

Eshageada UKIMWI Datoga!



A culture-specific film project from Mbulu/Hanang, Tanzania

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Eshageada UKIMWI Datoga is available in DVD and VHS format, with or without subtitles in English and Swahili. A web-version of the film is available at <https://bora.hib.no/handle/10049/115>.

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Employing film in HIV prevention: a culture-specific film project from Mbulu/Hanang, Tanzania

Eshageada UKIMWI Datoga!

Eshageada UKIMWI Datoga! (“Datoga, let's beware of AIDS!”) is a film on HIV/AIDS targeting the Datoga of Tanzania, a people roughly estimated to number 100,000. The Datoga are characterised by a number of features which mark a contrast to the majority population of Tanzania. Customarily they are a cattle-herding people speaking a Southern-Nilotic language in a country where 95% are Bantu-speakers, and their recent history has been dominated by considerable tension with colonial and post-colonial governments. The recorded history of the Datoga is characterised by violent incidents with disastrous consequences to Datoga culture and adaptation – from the execution of ritual experts by the Germans in 1908 and severe incidents of mass arrests of Datoga people to the more recent initiation of a huge wheat cultivation project in the heart of Datoga grazing land. The rapid depletion of land for pasture is a key to understanding the present situation of multi-sector marginalisation of the Datoga within the larger Tanzanian community. There is a considerable degree of scepticism in the Datoga population towards external intervention, which must be understood in the light of the harshly experienced history of the past 100 years.

Tanzania has been severely hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, but the limited research conducted on prevalence among the Datoga shows rates considerably lower than in the general Tanzanian population. A number of cultural traits and social practices however indicate a potential rapid spread of HIV when the virus fully enters Datoga communities. The general level of education and command of Swahili is low in the Datoga population. In addition, many Datoga today live in small enclaves in relatively remote geographic locations. Large numbers of Datoga are therefore for various reasons out of reach of most mainstream HIV preventive projects. This scenario is the background of the present initiative.

The group of individuals who have planned and realised this film project has shared the conviction that there is an urgent need for alternative approaches for the communication of the threat of HIV/AIDS to Datoga-speaking peoples. '*Eshageada UKIMWI Datoga*' attempts to address the vulnerability of the Datoga to HIV/AIDS in an alternative way. A basic concept behind the film is that initiatives to change cultural practices should come from within the community.

The Datoga language is used throughout the film. The approach of the project has moreover emphasised the employment of a vernacular that does not violate norms of communication on the many sensitive issues implied in the HIV/AIDS challenge. In the film we draw on central Datoga song, dance and ritual to enhance the communication of

the message at stake. Such an approach appeared to be particularly important when dealing with culturally deep-seated local norms and practices. Both “traditional” and “modern” risky practices are targeted in the film.

Individuals have been recruited to the project with the prime criteria being cultural competence. The actors, speakers and presenters are all respected and perceived as trustworthy within Datoga society. They include healers, diviners and other men and women of traditional authority, but also, for example, a well-known Datoga businessman and a high-ranking government official. These individuals have also had a decisive say in identifying the main topics and themes to be addressed in the film, and the forms in which to present them.

Filming in Datoga communities is a sensitive issue in itself, but the realisation of this project involved the filming of events which for various reasons are particularly sensitive – not the least in the sense that the film addresses topics such as sexuality, sexually-transmitted disease, illness, dying etc. A number of strategies were chosen to overcome this obstacle. Small and discreet video cameras were employed in ways that caused as little disturbance as possible. Open-ended scripts were developed, where the person behind the camera would appear as an attentive participant trying to catch the essentials of the events unfolding in front of the camera. In some cases, the camera and microphone were

left on a tripod while the photographer retreated so as not to disturb the situation recorded.

Before starting the filming, an intensive two-week workshop was arranged (January/February 2003) where a professional anthropologist and film maker (Rolf Scott) introduced the basic skills of using a small video camera and carrying out basic computer editing. Most of the recordings and the editing of the film have been conducted by amateurs, some of whom are Datoga who were introduced to computers and video cameras during the course of the project. The reasoning behind having relatively inexperienced Datoga people carry out the bulk of the filming was linked to attempts to minimise the distance between the recorders and those recorded. In a number of contexts the filming was facilitated by, and was in some cases completely dependent on, the fact that a Datoga was operating the camera. Cultural competence among these individuals was considered a prerequisite for the open-ended approach chosen. The ability to know what was important or less important to focus upon was crucial on a number of occasions.

Another motivation behind the present film approach was to create local competence that could facilitate further development of the film in accordance with the discovery of weaknesses, and adjust the content in relation to new developments in AIDS prevention, treatment and care. Based on feedback from the Datoga audiences and research on the impact of HIV interventions in the area, new scenes have been shot and



Participants at the film workshop (Peter Gasheka, Herman Malleyeck and Amani Gaseri)

the first version of the film was re-edited accordingly in October 2006.

