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# SITE VISIT: Child-to-Child Program in Uganda

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A Child-to-Child Program was established in Uganda in 1983 by a group of private citizens concerned with the promotion of health education. UNICEF provided initial financial and logistical support, and the program continues today with assistance from the Bergen Schools Project in Norway. In Uganda approximately 20-30 schools have Child-to-Child programs. Most of the schools are located in the city and its surrounding areas, with a few found in isolated rural areas. The program is relatively informal, and participation is voluntary. Students are recruited from standards 5, 6 and 7 and receive instruction from classroom teachers.

The main focus of the program is on the preparation of plays, songs, and poems with health-related themes. Child-to-Child hosts a half-hour radio program each Saturday morning with materials prepared by the participating schools. Child-to-Child themes are also presented through plays given at parents' meetings and common gatherings. The opportunity for Child-to-Child participants to perform publicly acts as a powerful, motivating force, which, in turn, enhances participant morale and commitment. The themes most commonly addressed in the Ugandan program include immunization, oral rehydration, nutrition, and personal hygiene, with attention placed on the identification and eradication of harmful traditional practices.

The communication of health messages is a central component of the Ugandan Child-to-Child Program. This communication occurs largely between groups, where the message is transferred from a group of children to a group of respondents. The group-to-group mode of communication is in contrast to the one-to-one approach that often characterizes the Child-to-Child Programs. Proponents of the group-to-group method claim it is a less stressful and more effective approach when children are attempting to translate often contradictory messages to their parents. A drawback to this approach, however, is the tendency for adults to view the children's performances simply as entertainment, so that it has little ability to affect behaviors. Further investigation is needed to determine how an audience interprets these messages and to what extent they are internalized and acted upon.

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*Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.* CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999.