

TRAINING PLAN FOR RUNNING A WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

by Leif Packalén
World Comics-Finland 2007

enlarged edition



Comics workshop in Bikaner, India, 2007.
Picture: Sharad Sharma



Comics workshop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2006.
Picture: Leif Packalen.



Comics workshop in Barr Elias, Lebanon, 2005.
Picture: Kirsti Palonen.



Comics workshop in Sri Lanka, 2005.
Picture: Sharad Sharma.

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Copyright: text and illustrations (unless otherwise stated): Leif Packalén, World Comics Finland, 2006. *The illustrations are from various comics manuals, workshop reports, and diary sketch books from World Comics' workshops 1998-2005. Strips in the "To the tutors"-section by Sharad Sharma.*

This version has been edited and enlarged in August 2007.



To the tutors:

Grassroots comics are not very well known yet in development work, so you must explain to people what grassroots comics are about and how they are useful. Here are some replies to frequently asked questions.

Why are grassroots comics useful?

It is an inexpensive medium, which can be used by people, who normally have no access to media. You need only paper, pens and a good story to tell.

The technology involved is simple, you only need access to a photocopy machine or a photocopying shop.

Grassroots comics have credibility in the communities. People are much more interested in their fellow community members' opinions rather than in those of outsiders. If you use local language and idioms your credibility is higher.

Grassroots comics are new and attract therefore attention.

WHY ONLY A-4 SIZE PAPER ?



WHY ONLY A-4 SIZE PAPER ?



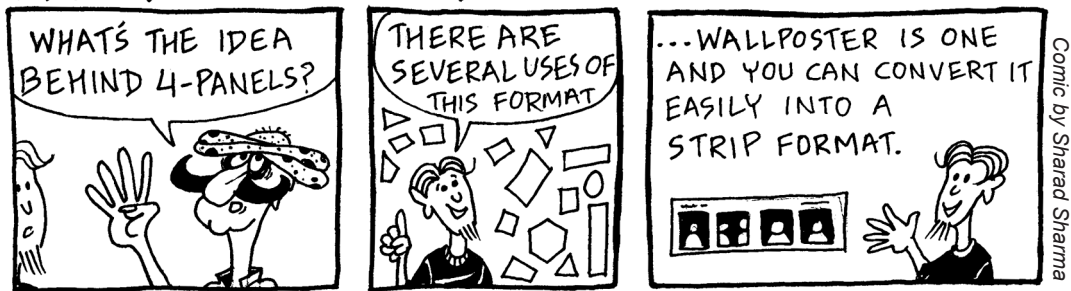
AS IT IS EASILY AVAILABLE, EVEN IN A REMOTE VILLAGE.



ALSO A-4 SIZE XEROX MACHINE IS AVAILABLE ALMOST EVERYWHERE.

Comic by Sharad Sharma

WHY ONLY FOUR PANELS ?



For what can you use grassroots comics?

If a group of people wants to communicate directly to members of their own community, they can make a campaign using grassroots comics, wallposters or small booklets, or both. Even ten wallposters placed in strategic places can reach a very large part of the community members.

You can raise awareness about an issue, you can come with new solutions and promote organisations that are involved in development work.

You can make sets of comics and distribute them to decision makers, politicians, officials, and the media as advocacy work on specific issues.

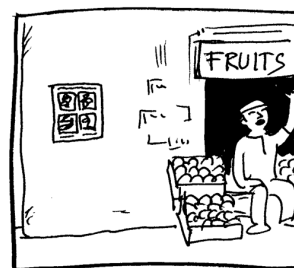
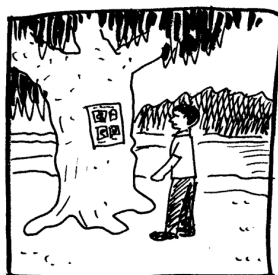
You can use grassroots comics successfully in peer group education. A youngster believes another youngster more easily than he/she believes an adult.

If you need to inform NGO members about something, a short story in a comics format will receive much more attention than a written report.

If you have a long report, you can make it much more attractive by using comics to illustrate it. But make sure the comics are about the same issue as the report, as some people will read only the comics!



Comics create debate!



If a group wants to use grassroots comics what should be considered?

How to best reach the target audience is the first consideration. Which comics format will work best for you? If you need to get your message to all villagers in a district, you probably have to choose wallposter comics distributed in strategic places in the village. If you want to give a message to twenty women group leaders, who will attend a meeting, probably an 8-page booklet might be a good choice. Again, if you have a sensitive issue that you want to address and the receiving group is small, perhaps the 8-page accordion minicomics or the 16-page minibook would be good, as they are small and discreet formats.

What is the exact message you want to go out with? What is the expected outcome of your campaign? What exactly do you want to change? Here you have to spend time discussing within the group and you need to work out the answers so that all in the group are on the same lines.

The practical circumstances determine the scope of what you can do. You will have to decide:

Who will be in charge of the production of the comics?

Will the comics be made in a workshop or over a longer time?

How many comics can you afford to make?

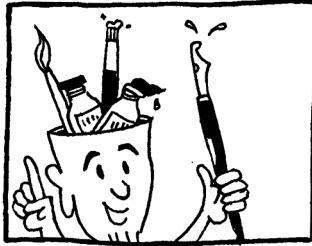
How many comics will be chosen for copying and distribution?

Where will the comics be photocopied/printed?

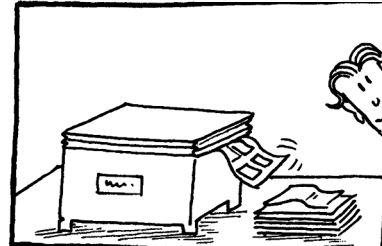
WHY ONLY BLACK & WHITE?



WHY NOT IN COLOUR?



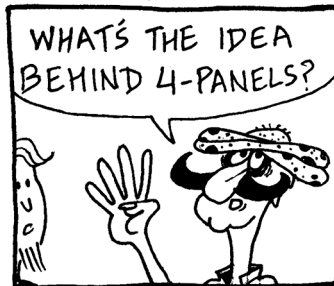
TO DRAW B&W YOU DON'T NEED MUCH RESOURCES



...AND IT IS EASIER TO PHOTOCOPY.