The Datoga of Mbulu/Hanang live in a rural environment which is linguistically and culturally one of the most complex in Africa, and it was also envisaged that local technical competence in making culture-specific films would be drawn on for similar approaches targeting other groups in the area. At the moment of writing, another culture-specific HIV prevention film is being finalised, targeting the neighbouring Iraqw population of the Manyara region and drawing on competence developed in the present programme.

The topics of the film

A number of Datoga institutions entail risk in connection with the spread of HIV. The Datoga participants found that the most important institution to be targeted in an HIV context was the *ratta* institution, which implies that a man has legitimate sexual access to his brother's wives and vice versa, as all children produced by a woman in principle belong to her husband's clan. *Ratta*-related practices are featured and elaborated upon throughout the film by actors and speakers of various categories, and the conclusions drawn by them all is that the coming of HIV/AIDS has turned this institution, however central and valued in Datoga culture, into a set of potentially deadly practices.

Another main topic of the film is the issue of alcohol consumption and associated risky sexual practices. Drinking alcohol, primarily in the

form of the sacred honey mead, has been the prerogative of male elders in Datoga society, but the deterioration of traditional norms and the increased availability of alcohol-containing beverages for sale have created new patterns of alcohol consumption. The use of alcohol has also become common among Datoga youth and women in many Datoga dominated communities, and – as is the case elsewhere – there is a strong link between excessive alcohol consumption and risky sexual practices.

Although the deterioration of norms regulating alcohol consumption is an obvious risk factor for HIV spread among the Datoga, the messages presented in the film do not try to advocate a simple “return to the old days”. The same argument applies to premarital sexual intercourse, which has been rare and has been strongly sanctioned within Datoga society. However, a point is made of revealing how customary Datoga norms and practices do not imply merely risk, but constitute an essential resource to be drawn upon in an HIV prevention context. Nonetheless, fully-fledged reinforcement or revival of customs is not what the committee planning the overall content and details of the film opted for.

Other potentially HIV-relevant institutions or practices could have been focused on in the film, but through lengthy processes of discussion a broadly constituted Datoga group found that the new patterns of alcohol consumption and the *ratta* institution and its related practices were assessed as implying the most immediate dangers to the broad

masses of Datoga. Examples of topics that have received relatively limited attention in the film are condoms, the increased availability of antiretroviral treatment, and the dangers associated with traditional practices such as male circumcision (when several hundred boys can be circumcised with the same knife) or various types of scarification. The rationale behind these decisions is diverse:

- the availability of condoms among the target group of this particular film is virtually non-existent, and this “rubber thing” – as it is called by one of the actors in the film – is at present not a realistic option for Datoga sexual partners. The condom is however mentioned in the film, and should receive attention in the sessions of information/discussion accompanying the film presentation.

- the availability of antiretroviral (ARV) treatment varies substantially from region to region, and from district to district within Tanzania. Many Datoga live in areas where access to ARV is not likely in the near future, and it was therefore difficult to address medication in general terms. This is thus another essential topic that could be addressed specifically by the individuals showing the film in a particular area.

- although the practice of male circumcision and scarification implies certain health risks, the danger of spreading HIV through these practice has been judged to be relatively low by health personnel working in the area. It was moreover suspected that

focus on such customs would distract attention from the challenges linked to the customary institutionalisation of multiple sexual partners and “modern” risky practices.

The structure of the film

The first half of the film, the story of Gidemeda, visualises the precarious situation of the Datoga people today. Gidemeda is portrayed as a Datoga with four wives living in a village in Central Tanzania. One day he gets a message from *Marembeda*, his Datoga homeland, that an important ritual expert has died and that there will be a large-scale funeral, a *bunged*. This is a most central ritual and social event in Datoga culture and, as in Gidemeda's case, involves long-distance travelling for some participants. The *bunged* entails nine months of elaborate preparations before the final day when the deceased is ‘reborn’ as a guardian spirit to serve the Datoga he/she left behind.

After receiving the message, Gidemeda leaves his home together with one of his wives to embark on the long journey to *Marembeda*. They pass through several major urban centres along the way. In Dodoma, Gidemeda enters a bar and is being served bottled beer, a social circumstance and a type of drink he is not accustomed to. He gets drunk and becomes sexually involved with one of the barmaids who, as later becomes clear, was HIV positive.



Gidemeda (Actor: Hayte Samo)

He and his wife then continue the journey towards *Marembeda* where he attends the *bunged* together with several thousand Datoga who have gathered from large parts of the Tanzanian mainland. On this occasion, he establishes sexual relations with women married to members of his patrilineage, and he also continues to engage in such relations after he returns to his homestead.

After some time, he starts feeling ill and begins a quest for therapy. First he goes to a diviner, who employs the technique referred to as “throwing stones” to assess the cause of the problem. The diviner's conclusion is dismaying, but he directs Gidemeda to a certain healer of the powerful Daremgajega clan of the Datoga. The Daremgajega healer conducts his healing ritual and advises Gidemeda on how to try to save his life. But Gidemeda continues to suffer. He is advised to try modern medicine, and goes back to *Marembeda* and Haydom Lutheran Hospital where he is admitted. Here he is tested, and when he is found to be HIV-positive he is counselled by a nurse on how to take care of his own health (“to prolong his life”), and how to avoid infecting others, such as his own wives and the wives of his brothers and lineage mates.

