Burkinabe Youth Tackle Social Challenges Through Cinema

The Peace through Development program (PDEVII) uses the social communication tools of mobile cinema and participatory theater to engage and motivate young people in Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso to take on a more proactive role in their community’s development. In each country PDEVII has produced a film reflecting the particular social challenges faced by young people. The project has also provided intensive training for youth to build their skills in facilitating discussions around the sensitive issues raised in the films and in encouraging analysis and reflection among their peers. In this way, mobile cinema provides impetus and a social space for young people to address the challenges they face and to propose their own solutions.

Torodi is a small village in the arid north-eastern Sahel region of Burkina Faso. Over a number of years the village has witnessed significant rural exodus, due to the limited economic opportunities. Many of those that have stayed behind find employment in traditional gold mining. However, the gold mines have also inadvertently become sites for young people to engage in drug abuse. On a typically hot and dry Sahelian evening in April, PDEVII-trained youth set up a large screen in a public square, around which more than 200 inhabitants of Torodi gathered to watch “Fatim’s Struggle”. The film was particularly relevant for the setting as, among other youth issues, it tackled drug abuse and violence, their effects on the community, and how young people could act positively to change the social environment. The fact that it was translated into the fulfulde language spoken by the main ethnic group of Torodi, the Fulani, enhanced the resonance among viewers. By all accounts, the film captivated its audience.

After the screening emerged a lively debate amongst the audience and the facilitators on the issues raised in the film: drug abuse, crime, violence and youth-led community development. The discussions about the film’s protagonists continued even as the facilitators packed up their material. The feedback from audience members demonstrated that the seeds of positive attitude change had been planted. It was clear that for the population of Torodi, the mobile cinema screening of “Fatim’s Struggle” provided a much-needed platform to reflect on a concrete community challenge.

“This film shows us that young people can themselves work for their community without waiting for the government to take action.”

“This film shows the consequences of crime [...] young people have to avoid crime and work to develop our communities”

- Young mobile cinema viewers