

# A VILLAGE PLAY

During a recent meeting of women's organisations in the Northern Transvaal, one group of village women were asked to give a presentation on the theme of group organisation.

They chose to do a play about the importance of group organisation in relation to health in their village. This is a synopsis of their play, which was presented in Pedi.

## SCENE 1

An old woman starts suffering from pellagra dementia(1). People in the village send a telegram to her daughter who works in town. She has done well for herself and 'arrives' wearing high heels and pretending to be driving a car.

She tries to explain to her mother that she needs to go to hospital, but the old woman refuses, saying she will die if she goes there.



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1) pellagra dementia - mental disorder due to vitamin deficiency

SCENE 2

Her daughter eventually persuades the old woman to go to see the doctor and they get into their imaginary car, the old woman shakily leaning on a tree branch and talking nonsense.

SCENE 3

On arrival at the hospital they are met by the 'doctor' dressed in a white sheet and carrying a chrome-plated coat hook for a stethoscope. The doctor is played by a woman who used to work in an urban hospital as a nurse-aide; she brings to the role years of experience of the treatment the old woman is likely to get.

She examines her, starting with the inevitable and derogatory "What's the matter, gogo (2)?" Speaking the only few sentences of English in the play, she announces at the end of her brief examination, shouting into the old woman's face, "You are too bloody weak!" This obviously sounded familiar to the largely Pedi-speaking audience, who responded with laughter and applause.

The 'doctor' tells the daughter that her mother must eat fish, meat, eggs, fresh vegetables, milk etc.

They leave the doctor and head back for the drought stricken homestead where the old woman lives.

SCENE 4

Meanwhile, the village women have been discussing the old woman's illness, and the plight of many people, both old and young, in their community who suffer from malnutrition-related sicknesses.

They have heard of women in neighbouring villages forming groups to work collectively on projects involving vegetable growing, chicken keeping, fruit tree planting etc. They hire a truck from the local shopkeeper to take them into the

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2) gogo - grandmother

local centre, where there is a social worker who is helping such groups to organise themselves.

The women tell the social worker of the old woman with pellagra, and of their ideas to work together to tackle the problem of malnutrition. She agrees to help them.

### SCENE 5

The women go home and go from house to house telling people in the village of their plan to work together. They form a women's organisation and start projects to provide food and build health.



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