Comic by Sharad Sharma

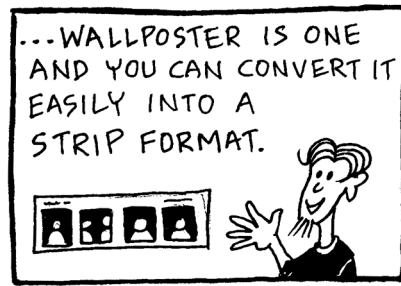
WHY ONLY FOUR PANELS?



WHAT'S THE IDEA BEHIND 4-PANELS?



THERE ARE SEVERAL USES OF THIS FORMAT



...WALLPOSTER IS ONE AND YOU CAN CONVERT IT EASILY INTO A STRIP FORMAT.

Comic by Sharad Sharma

After a successful workshop, how to maintain the momentum and enthusiasm?

It is important to collect all comics that are made in a workshop and if possible make photocopies available to all participants.

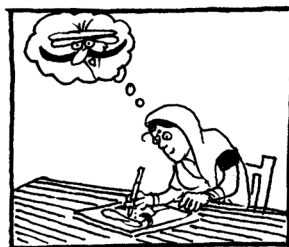
Use the comics in reports and documents of your organisation and if you have a website, upload comics on the website.

Try to make sure that the group which has made comics, will be able to continue, i.e. they have access to paper and pens (and occasionally photocopying).

WHY NOT ARTIST?



HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM THE COMICS DRAWN BY AN ARTIST?



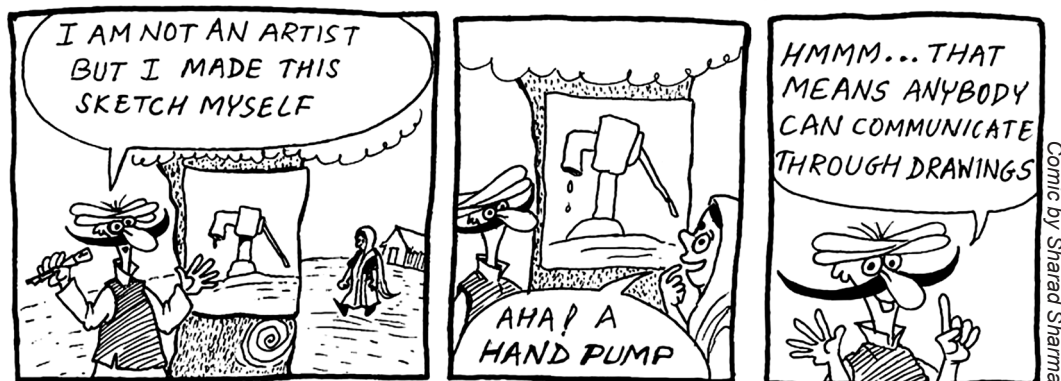
LOCALS KNOW BETTER THEIR CULTURE, DRESS, LANDSCAPE...



LOCAL DIALECTS & HUMOUR ARE THE POWER OF THESE COMICS.

Comic by Sharad Sharma

I CAN'T DRAW, SO HOW CAN I MAKE COMICS?



How to use this manual

If you have a group of motivated people (about 15 - 20), two tutors, a hall, pens, papers, other materials and access to a copying machine, you can arrange a comics workshop for producing wall-poster comics.

In this manual all steps are explained and it is assumed that you will use our manual "Wallposter comics - a great campaign tool for NGOs" as a handout to all participants.

The steps are in a logical order, but if you feel it would be better to start immediately with drawing exercises, you can change the order. Especially when you have a workshop with children it is usually better to start with drawing immediately.

A good idea could be to start with a small test group (4 -5 persons), go through all the steps, gain experience and confidence, before doing the first "real" workshop. The grassroots comics method is rather simple and has proven easy to grasp in very different circumstances, so you can feel confident your group can make something out of it, too.

Enjoy making your voices heard in your society with this exciting and simple communication tool - wallposter comics!

Leif Packalén
Chairman
World Comics - Finland

August 2007



TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 1:

Description: Introducing the tutors and the participants to each other.

Action: A host presents the tutors, who then themselves give a short summary of who they are and what they have done in relation to the grassroots comics.

After this the participants introduce themselves, name and background, one by one.

Results: Everybody knows each other and their roles at the workshop.

Notes: At this stage the tutors can ask also what expectations the participants have and also if there are some special worries they have (some might think that they cannot draw well enough, and need to be reassured).





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 2:

Description: Orientation to the grassroots comics concept

Action: The tutors explain:

- comics are stories with a message
- grassroots comics are made by activists, not professional artists - genuine voice!
- grassroots comics are made for photocopying - show the two A4 = A3
- show samples from different groups from other countries and also from likeminded groups of similar background/size

Now you can distribute the manual “**Wallposter comics - a great campaign tool for NGOs**” to the participants.

Results: The participants understand that they are not going to make comics in the same way as they might have seen in newspapers or comic books. They understand the basic technologies involved. They are inspired by likeminded efforts by groups similar to their own, and gain confidence. Everybody has now the manual for easy reference.

Notes: Go through the sample stories properly and explain especially the messages and the target groups.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 3:

Description: Decide on the theme

Action: Divide the group in subgroups of 4 - 5 participants and ask them to suggest three themes on which they would like to make their comics. Then each group chooses one of the themes.

Results: The participants have chosen a theme, which is important to them.

