:

- 1** Name of Magnet Theatre site. _____
- 2** Name of Magnet Theatre troupe. _____
- 3** Names of facilitators, mobilisers, reporters, and performers.

- 4** Date, time, and duration of Magnet Theatre session (including performance and post-performance discussion). _____
- 5** Total audience size (males, females, transgenders). _____
- 6** Number of people who had attended previous sessions. _____
- 7** Audience participation (number of audience members who actively asked questions, debated an issue, and/or stepped forward to enact choices). _____
- 8** Key population issue discussed. _____
- 9** Dilemma. _____
- 10** Summary of script. _____

- 11** Summary of key issues and questions raised by the audience.

- 12** Main issues discussed in post-performance discussions with audience members

- 13** Issues that need to be addressed in the next performance.

- 14** Practical risk-reduction solutions presented by the audience.

- 15** Additional feedback and comments.

Component 9: Feedback for advocacy and action

In order for Magnet Theatre to reach its full potential as a catalyst for change, the troupe must help the key population in each site relay issues and discussion points to relevant service providers.

Often, solutions to problems cannot be carried out by individuals or even groups in a particular community. The solutions may require the involvement of a service provider such as an NGO or the government. Solutions may also require the involvement of community leaders, officials, policymakers, or legislators.

For example, during the discussion, audience members may say that clinic operating hours or location make it difficult for them to access treatment. They may not find particular staff members to be very friendly. This information needs to be given to the relevant service provider, who is usually happy to make changes immediately. Positive feedback is important to give as well, to reinforce good practices and help service providers understand what works.

During the discussion, audience members may talk about harassment by the police, or say that the enforcement/non-enforcement of specific laws or regulations prevents them from reducing their risk of HIV or from accessing care and treatment. These issues need to be presented to local human rights organisations, or if they exist, to local advocacy committees, so that the rights of all key populations can be recognised and respected.

Many issues are raised during Magnet Theatre sessions, and it is important to capture them all. Issues discussed inform the next script, but can also be used in a powerful way to influence a positive environment for HIV prevention, care, and treatment.

Section D: Managing a Magnet Theatre Session

A Magnet Theatre session consists of a number of activities that need to be efficiently coordinated. In the initial stages, the troupe also needs to fulfill administrative formalities, such as seeking permission from the authorities and the community to conduct the Magnet Theatre.

There are several tasks that need to be carried out in the course of the Magnet Theatre session. These should be identified and assigned to appropriate troupe members. Duties may be rotated amongst them so as to improve each individual's capacity as a Magnet Theatre practitioner. Magnet Theatre session tasks include the following:

- 1** Mobilisation of the key population. It is important for every member to actively participate.
- 2** Ice-breaking and leading of theatre games. One person should be responsible for leading these activities at each Magnet Theatre session, but everyone should participate.
- 3** Facilitation of the Magnet Theatre session. Facilitation is a critical task; the flow and quality of the session depend on the skills of the facilitator. Each member of the troupe should be encouraged to build his/her facilitation skills.
- 4** Enactment of the Magnet Theatre play. A core component of the Magnet Theatre session is the enactment of the day's drama. The entire troupe is expected to carry out this task because it is the primary basis of their membership in the troupe.
- 5** Documentation and recording of Magnet Theatre proceedings. For the purpose of monitoring and evaluation, and in preparation for the Magnet Theatre session review, it is important to keep a record of the session. This can be done through photographs, video recordings, and/or written notes. Recording should be done discreetly; it should not interfere with the participation of the audience. Prior to taking pictures or videos, the informed consent of the audience must be gained.
- 6** Inclusion of children brought to the Magnet Theatre session. Whilst children can be a useful resource for mobilisation, they must not impede the session in any way. The troupe should hold separate, parallel sessions for accompanying children. This can be done some distance away from the main session. The troupe would need to assign a facilitator and prepare for these sessions.
- 7** Safekeeping of Magnet Theatre costumes, props, and equipment. In the ideal scenario, each person should look after his/her own costumes, props, and other equipment. But there are times when the entire cast is on stage, unable to attend to this task. For this reason, one member of the troupe should be selected for this purpose.
- 8** Distribution of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials. The Magnet Theatre may provide literature and other IEC materials to the key population. Given the typically large audiences, all troupe members should be involved in the distribution of these materials at a specified time.
- 9** Provision of referrals for services (e.g., for STI management). Part of the process of facilitating the audience's adoption of low-risk behaviour is aiding their access to services and products. This may be done, in the case of HIV and sexual health, through referrals to clinics and other health institutions. Troupe members should be well-informed about the products/services available and be prepared to refer audiences.



