A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY THEATRE

FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

KCOA
Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture in Africa

KHSA
Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture in Southern Africa

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by
giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

In cooperation with
SFHC
SOILS, FOOD AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

ABOUT SFHC

The Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) project is a participatory, farmer-led nonprofit organization in Malawi that uses agroecological methods to improve food security and nutrition. The SFHC project's training programmes use participatory theatre to engage farmers in learning about agroecology and to develop the skills they need to promote positive change in their communities.

Participatory theatre is a powerful tool for teaching, learning and assessment. It is a collaborative process that engages participants in creating and performing theatrical pieces to explore and address real-world issues. Participatory theatre can be used to promote social change, build community and develop individual and collective skills.

During the training of SFHC Agroecology Promoters and Farmer Research Teams, participants perform a variety of skits and roleplays on topics such as the importance of soil health, the benefits of crop rotation and the challenges of climate change. These activities help farmers to learn about new concepts, to practice their skills, and to reflect on their own experiences.

About this manual

This training manual provides a comprehensive overview of participatory theatre and a practical guide on how to create participatory theatre sessions with your group of farmers. It is designed for educators, community leaders and anyone else who is interested in using participatory theatre to promote positive change in the agroecological sector.

Participatory theatre is a powerful tool for transformation, and it has the potential to make a real difference in the world.

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THEATRE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

Theatre is a collaborative form of performing art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage. The performers may communicate this experience verbally or nonverbally by acting out roles, telling stories, singing, dancing and/or playing music. Theatre is considered a performing art because it is primarily intended to be experienced live by an audience.[i]

Participatory theatre is a form of theatre in which the audience interacts with the performers or the presenters. It can be used for education, entertainment and advocacy and encompasses a wide range of practices, including forum theatre, popular theatre, legislative theatre and theatre for health. It also incorporates theatre for development, which is a type of community-based or interactive theatre practice that aims to promote civic dialogue and engagement.

Participatory theatre for development uses performance and theatrical methodologies to investigate the socio-cultural realities of a people, with social change and development as its goal. There is an emphasis on audience participant and collaboration and the objective is to promote social change and development.

In the context of organic agriculture and agroecology, participatory theatre can be used to achieve a number of goals. It can be used to:

- Raise awareness of the benefits of organic agriculture and agroecology.
- Promote the adoption of organic and agroecological practices.
- Build capacity among farmers and other stakeholders.
- Facilitate dialogue and collaboration among different stakeholders.
- Advocate for supportive policies and programmes.

Participatory theatre is an empowering approach that can help farmers, other stakeholders and the general public to learn about and adopt organic and agroecological practices. It can also encourage community members to engage with sensitive topics, like gender and climate change, in a safe space.

Types of participatory theatre

This manual describes three types of participatory theatre approaches. These are legislative theatre, theatre for justice and theatre for behavioural change. The intent of the performance and the context in which it will conducted determine the type to use. It may be appropriate to use just one type or a combination of types. Table 1 highlights the key characteristics of each type.

Using participatory theatre to advocate for change

Participatory theatre can be a powerful tool for advocating for change. By performing for policymakers and the general public, farmers can raise awareness of the issues they are facing and build support for the changes they want to see. For example, a group of farmers could use participatory theatre to advocate for a new policy that supports organic agriculture. They could develop a performance that explores the benefits of organic agriculture and the challenges that farmers face in adopting organic practices. The performance could then be performed for policymakers and other stakeholders to build support for the new policy.

Participatory theatre is a versatile and powerful tool that can be used to achieve a variety of goals in the organic agriculture and agroecology sector. By following the steps outlined in this training manual, facilitators can create participatory theatre with farmers to raise awareness of important issues and advocate for change.

The following steps will guide you through designing and facilitating a participatory theatre experience with your chosen participants. The examples given here pertain to organic and agroecological food and farming systems, and key issues within them.