Notes: If the group is already very much involved in a specific activity, the theme might be ready and there is no need to go through the choosing process.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 4:

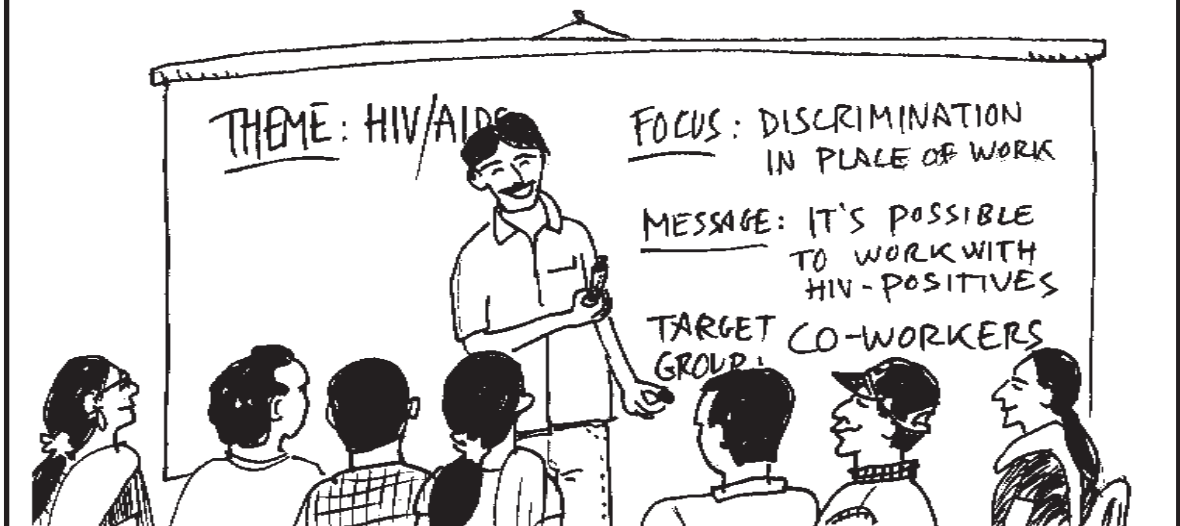
Description: Explain the concepts of focus, message and target group

Action: The tutor explains:

- a focus is necessary, otherwise the message becomes too general. A specific message is always more powerful than a broad approach.
- the message should be clear: which change or result is desired?
- the message should have a defined target group

Results: The participants understand that a focused message is better than a broad one, and that if the desired outcome and the target group are defined well, the story becomes more to the point.

Notes: Go back to the sample stories in Step 2, point out the target groups in them.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

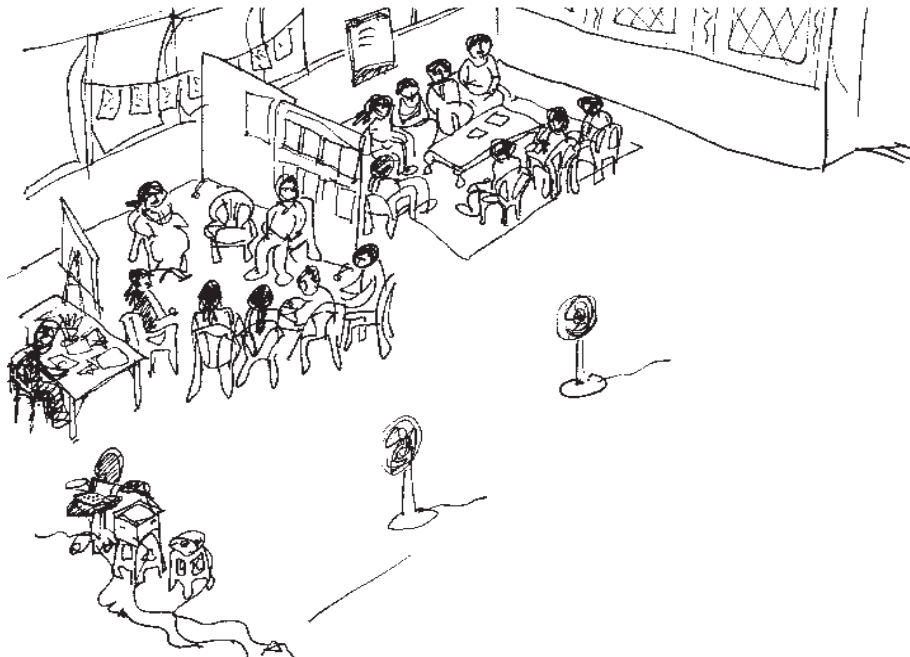
Step 5:

Description: Choose focus, message and target groups

Action: Each group is given the task to choose a focus of their theme, spell out the exact message and define their target group. This should be written down. After doing this, each group presents their choices in a full session and everybody is allowed to comment.

Results: The message and the target group are defined, the building blocks for the stories are now ready.

Notes: Stress the point that the choices the groups make should be focused messages which they are familiar with and/or feel strongly about. This will improve the quality of the stories.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 6:

Description: Propose storylines and characters

Action: Each participant is given the assignment to propose a story which carries the message to the earlier defined target group. The tutor explains that the story cannot be very complicated or have a lot of characters as the story must fit into four panels.

Each participant will read out his/her story in a full session and the tutor (and the other participants) can make comments.

Results: Each participant will have a story with a defined message and target group to work on.

Notes: Stress that drama works better than a strictly educational message. Stress that the beginning must be interesting, so that the reader wants to know what happens in the end.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 7:

Description: Break the story into four parts

Action: Explain that the story must be divided into four parts, one part for each panel. This means: only one action/location per panel.

After this each participant writes the story in four parts and shows it to the tutor. The tutor gives individual advice to each participant.

Results: Each participant has a story which is possible to fit into a four-panel wallposter comic.

Notes: Show how a story can be compacted by adding information in an explanatory box in the beginning.

Example 2. You want to emphasise the right to water.



The story: Two women discuss their plight as the high-caste landlord refuses them to take water from the tank. The women decide to speak with a women's NGO. They have a meeting and then decide to demonstrate against the landlord. The women gather with placards and in the end a policeman arrests the landlord.



TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 8:

Description: Drawing exercise I - faces

Action: Set the stories aside and start drawing. Begin with a drawing exercise of facial expressions.

- ask the participants to copy some faces from the manual and also invent new ones.

- arrange the participants in pairs and ask them to draw each other's facial expressions (posing for 1,5 minutes) 3 or 4 times.

