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‘DANCE LIKE EVERYONE’S WASHING’

#dance4WASH

IN AFRICA, MUSIC AND DANCE MOBILISE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR WASH



THE GHETTO KIDS UGANDA:
From a viral handwashing song to dancing with Shakira at the 2026 Football World Cup Halftime Show – and much more from Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia







The popular saying 'dance like nobody's watching' has been turned on its head by **Dance4WASH's award-winning campaign** inviting young people in Africa to 'dance like everyone's washing'.

"Many people look up to artists. These are their heroes. And whenever these people are talking about things that will affect their communities positively, the masses follow." Henry Ohanga, also known as Octopizzo, should know. He is a Kenyan musician and influencer with a massive following of 4.6 million people on social media. Music and dance have a big role to play, he says: *"Everybody has a smartphone now, even in the slums. 'Edutainment' is the best way to reach people."*

Octopizzo is one of several African influencers that worked with Dance4WASH, a joint initiative of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Viva con Agua and African artists committed to raising awareness about human rights to water. Dance4WASH harnesses the power of the 'universal language' of dance, music and art to engage young people, promote good hygiene and simple hand washing and raise awareness about rights to water, sanitation and health issues (WASH). The campaigns reached an impressive 1.2 million people in a matter of months. It has also won the NRW Media Award for sustainable development, which recognises 'outstanding and successful examples' of social media campaigns promoting international development goals. So how did this 'outstanding' campaign come about, and what lessons can be learned from it?

A JOINT EFFORT FOR INFECTION CONTROL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Dance4WASH started as effort to improve infection prevention and control through handwashing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea was born at the 2022 Millerntor Gallery festival where WASH experts Arne Panesar and Jan Schlenk of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) first witnessed the powerful messaging on water, sanitation and hygiene that Viva con Agua, GIZ's Sport for Development and African athletes and artists like Octopizzo brought to life in their Universal Languages approach. *"We knew from our own work with local influencers how effective they are in reaching young audiences"* says Schlenk. *"Viva von Agua and young artists were perfect partners for us."* Panesar and Schlenk approached them, got the go ahead from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and a few months later the Fit for School Africa Initiative and Viva con Agua Germany with its independent Viva con Agua associations in Africa and other local partners jointly mounted the Dance4WASH campaign.

USING 'UNIVERSAL LANGUAGES' TO PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE

The Dance4WASH project draws on Viva con Agua's wider strategy of using the 'universal languages' of dance, music and art to raise awareness about water and sanitation issues in a fun and engaging way. Belinda Abraham, who managed the project for Viva con Agua, says Viva con Agua's Waterproof campaign calls for 'water for all and all for water' and this emphasis on water as a human right for all entail much wider engagement—especially with young people. Within less than a year, Dance4WASH realised a multi-country campaign with school and community-based dance competitions; artists creating music and dance videos amplifying WASH messages to create a buzz of popular interest amongst their followers; and the distribution of country-specific material targeting 500,000 children ages eight to 18.

CHOREOGRAPHING THE MESSAGES

The collaboration began with initial conceptual meetings between the partners involved to determine the overall aim and design of the programme, followed by a series of workshops held in the six participating countries: Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. In each country, Viva con Agua international and local representatives, local musicians, dancers, and artists with large social media followers, as well as officials from Ministries of Health and Education, took part in discussions to determine how evidence-based and contextually appropriate hygiene messages could best be conveyed in an engaging and fun way through dance, music and art.

WASH IT, SHAKE IT, BREAK IT, MAKE IT!

Out of this collaborative creative process came the key slogan:

'WASH IT, SHAKE IT, BREAK IT, MAKE IT'.

WASH IT: Wash your hands with soap and water.

SHAKE IT: Shake off bad Habits.

BREAK IT: Break the spread of infection.

MAKE IT: Make the world a healthier, better place.

Once the overarching messages and approach had been agreed, each country was largely responsible for honing its own campaign of catchy songs and dance videos, based on the Wash it, Shake it, Break it, Make it slogan. The material created by musicians, artists and dancers was then shared via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok for a period of five months in 2023.

FROM AFRICA FOR AFRICA: KEEPING IT LOCAL

Once the overarching aims and activities had been agreed, the campaign's momentum was largely driven by the participating countries themselves. In Malawi, for example, where poor sanitation and access to safe water in rural areas leads to high rates of water-borne diseases such as cholera and typhoid and where diarrheal diseases are a leading cause of death in under-fives, the social media campaign was launched by a local marketing agency, Ketase, working with Nyalimuzik, a production house in Lilongwe run by influencer and 'artpreneur' Kelvin Before Gumbi (known as KBG). He engaged with local influencers, government officials, teachers and dance troops to ensure the hygiene messaging was coordinated and consistent. Dance workshops and competitions were also organised in schools with prizes of water tanks, filters or toilets offered as incentives.

INSTANT REACH AND A NUMBER ONE HIT

Once the songs and videos spread on social media, Dance4WASH rapidly gained traction. According to analysis compiled by Ketase's social media team and Nyalimuzik in Malawi at the end of the project, Dance4WASH far exceeded its target of reaching and engaging 500,000 young people.