Legislative theatre	Theatre for justice	Theatre for behaviour change
Objective		
• Focused on policy change tied to the protagonist's situation in the drama. • Aim to create a more just and equal society by influencing power holders.	• Focused on broader questions of justice for the protagonist, which can include policy change. • Seeks to change harmful social/ cultural attitudes and norms.	• Focused on changing personal behaviours.
Who does it target?		
• Targets policymakers, law makers, or community leaders.	• Targets power holders – anyone with power over the protagonist's life – e.g., neighbour, friend, relative – as well as policymakers.	• Challenges power dynamics in personal relationships.
Advantages		
• Can be used to support implementation of new or existing laws and policies. • Seeks commitments from policymakers to make new policies/laws or change existing policies/laws.	• Is more participatory – it works in a variety of settings where individuals, groups and communities are engaged in the process of seeking justice in their immediate environments. • Seeks to empower communities to bring justice to the protagonist's situation by identifying pathways to justice and who in the community can help the protagonist pursue them.	• Develops communication and assertiveness skills. • Individuals make commitments to healthier more balanced relationships
Limitations		
• Needs a framework of advocacy work. Is limited to policymaking.	• Needs a framework of advocacy work.	• Only to be used when the person has the power to make the change themselves.
Size of group		
• Generally, a smaller more targeted audience.	• Generally, a larger/broader audience.	• Should be part of a longer-term programme.

[i] Chisiza, Z. 2017. Critical stages: In search of theatre for development in Malawi: A modern history. [Online] Available: https://www.critical-stages.org/15/malawi-theatre-history-theatre-for-development/.

STEP 1: PLANNING YOUR PARTICIPATORY THEATRE EXPERIENCE[ii]

The main purpose of Step 1 is to decide on your participatory theatre approach based on your desired outcomes and available resources. To plan your participatory theatre experience, consider/do the following:

- Determine the outcome of the intervention- What do you want to achieve? For example, you might want to encourage dialogue about a particular topic/aspect of life, such as the risks posed to environmental and human health by pesticides or the significant role of women in farming systems. Think about the key issues or situation that you want to unfold in the theatre story.
- Identify the 'lever' of change: What will lead to the biggest change or have the biggest impact? For example, is it policy change or a change in community attitudes that will make the biggest difference?
- Think about how long you will work in the context and what resources you have available. Is there sufficient time for one or more performances?
- Determine the community with which you will work. This will affect how you design your participatory theatre intervention.
- Use the information in Table 1 to decide on your participatory theatre approach.

[ii] Mafuel, I. n.d. Theatre for Development in Malawi. [Online] Available: https://howlround.com/theatre-development-malawi.

STEP 2: DESIGNING YOUR PARTICIPATORY THEATRE EXPERIENCE

Once you have decided what you want to achieve and which community you will work with, you will need to design the participatory theatre experience. This includes deciding on how the audience will engage with the topic. For example, you can decide to:

- Use improvisation exercises to explore different perspectives on organic agriculture and agroecology. Improvisation is making something up on the spot – spontaneously.
- Share stories and experiences of organic and agroecological farming.
- Provide feedback on performances and suggest new ideas.
- Work with theatre practitioners to develop and perform new pieces of theatre.

Sample topics

- Climate change and agriculture.
- Pests and diseases.
- Access to markets.
- Gender inequality in agriculture.
- The challenges of organic farming.
- The importance of sustainable agriculture.
- The need for food sovereignty.

Once you have decided on your approach, choose a comfortable location that has enough space and seating for your group of participants. They need to be comfortable and feel safe. Their feeling safe in the space has a lot to do with how you 'hold' the space and introduce the activity.

STEP 3: FORMING A PARTICIPATORY THEATRE ENSEMBLE

As the name suggests, participatory theatre is participatory and interactive. One of its most important components is having members of the target audience as part of the performing team. This makes it easy for the members of the general audience to identify with the characters. Because participatory theatre relies on real life experiences of the target audience, for example, having farmers as part of the performance team helps to keep the stories realistic and experience-based. Important note: Everyone has the potential to act.