The drawings are then put up on the walls and quickly looked through by everybody. The tutors give only encouraging feedback.

Results: Building up confidence in drawing ability.

Notes: Find something positive in each drawing!



very glad



tired



proud



astonished



suspicious



embarrassed



TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 9:

Description: Drawing exercise II - body postures

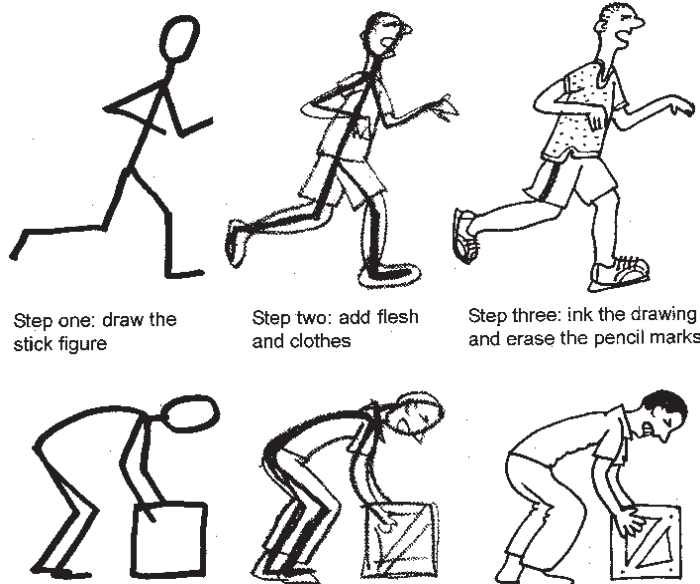
Action: Explain the stick figure method.

- ask participants to copy some postures from the manual
- have a live model posing for 3 minutes, 4 - 5 postures

The drawings are put up on the wall and looked through by everybody. Again, the tutors should give mainly encouraging feedback.

Results: Building up confidence in drawing ability.

Notes: Find something positive in each drawing.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

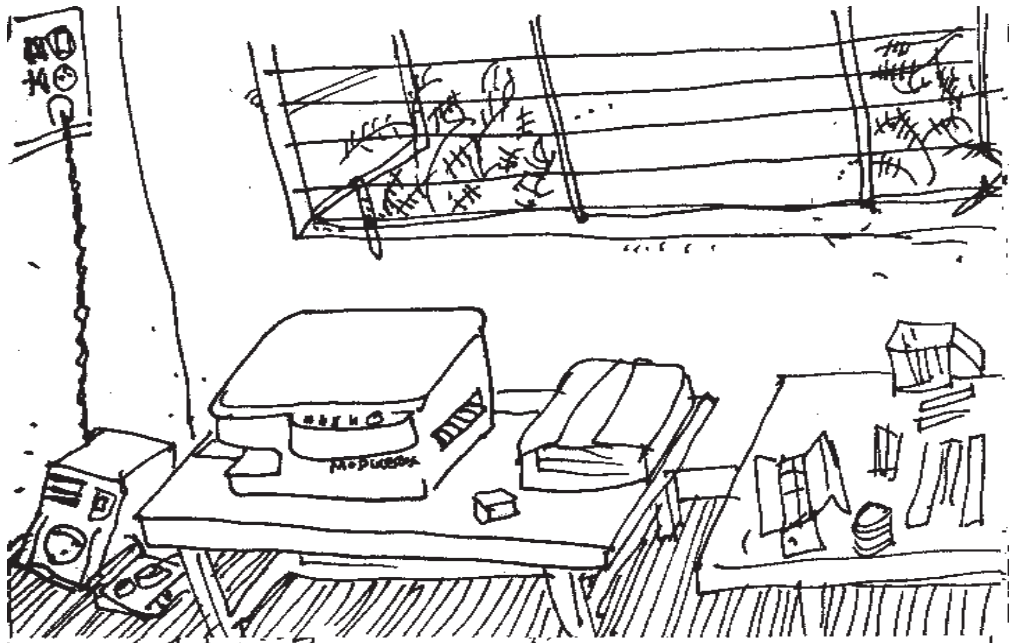
Step 10:

Description: Drawing exercise III - objects

Action: Ask the participants to draw some object in the classroom, a chair, a table, a bag, a window, a cupboard – anything. Put the drawings up on the wall.

Results: Building up confidence in drawing.

Notes: Find something positive in each drawing.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 11:

Description: Drawing exercise IV - outdoors

Action: Ask the participants to go outdoors and draw:

- a building
- a tree
- a vehicle
- a landscape with a horizon

Results: Building up confidence in drawing, understanding that perspective exists

Notes: This exercise can be combined with a picnic of some kind.





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

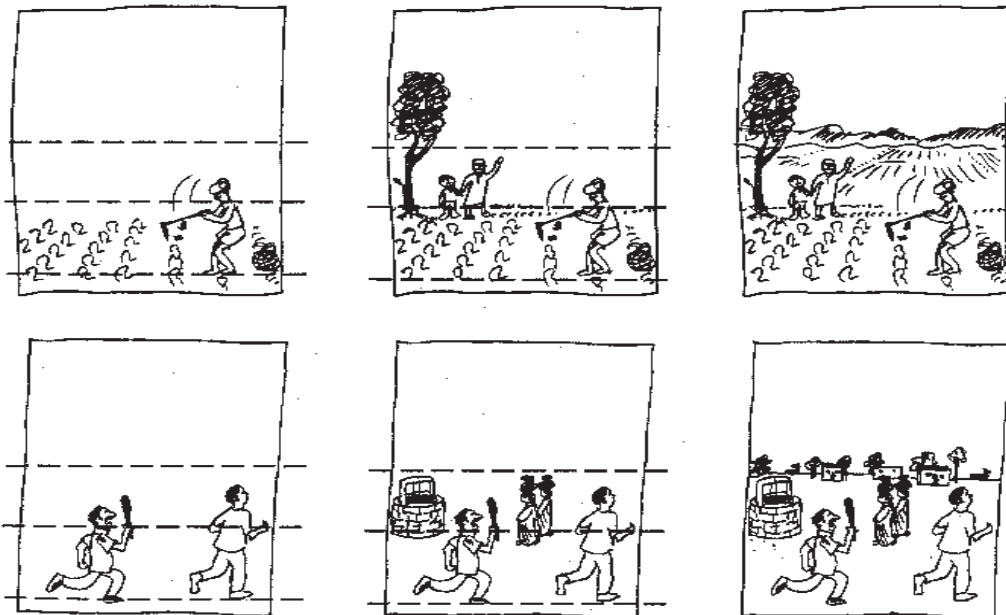
Step 12:

Description: Foreground, background and horizon

Action: Explain that in comics the important things happen in the foreground. Background and horizon are secondary and only indicate environment.