By September 2023, across the six participating countries, the campaign had already reached at least 1,200,000 young people on social media, as well as getting thousands of likes and shares, and coverage in traditional media outlets. No further monitoring has been conducted since the project ended, but with the dynamic and multiplying effect of sharing via different platforms, those figures are likely to have increased since the project ended. In addition, in Malawi, Shasha Amasamba ('Cool kids wash'), a song written and performed by Henry Czar and Beejay in collaboration with Zaluso Arts, was so popular it quickly topped the national charts.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE CAMPAIGNS

Given the very short design and implementation period for Dance4WASH, and the plethora of different funding, technical, coordinating and creative partners involved in this ambitious project, there is much to be celebrated – but also much that can be learned about using such an approach for the future.

For Viva con Agua's project manager Belinda Abraham, 'the biggest challenge was actually what we celebrate – the diversity of Dance-4WASH'. Given that Viva con Agua is actually what she calls a 'cosmos' of different affiliated organisations (in Europe and in Africa), plus the diversity of technical and creative people involved in the project across six different countries, sometimes with slightly different approaches or timeframes, coordinating the project was at times challenging. There are also, she says, always things that could have been done better with more time and money: For example, creating more multilingual content that is appropriate and relevant for each country, and making the campaigns even more interactive, by encouraging more user-generated content.

Nicole Siegmund, a GIZ regional manager and advisor for the Fit for School programme, welcomes the success of Dance4WASH but also cautions that the effects of such campaigns can be difficult to measure: Clicks and likes do not necessarily translate into lasting impact, and assessing results is difficult using conventional WASH monitoring methods. The approach needs new ways of monitoring how people have internalised the messages and discussions are now ongoing about how best to measure the success of such universal language campaigns and link the approach to conventional monitoring methods.

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN A CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN WATER AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Dance4WASH has shown that the Universal Languages approach can generate a lot of buzz and excitement and make WASH issues 'cool' and fun for young people in a way traditional messaging has often failed to do. In Uganda, for example, a single video from the Waterproof dance collaboration with Ghetto kids has already reached 1.5 million people, been played 1.9 million times, received 104,384 'likes' and been shared 3,434 times.

Although the project is now over, the creative connections continue to flourish, with three of the artists – Octopizzo from Kenya, Zex Bilangilangi from Uganda, and Suffix from Malawi – recently coming together to record another song: 'On My Own'. The song, says Octopizzo, is about the need for people to work together and to empower people to bring about change, which is what his Octopizzo Foundation is campaigning for in Kenya.

The challenges are immense: Africa is the only region in the world where the number of people without access to water is growing. About 387 million people lived without access to basic drinking water services in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 – an increase from 350 million people in 2000, according to a WHO/ UNICEF progress report.

GIZ's Fit for School programme, the broader WASH community, Viva con Agua and local NGOs such as the Octopizzo Foundation all believe that the universal languages approach can successfully engage young people to campaign for clean water as a human right. However, 'supporting campaigns for clean water as a human right should go hand in hand with investments in the needed WASH infrastructure – and with systems to monitor and maintain this infrastructure, both in schools and beyond', says GIZ advisor Nicole Siegmund.

CLICKS ALONE ARE NOT ENOUGH

Octopizzo believes that the Dance4WASH campaign is an exciting step in the right direction, but he warns that 'clicks' alone are not enough. People may know how to wash their hands, and why it is so important to do so as a result of the Dance4WASH campaign, but those same hands are firmly tied if they still have no access to or cannot afford clean water: 'In Kibera slum where I grew up, nobody has water running in their houses. Water is more expensive than rent. When you go to the toilet you have to buy water, or when you cook or wash clothes, you have to buy water.'

Article by Ruth Evans – published @ BMZ's Healthy DEvelopments in February 2024

Listen to our podcast, read this story and watch the videos to get the full picture:
› ***https://health.bmz.de/podcasts/podcast-dance-like-everyones-washing***

HOW CAN WE MOBILISE COMMUNITIES TO DRIVE LASTING CHANGE FOR WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)? VIVA CON AGUA'S UNIVERSAL LANGUAGES FOR CHANGE (UL4C)



MAKING WASH ENGAGING, PARTICIPATORY AND JOYFUL

Viva con Agua's Universal Languages for Change (UL4C) approach harnesses the power of arts, sports, music, dance and games to promote sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) behaviours.

Rooted in the belief that water is a human right, UL4C creates joyful and inclusive spaces where people can learn, participate and drive change within their communities. Rather than relying on conventional awareness-raising or messages that point fingers, the approach uses creativity to spark curiosity, build knowledge and encourage positive behaviours.

By engaging children, young people, families and entire communities, UL4C transforms WASH education into an experience that inspires collective action and empowers people to become agents of change.

FROM CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT TO LASTING IMPACT

UL4C goes beyond raising awareness. It connects behaviour change with access to sustainable WASH services and strengthens local structures to ensure that improvements last.

LEARNING, PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

UL4C demonstrates how creative and joyful approaches can make WASH more engaging, strengthen community participation and inspire positive behavioural change. For these changes to have a lasting impact, awareness and behaviour change must be supported by reliable infrastructure, local capacities and systems that ensure WASH services remain functional and sustainable.



Learn more
www.susana.org
community/themes/ul4bc

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