Host a story-devising workshop

One way to generate interest and to get started is to involve your whole group of farmers in a story devising workshop that also acts as an audition for talent and identifying which individuals suit which characters. The group can be as small as 10 people or as big as 30 people, as long as it is a manageable number. To hold a story devising workshop, you will need to:

- Find a space where the farmers can feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Gather some materials, such as paper, pens and markers.
- Start by introducing the farmers to the concept of participatory theatre and the goals of the workshop.
- Lead the farmers in some warm-up exercises, such as games and activities that encourage them to move their bodies and use their voices.
- Once the farmers are warmed up, you can begin the story devising process. This can be done in a variety of ways, but one common approach is to start by asking the farmers to share their own stories and experiences. For example, you could ask them to share stories about their experiences with climate change, pests and diseases, or access to markets.
- Once you have a collection of stories, you can start to brainstorm ideas for a performance. The performance can be based on one of the farmers' stories, or it can be a composite of several stories.
- Once you have a basic idea for the performance, you can start to assign roles to the farmers. This can be done based on the farmers' own interests and skills, or you can assign roles based on the characters in the story.
- Finally, you can start to rehearse the performance. This can be done in a variety of ways, but one common approach is to start by rehearsing the individual scenes and then gradually working up to rehearsing the entire performance. Provide feedback and support to the farmers as they rehearse.
- Encourage the farmers to be creative and to use their own voices in the performance.

Here are some additional tips for forming a participatory theatre ensemble with farmers:

- Make sure the environment is supportive and welcoming. Everyone should feel comfortable sharing their ideas and participating in the creative process.
- Be patient and flexible. It may take some time for the farmers to get comfortable with the idea of participatory theatre and to develop their acting skills.
- Be inclusive. Everyone should have the opportunity to participate, regardless of their age, gender, experience, or skill level.
- Have fun! Participatory theatre should be an enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

Sample script:
A participatory theatre storyline from a workshop with farmers at Edundu in Ekwendeni, Mzuzu, Malawi focused on gender.

- The Phiri family has two children, a boy and a girl. In the first scene we see the mother waking the girl up to do all the household chores while the boy is still asleep.
- In the second scene the mother tells the girl to prepare water for the boy and wake him up so he can bath and go to school. When the girl complains the mother reports to the father that the girl is being rude.
- The father comes to talk to the girl and tells her that the only reason she is told to do all the work at the house is because they are preparing her to be a good wife when she gets married. The girl says she wants to go to school but the parents tells her that if she does not want to work she should leave their house and find somewhere else to stay.
- The girl reports to an aunt who keeps reinforcing what the girl's parents have told her. The girl is desperate.
- The play ends with the girl being desperate and the facilitator asks the audience what should the girl do? What can be done differently? How can we help the parents? The audience comes in at different points of the drama to role play ways of changing the situation of the girl in the family.

STEP 4: HOST YOUR THEATRE PERFORMANCE

Once performers feel comfortable that their rehearsals are complete, it is time to perform it for an audience. The audience can be farmers, community members or even policymakers. The target audience should align with the intended outcomes of the theatre intervention. It is important to note that participatory theatre is not about creating a polished performance. The most important thing is that the performance is engaging and thought-provoking. Encourage the audience to engage with the performance and to share their reactions and thoughts.

Following the performance, you can host a discussion:

- Invite the audience to share their reactions and thoughts.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage discussion and reflection.
- Be sure to create a safe and supportive space for everyone to participate.

Possible questions to ask the audience include:

- What did you think of the performance?
- How did the performance make you feel?
- What did the performance teach you?
- How does the performance relate to your own experiences?
- What can we do to address the issues raised in the performance?

Tips for facilitating the audience discussion

- Be patient and respectful. Allow everyone to have a chance to speak and share their thoughts.
- Be open-minded and non-judgmental. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Encourage different perspectives and viewpoints.
- Help the group to focus on the main themes of the play. The aim is not to judge the performance or acting ability of performers
- Summarise the key points of the discussion periodically.
- End the discussion on a positive note, with a call to action.

Before closing, thank the audience for their participation, summarise the key points of the discussion and encourage them to continue thinking about the issues raised in the performance and to act to create change.