Results: The participants understand basic use of panel space

Notes: Show many examples, also the below grid from the manual.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 13:

Description: Readability

Action: Explain the concept of readability:

- texts should be easy to read (straight lines, size 1 cm, spacious balloons)
- images should be big enough and not cluttered with details
- the reading order should be logical
- the picture is read first, then the texts
- the amount of text should be minimized, the medium is primarily visual

Results: The participants understand that both pictures and texts are read and that comics are built up with logic.

Notes: Explain that readability is the main criteria at the critique session to come. If the comic is understood wrongly, it's useless.





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 14:

Description: Reading order

Action: Explain that comics are read from left to right (first criteria) and from up to down (second criteria).

This rule is absolute (but in Arabic and some other languages this does not apply).

Results: Participants understand that reading order is a cornerstone in visual storytelling.

Notes: Show a panel with a question and an answer.

Reading order is from left to right and from top to bottom.



question here

reply here



explanatory texts (like time and place)
always in the top left corner

Illustration credit Ms.Amoii Chaltilang(left) Thomas Sundi (right)



TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 15:

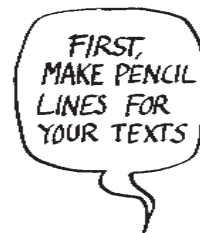
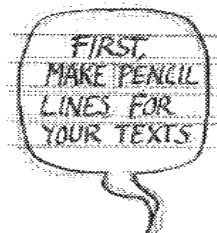
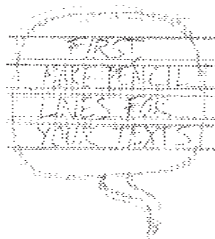
Description: How to write and place texts in comics

Action: Explain to the participants:

- they should avoid writing in the text what is clear from the picture (texts must always bring additional input for the story)
- size of text is important especially if the comics are converted into strips later. (recommended size is 1 cm).
- draw guiding lines first, and then pencil in texts.
- after this, make the shape of the speech balloon
- show different types of texts: explanatory boxes, speech balloons, thought balloons, mechanical sound etc.
- the preference is to have speech balloons in the upper part of the panel above the speaking characters.

Results: Participants understand that they will have to work with the texts quite a lot and that there are many things to consider.

FIRST,
MAKE PENCIL
LINES FOR
YOUR TEXTS





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 16:

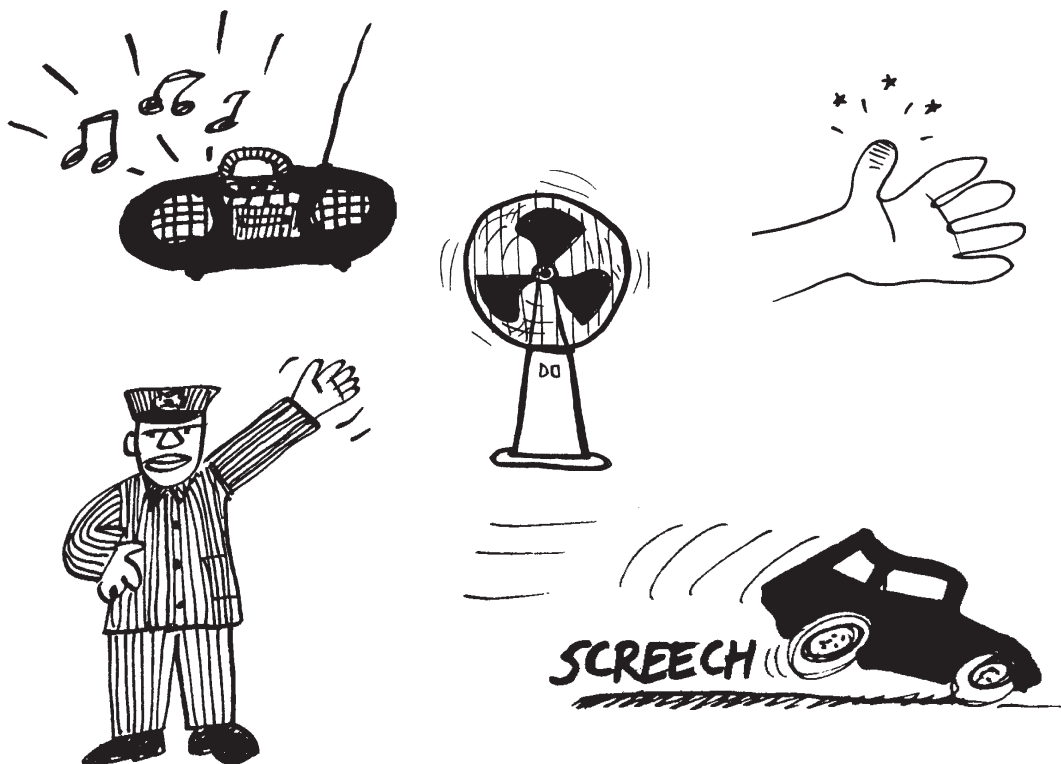
Description: Visual effects for sound, movement etc

Action: Explain to the participants that sound and movements can be represented by visual clues. Show sound, movement, pain, smell, and other effects.

Explain also that these effects are not universal, that they are different from one culture to the other.

Results: Effects can be included to enhance the stories.

Notes: Show the effects pages in the manual.