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Spandan Group
THIRD Performance.
(CHIKODI) 28-03-2006

- MANOJ
- RAHUL
- PRAKASH
- SALIM
- MUSTAFA
- MUSSA
- SANJU
- RUDRAPPA

Section E: Maintaining the Quality of Magnet Theatre

Magnet Theatre review checklist

1 Mobilisation and ice-breaking

Was the timing conducive for holding a Magnet Theatre session?

What techniques were used for mobilisation and ice-breaking?

Was the audience involved in the theatre games?

2 Introduction

Were the day's theme, drama, actors, and facilitator introduced to the audience?

Did the audience suggest the characters' names?

What was the key question?

3 Enactment

Did the performance succeed in presenting the dilemma in a way that was understandable to the audience?

Were the actors audible and visible?

Did the actors volunteer to act out their opinions in improvised dramas?

4 The drama

Was the performance entertaining?

Was it open-ended?

How big was the cast?

How long did the performance take?

5 Participation

Was audience participation active or passive?

In what ways did the audience participate in the Magnet Theatre session?

Did the audience speak most of the time, or did the drama and the facilitator take the greatest chunk of available time?

Was participation spontaneous or forced?

Did any member of the audience share his/her personal experience?

Magnet Theatre review checklist (continued)

6 Post-performance discussion

What was the composition of the discussion?

How long did it take?

Was the discussion more intense than in the general session?

What was discussed?

7 Magnet Theatre site

Were there any distractions at the Magnet Theatre site (e.g., noise, vehicles, other community activities, drunkards)?

Did the audience seem comfortable at the site?

Did the site help in promoting audience participation?

8 Audience

Was the key population well-represented in the Magnet Theatre session?

What was the audience size?

Who was in the audience?

9 Managing the Magnet Theatre session

How did the facilitator and actors share duties?

Did non-key population members present a barrier to effective communication?

10 Questions, concerns, and suggestions

What questions did participants ask?

What concerns did they raise?

What suggestions did they make?

How can they shape future Magnet Theatre sessions and thematic choices?

11 Feedback for advocacy and action

What issues were relayed to appropriate NGOs or community-based organisations?
To which organisations?

What action was taken as a result of the Magnet Theatre session?

How did the advocacy or action benefit the key population?

Section F: Suggested Dilemmas to Be Addressed in Magnet Theatre

Choice 1

Shall I disclose my MSM identity and risk losing my parents and suffering humiliation by society?

Shall I ask my regular partner to use condoms and risk him thinking I have an STI or that I suspect him of being unfaithful?

Shall I use a condom and risk having less-pleasurable sex?

Shall I go to the government hospital for STI treatment and risk being subjected to unpleasant behaviour from the staff and other clients?

Shall I go for HIV testing and risk being branded by everyone for the rest of my life?

Shall I carry condoms when I go out for street sex and risk harassment from the police if they find them?

Shall I use condoms with my wife and risk her thinking I have been having unsafe sex outside my marriage?

Shall I share needles whilst injecting drugs with my friends and risk getting HIV or Hepatitis C?

Shall I go to the health centre for treatment of the abscess on my leg and risk disapproval and stigma about my drug-taking from the doctors and nurses?

OR

Choice 2



Shall I keep my MSM identity a secret and cause suffering to myself and eventually to my wife?



Shall I have sex without condoms and risk getting HIV?



Shall I not use a condom and risk getting HIV or an STI?



Shall I get treatment from my local, unqualified doctor and risk not getting the correct treatment and not having my STI properly treated?



Shall I not go for HIV testing and risk getting ill and not getting treatment when I need it?



Shall I not carry condoms and risk unprotected sex and possible HIV and STIs?



Shall I not use condoms and risk her and potentially my unborn child getting HIV?



Shall I buy my own needles and syringes and risk disclosing within my community that I am an IDU?



Shall I self-medicate and risk losing my leg?