Sample script:
Climate change and agroecology

- **A boy and a girl approach their parents to tell them that they need money for school fees and other important items. The parents sit down to discuss the best alternatives for solving the problem. They settle on making and selling charcoal.**
- **We see the family cutting down trees in a forest just next to their farm. As making charcoal requires many trees they cut all the trees in the small forest.**
- **Neighbours advise them on the importance of not cutting down trees and the need for permaculture but they tell them that they need money to take care of the family now.**
- **It's rainy season, the family has planted crops in their farm. Heavy rains come and because they cut down all the forest cover that used to protect their farm from run off, the rains now wash away all their crops and they are left destitute. Play ends.**
- **Facilitator comes in to ask the audience to narrate what they think happened, what could be done differently, if they were the family in the play what other alternative means of income could they put in place instead of wanton cutting down of trees to make charcoal.**

STEP 5: MONITORING AND FEEDBACK FOR IMPROVEMENT

There are tools that allow you to monitor skills and competencies gained during the participatory theatre experience. These assessments are complemented by participants' individual and the group's reflection on what went well and what didn't, and why. There are many ways to conduct the assessments. You can print out the questions and ask people to fill them in, but you can also ask people to stand in a line and mark the different points 1-5 with stones and ask them to stand at the numbers that correspond to their answers.

Pre-training assessment

- Have you ever attended theatre training before?
- How would you rate your skills in the following areas from **1** (weak), **2** (moderately weak), **3** (medium), **4** (strong) and **5** (very strong)?
  - Facilitation skills – ability to engage people in a participatory manner.
  - Problem-solving skills – ability to address problems at the individual and project level.
  - Communication skills – ability to communicate in a way that participants understand.
  - Self-confidence – ability to speak with confidence and engage participants.
  - Team-building skills – ability to ensure that all participants feel included and can participate.

Post-training assessment

- How would you rate your skills in the following areas from **1** (weak), **2** (moderately weak), **3** (medium), **4** (strong) and **5** (very strong)?
  - Facilitation skills – ability to engage people in a participatory manner.
  - Problem-solving skills – ability to address problems at the individual and project level.
  - Communication skills – ability to communicate in a way that participants understand.
  - Self-confidence – ability to speak with confidence and engage participants.
  - Team-building skills – ability to ensure that all participants feel included and can participate.
- What are the areas that you feel most confident about after this training?
- What are the main gaps in which you still need to improve?
- Did your performance skills improve? (1) stayed the same, (2) I can't say, (3) slight improvement or (4) major improvement.

Self-assessment – individual

- What did you do well?
- What could you have done differently?
- What suggestions would you give yourself to improve your performance?
- Does the story represent what really happens in your community?
- Did you feel that the way your presented yourself as the character is a clear representation of how the character is presented in your community?

Self-assessment – group

- What did we do well as a group?
- What could we have done differently?
- What suggestions do we have to improve our performance?
- As a team, how do we feel about the story we have created?
- Does the story represent what really happens in our community?
- What can we say about so and so's performance?
- What can we do differently next time?

Sample script:
Post-harvest management

- A family has had a bumper harvest and they are excited about it but in their excitement, they start abusing the harvest. The wife buys things from vendors which she exchanges with the harvest at unfair exchange rates. Every time the wife leaves the house the husband sells some of the crop to vendors and uses the money for beer.
- Everyone is surprised the harvest in the storage is decreasing at a rapid rate. They catch each other stealing their own harvest and a fight ensues as each blames the other of squandering their hard-earned harvest.
- Facilitator jumps in to ask the audience to help the family resolve the issue. What could they have differently for things not to reach this far?

CONCLUSION

Participatory theatre is a dynamic and ever-evolving art form. The stories told, the performances staged, and the audiences engaged are all unique and unrepeatable. This is part of what makes participatory theatre so powerful and transformative.

Creating and performing participatory theatre can be a challenging but rewarding process. It takes time and dedication to develop stories that are both meaningful and accessible to the audience. However, the rewards of seeing your community come together to share their stories and create something truly special are immeasurable.

Remember, the most important thing is to tell a story that is meaningful to you and your community. Participatory theatre is a powerful tool for social change, and it has the potential to make a real difference in the world.

Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) is an in-country partner of the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture (KHSA). KHSA is part of the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture in Africa (KCOA), a collaborative country-led partnership funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and non-governmental organisations across Africa.

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