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 17:

Description: Heading of the comic

Action: Explain to the participants that the heading is important as it is the first thing that will be read.

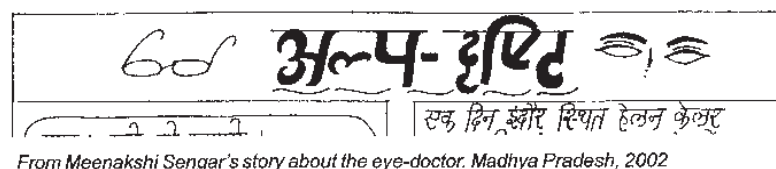
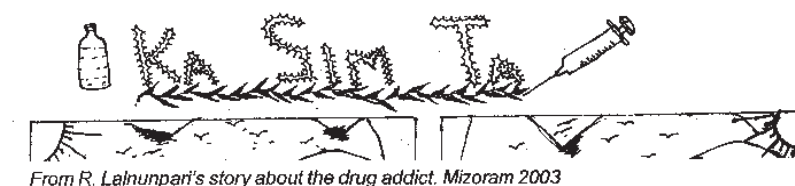
Explain that the heading should not reveal the point of the story – it will be a disappointment to the reader.

The heading should be interesting so that the reader would like to know what the story is about.

The heading can be decorated with visual elements with some relevance to the story.

Results: The participants understand that the heading is an element to attract the reader.

Notes: there is a headings page in the manual.





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 18:

Description: the Visual script

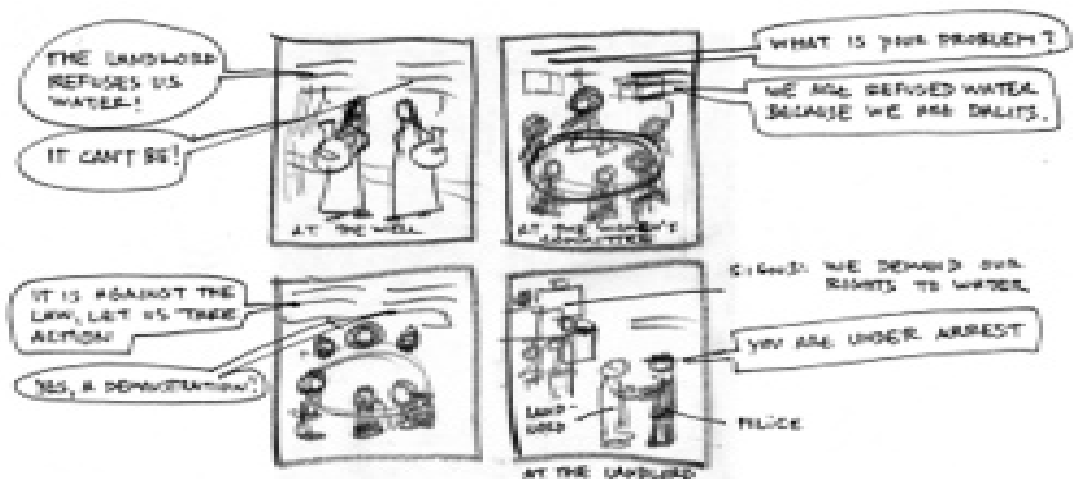
Action: Explain to the participants that a visual script is necessary because it shows that all parts of the story are in the right place. The script is still open for changes and can be shown to friends and colleagues for additional opinions.

Especially point out:

- the visual script is a sketch – the drawing should not be much elaborated

Results: The participants appreciate that a visual script is a necessary step.

Notes: Show the below page in the manual.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 19:

Description: The visual script is shown to the tutors

Action: Ask each participant to bring his/her visual script for checking. Go through the following:

- is the story easy to understand correctly?
- is the heading ok?
- is the reading order correct?
- are there any writing errors in the text?
- is the balance between images and texts ok?

Results: The participants' stories are gone through in detail and they will be confident to move to the next step (making final artwork).

Notes: If there are many corrections to be made, ask the participant to show it again after changes.





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 20:

Description: Measurements and procedure of final artwork

Action: Explain the measurements

- why A4? Two A4s with the same grid make an A3
- always turn the lower paper
- paper should be of good quality (stiff but not glossy)
- sketch lightly with pencil on the final artwork, because the pencil lines have to be erased anyway.
- ink with thin line then erase pencil lines
- fill in solid black areas
- explain crosshatching, textures and fill-ins

Results: confidence in procedure and equipment

Notes: Show the below page in the manual





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 21:

Description: Inking exercise

Action: Explain inking:

- always in black, no colours or pencils (greyscale)
- drawing textures, decorations
- ask the participants to test their inking equipment on the visual script

Results: confidence in inking, testing of equipment

Notes: Show the below page in the manual





TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 22:

Description: Actual artwork

Action: the participants redraw the sketch in full scale

explain:

- importance of guiding pencil lines for texts
- the artwork should be drawn with pencil lightly
- the tutors can help but not change the story or other content
- individual tutoring with inking and correction problems

Results: the artwork is ready to be copied





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 23:

Description: Artwork copying

Action: All originals are now taken for copying and a sufficient number of copies (8 – 10) is made.

If A3 size is available, make the wallposter comics in that size, as it is more convenient to handle them.

Results: The artworks have turned into comics.

Notes: Take the participants to follow the photocopying procedure, if convenient. The experience of seeing one's own artwork being reproduced for distribution is rewarding.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 24:

Description: Critique session

Action: All comics are pinned up on a wall and all participants should look at them with enough time.

The tutor comments on the comics, one by one:

- is the message understood correctly?
- is the balance between text and images ok?
- is readability ok?
- does the comic attract attention from a distance?
(enough black portions)

After this the tutor can invite the other participants to give comments and give the creator of the comic also an opportunity to share his/her views.

Results: Each participant will get proper feedback on his/her work.

Notes: This might take several hours, so prepare for that, break up regularly for stretching, tea etc





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 25:

Description: Distribution I - on walls

Action: The wallposters are distributed in the community or in places where they can be read by many people.

However, please tell participants not to put comics up on walls without permission from the owners.