After some time, Gidemeda is discharged from the hospital in better condition, but soon finds himself at yet another stage in his quest for therapy. He seeks the help of a respected healer from another ethnic group, but is rejected as the healer “does not know how to treat AIDS”. At this stage Gidemeda's condition becomes worse, and towards the end

of the story we find Gidemedea lying in the compound of a relative in *Marembeda* talking to Gesso Bajuta, a Datoga businessman from Arusha. Bajuta is a major importer and distributor of bovine and human drugs in Tanzania. The two together reflect on the new disease and the threat it poses – not just to Gidemedea and his wives and his *ratta*, but also to the larger Datoga community.

The second half of the film consists of several sections. The first is simply a rephrasing of the story about Gidemedea in the form of a song performed by a group of young men, a song that appears as if composed by one of his wives according to Datoga criteria. It is accompanied by visual images of central features of the film about Gidemedea.



Herman Malleyeck filming “The song of Gidemedea’s wife”

The next section consists of recordings from gatherings where Datoga men and women discuss issues related to HIV/AIDS and say prayers. Such occasions consist of forms of communication that lie at the core of Datoga culture and everyday life. Worries about the state of people, cattle and land are presented and discussed, and each speaker ends with a call for, and receives, the vigorous approval of the audience.

The last section is an appeal by Matthew Sedoyeka, the present District Commissioner of Karatu District and a deeply respected individual within the Datoga community. Through his speech Sedoyeka reveals his genuine concern for Datoga communities, and simultaneously points a way forward for Datoga people.

Final remarks

Eshageada UKIMWI Datoga has sprung out of 15 years of research collaboration between two Norwegian medical anthropologists and their Datoga counterparts. The film can be seen as an attempt to bridge research and intervention in a way that makes a fundamental difference. It also represents an example of a community-based health project, where it is the health-related concerns and priorities of Datoga that are given a voice rather than directives and strategy documents from international, national, regional, and district institutions involved in HIV/AIDS intervention. This is a film made by the Datoga for the Datoga.

GeGCA-NUFU Publications:

Vol 1	Simon, Vendelin (2002) Local culture: Risk or resource in times of AIDS? A case study from Mbulu in Northern Tanzania. M. Phil. thesis, Centre for Women's and Gender Research, University of Bergen. ISBN 82-91878-06-4
Vol 2	Scott, Rolf and Trygve Tollefsen (2003) Workshop in documentary filming, Tanzania 2003.
Vol 3	Rekdal, Ole Bjørn and Yusufu Q. Lawi (eds.) (2003) Gender, generation and communication in times of AIDS. Proceedings from a workshop held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 6-9 August 2002. ISBN 82-7815-088-5
Vol 4	Rekdal, Ole Bjørn, Astrid Blystad, Herman Malleyeck and Peter Gasheka (2004) Datoga aeshegeda UKIMWI! (Datoga, let's beware of AIDS!): A culture specific HIV prevention film targeting Datoga communities in Tanzania. Bergen: Centre for International Health. (58 min., subtitles in Swahili and English). VHS version: ISBN 82-7815-102-4, DVD version: ISBN 82-7815-103-2
Vol 5	Gombachika, Belinda Thandizo (2004) Experiences of HIV-positive pregnant women: A qualitative study from Lilongwe Urban, Malawi. M. Phil. thesis, Centre for International Health, University of Bergen. ISBN 82-7815-109-1
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Vol 8	Våga, Bodil Bø (2005) The search for care and cure: Exploring health seeking behaviour in Mbulu District, Tanzania. Department of Public Health and Primary Health Care, University of Bergen. ISBN-10 82-7815-119-9, ISBN-13 978-82-7815-119-9
Vol 9	Bell, Karin (2005) Nursing care in an African context: A qualitative study from Haydom Lutheran Hospital, Tanzania. Department of Public Health and Primary Health Care, University of Bergen. ISBN-10 82-7815-120-2, ISBN-13 978-82-7815-120-2
Vol 10	Moland, Karen Marie, Nils Gunnar Songstad, Astrid Blystad (eds.) (2005) Gender, generation and communication in times of AIDS. Proceedings from a workshop held in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, 23-25 November 2004. ISBN-10 82-7815-121-0, ISBN-13 978-82-7815-121-0
Vol 11	Rekdal, Ole Bjørn (2006) Bibliography on Mbulu/Hanang.
Vol 12	Øyaseter, Maria and Marie Grytdal Eilertsen (2006) Locally provided HIV-information - A study from Haydom, Manyara Region, Tanzania, 2003. ISBN-10 82-7815-133-4, ISBN-13 978-72-7815-133-4.

GeGCA (“Gender, generation and communication in times of AIDS”) is a collaboration project between University of Bergen, Bergen University College, Department of History at University of Dar es Salaam, and School of Nursing at Muhimbili University College of Health Sciences. The project is funded by NUFU (The Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Higher Education) for 2002-2007.

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