School noticeboards and offices are also good places where comics can be put up (provided you get permission from the people in charge).

Trees and fences, ordinary house walls are options too.

Results: the comics can be read by the target group.

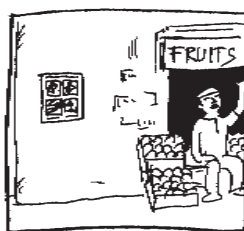
Notes: Even for people who are not in the target group, the issue in the comics can be informative and further debate in society.



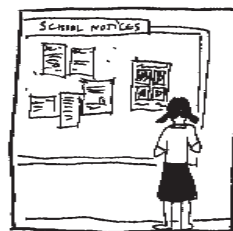
On house walls



On trees



Next to a shop



On notice boards



TRAINING PLAN WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 26:

Description: Distribution II -in print media

Action: The original artwork of the wallposter comics can be reduced in a photocopier (50 %), then cut out and rearranged in a strip form.

Results: the same comic can also be used for print media.

Notes: The procedure is explained in the manual. You can also explain how this is done in Photoshop, if necessary.



Illustration credit: Micky (Tanzania).



TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 27

Description: Distribution III -at events

Action: The photocopies are mounted on cardboard and covered (optional) with polyethene film. The comics become an exhibition which can be displayed at special events, such as meetings, seminars, rallies etc.

Results: The comics will be displayed at events that gather people who are interested in issues of the society.

Notes: If you can afford to laminate the comics, the exhibition will be less bulky and very durable.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

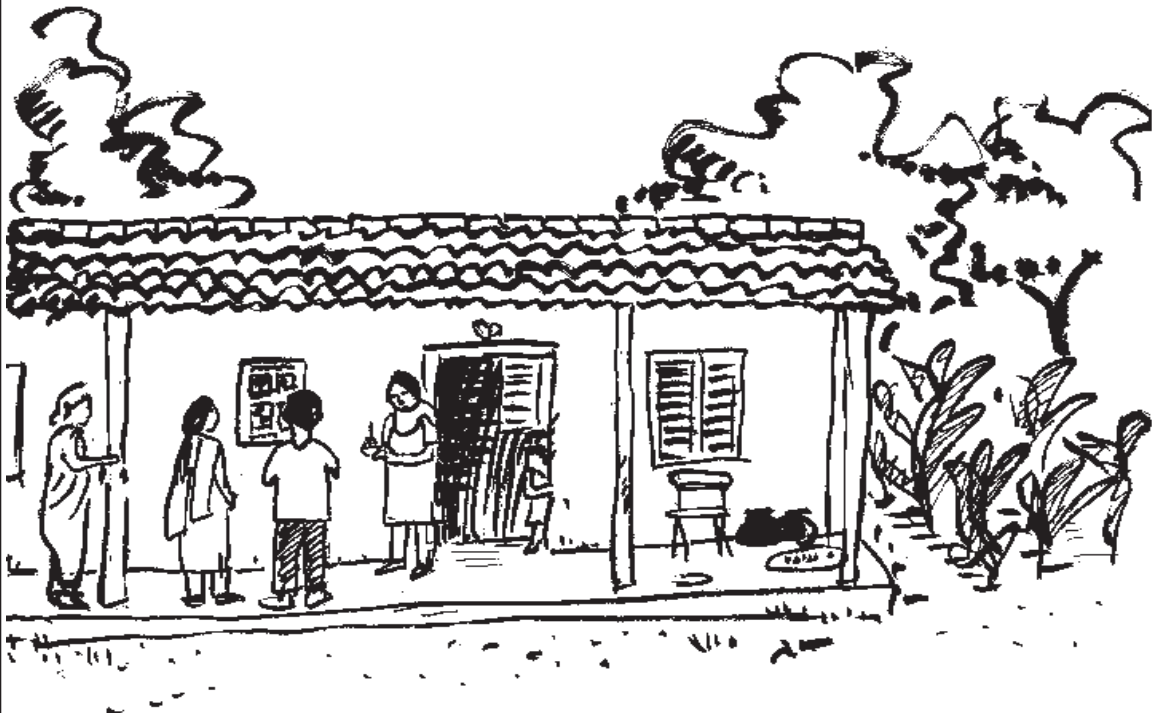
Step 28:

Description: Collect feedback

Action: Ask the participants to collect at least 5 opinions from local people on the comics. They should write down the main points. The whole workshop is brought into full session and each participant can report on the response from the local people. If you have many participants you can restrict each one to read out only two opinions, one positive and one negative.

Results: The participants will get feedback from the target group and, hopefully, get inspired to continue using the medium.

Notes: The feedback could be systematically compiled for later reference, as very little material of this kind is available.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 29:

Description: Workshop review

Action: All participants are brought into full session and asked to write down their impressions of the workshop:

- what was positive
- what could have been improved

Collect the opinions and then let the participants give their views to the full session. Encourage constructive criticism.

If you plan to make a report, make sure you collect all addresses and ask general permission to use the workshop material in the report (and on your website, if applicable).

Results: The organisers get feedback.

Notes: The participants should be given back their originals, unless there is a special reason for not doing so.





TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 30:

Description: Workshop final words

Action: In a full session the participants should be thanked for their work and enthusiasm.

The certificates (if any) are distributed to the participants, allow time for photographing.

If you plan to have another workshop, mention it now and say if these participants are eligible to join that.

Explain how the participants will be supported in their grassroots comics efforts in the future (if applicable).

If there are publication prospects (exhibitions, compilations, websites, anthologies etc) for the participants' future comics, explain about them now.

Also tell about other workshops that are in the pipeline in other parts of the country (or world).

If you plan to send a report to all participants, give an approximate date when it can be expected.

Take a group photograph and declare the workshop ended.

Results: The participants will leave the workshop with a sense of being part of a larger movement and that their comics are interesting and important.

TRAINING PLAN

WALLPOSTER COMICS WORKSHOP

Step 31

Description: Workshop report

Action: Prepare a short report on the workshop, stating the number of participants, their names and affiliations, contact addresses, the resource persons, the programme, the venue, etc. The report should also have samples of the comics made at the workshop.

Results: The participants will feel connected to the grassroots comics movement and be proud that their comics are part of it.

Note: The report is important, as the activity of arranging comics workshops is so new and spreading reports is a good way of promoting the idea.



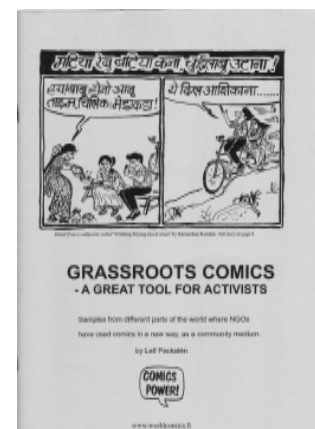
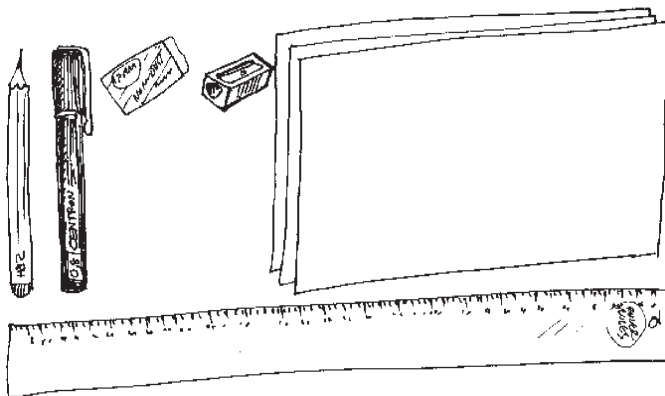
Checklist of basic material requirements:

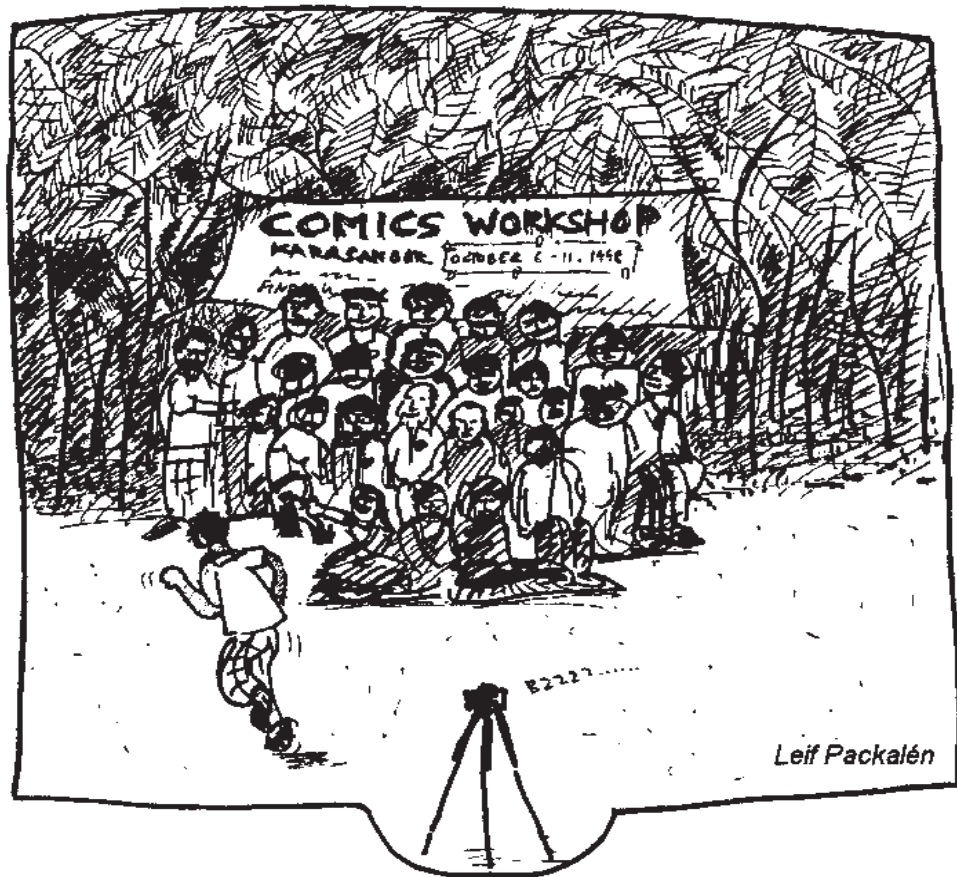
1. A hall or a room that can accommodate all participants also so that they have space to draw. A whiteboard or a flipchart is needed too.
2. Rough paper for sketching.
3. Pencils, erasers, sharpeners, and rulers (ordinary school material).
4. Inking pens: could be fibre-tipped, thin marker pens, gel pens, pigment ink pens etc. You should test them first before buying any quantity.

Inking pen requirements:

- proper black (not dark blue, brown or grey).
- the ink shouldn't smudge easily (test it like this: first make pencil lines, then ink on them, let them dry a little, and after that erase the pencil lines - the ink lines should still be intact).

5. Good paper for final artwork (should not be glossy)
6. Access to a photocopying machine.
7. Tape, bluetack, pins and paste to put up the comics with.
8. Blank certificates.
9. Grassroots comics demonstration material such as prints, photocopies, compilations, transparencies etc
10. Handouts, manuals, reports, flyers etc.





**COMICS
POWER!**

World Comics-Finland was founded by comics artists and aid activists in 1997. It has members and affiliates in a worldwide network. The main common interests are:

- local comics as an information tool in development and human rights work
- local comics as a mirror of culture
- comics as a medium for self-expression for special groups

World Comics arranges courses and comics workshops, lectures, and exhibitions. We have had cooperation with organisations in India, Tanzania, Mozambique, Benin, Togo and Lebanon. We have also invited comics artists from Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Cuba, Iran and India to Finland and presented their work here. We have in the last years concentrated mainly on grassroots comics workshops and training comics tutors.

World Comics-Finland

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