

YOUTH SHAPING PERSPECTIVES

# FORUM THEATRE

LEARNING MANUAL





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However, the SDJF shall be responsible for the substance and the perspectives provided in this manual.

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## **SRI LANKA DEVELOPMENT JOURNALIST FORUM (SDJF)**

Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) is a national level organization that is committed to foster a vibrant democracy and freedom of expression, particularly the voice freedom of marginalized communities. Use of creative innovative media tools, strengthening community media, amplifying voice of excluded, capacitating marginalized, creating access to information and culture of openness are its strategic priorities.

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## KEY MILESTONE

It has been a tremendous pleasure working with SDJF team and its partners in putting together an important learning manual for the use of secondary school children, university students, young forum artistes and for those who are passionate about using Forum Theatre (FT) as means of positive transformation. Producing this manual is a timely effort and it fulfills a long time learning gap in Sri Lanka.

Forum theatre concept is very attractive and versatile. On account of this, the FTs have become very popular and are being increasingly practiced and performed by various youth groups in Sri Lanka. Some organizations and individuals have already been playing a significant role in bringing FTs and other forms of performing theatres to the young people. A person like Parakrama Niriella - Founder of Janakaraliya Mobile Theatre (Theatre of the People) played a significant role in bringing people into theatre. Act4, British Council, Sri Lanka Unites, Care International, Family Rehabilitation Centre, Women in Need and several other organizations have engaged in Forum Theatre. Unfortunately, there are not enough learning material and resources available in Sri Lankan local languages, if one wants to provide inclusive learning opportunities for our young boys and girls who like to make positive changes in our societies with the help of FT.

This manual signifies the first attempt of its nature; therefore, it may also have room for further improvement. I am very confident that this learning manual not only provides young people to learn skills of Forum Theatre, but also allows them to actively use it, to promote social change and wider culture of active non-violence in Sri Lanka.

Young people who are passionate about creating dialogue and willing to promote pluralistic values can apply this manual. I also believe this manual is going to be a great learning resource for school children, drama students, young forum performers, theatre groups, and drama teachers.

Within the changing social dynamics, young people have been experimenting with various forms of arts and culture in view of promoting pluralistic and democratic values. One such tool which is gaining popularity amongst the young people in the recent past is Forum Theatre.

### Mr. WARUNA ALAHAKOON

Chairperson, Review Committee

Deputy Director, Aesthetic Education Unit, Ministry of Education

## REFLECTIONS

Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Program was started in the year 2013 as a one-time intervention to engage young people from the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, allowing them to use Forum Theatre as an effective way of catalyzing their talents, innovative thinking in creating critical dialogues on pluralistic values - Engaging diversity, respecting differences, tolerance, constant dialogue, equality, justice and active-non-violence.

Overwhelming support extended by the Ministry of National Integration and Local Languages (then), Provincial Ministry of Education (Eastern), and Provincial Education Department (Eastern) and Young Forum Artistes in the Eastern Province, made SDJF to courageously take this initiative to other provinces in the next four years.

Until now, the Forum Theatre programmes have been implemented in the Eastern, Central, North Central, Western, Southern and Eastern provinces with the ready support of respective, Provincial Education Ministries and Provincial Education Departments.

The rich experience of meeting; nearly 40,000 students and 5000 young boys and girls from a diversity of faiths and ethnic groups, hundreds of teachers, visiting; hundreds of remote villages, training; nearly hundred and sixty young Forum Artistes provided SDJF a broader understanding of the potential of youth in creating a peaceful Sri Lanka, where people are respected for each others' differences and the diversity is acknowledged as a strength.

We also found out that young children in schools need wider exposure to the external world. Each child is unique for her/his creativity. Their opinions are far logical than adults. Their stories are richer than those of adults. Their world views and perspectives of pluralistic values are very powerful. Many of them had challenges in their surroundings. Many of them had unresolved, and unanswered questions about the system in which they were learning. These observations confirmed the need of deliberately engaging young children as contributors with high potential.

It is believed that this manual will provide only a basic understanding of the subject of Forum Theatre. In this manual we have tried to adapt its fundamental concepts to local circumstances, to some extent. Therefore, it can still be treated as a preliminary effort that needs further improvements and value additions. Though the manual is produced by SDJF, this was built on the efforts of several committed people and organizations, which performed FT in Sri Lanka.

I take this opportunity to thank all our partners, supporters, and SDJF program team for the wonderful support given to the Sri Lankan Forum Theatre Program. I also thank valuable contributions extended by the expert review committee headed by Mr. Waruna Alahakoon, Deputy Director, Aesthetic Education Unit, Ministry of Education. Last but not least, implementing FT program and producing this manual was only possible with the support of U. S. Embassy in Colombo. I like to thank all those who supported from the embassy.

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**We have experienced that young people have enormous strength to provide creative, sustaining and innovative solutions to any community issue that compromised co-existence in their own setting.**

**It became very obvious that engaging young people, treating them as active peacemakers, capacitating as civil leaders, creating space for their opinions are very vital in achieving sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.**

**PROF. W A D P WANIGASUNDERA**

Chairperson, SDJF





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Picture 01: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Vavuniya District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

### What is a Spect-Actor?

It refers to the dual role of the audience who has to play both as spectator and actor 'Spect-Actor' who gets an opportunity to pre-determine their own realities in the play.

# 01

## FORUM THEATRE A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Forum Theatre is a form of theatre presentation, created by the revolutionary Brazilian artist, Augusto Boal. This is also known as “Theatre of the Oppressed”. Forum Theatre empowers powerless segments. It gives people an opportunity to critically look at powerlessness and to explore alternatives and highly relevant solutions to community issues. With its versatile nature, it is also used globally as a potential tool for transforming conflict and creative problem solving. It has several unique features. One of them is that, in the Forum Theatre performances, audience receives an opportunity to intervene, actively participate and to change situations displayed in the performance. Due to this duality, the conventional ‘spectators’ can become transformed into ‘Spect - Actors’. Forum Theatre performances are constantly changing displays that attempt to explore solutions to selected problems, where the plays are performed impromptu or with evolving scripts.

Forum Theatre has evolved over the years in many different forms around the world. It also can be used in multiple contexts of non-formal education, giving an opportunity for the audience to learn through experience, which makes it a valuable tool for experiential learning.



Picture 02: <https://www.pinterest.com>

“The Theatre of the Oppressed is the theatre in its most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!)”

“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it”

- Augusto Boal

- Augusto Boal was a revolutionary dramatist who introduced various forms of interactive theatre that engaged the audience as the main contributors.
- Brazil was a deprived nation by its military regime and the public was silent to the imposed oppression. Therefore, Boal wanted to create a platform to demonstrate reality to its people in order to take action by themselves.
- Forum Theatre is not a decision making tool or a method for capturing the views of the audience.
- He transformed spectator by introducing the concept of Spect-Actor by breaking invisible wall between the Actors and the Spectators thereby giving the ‘Spect-Actor’ the center stage, in order to change the outcome of the play.

# 02

## WHO IS AUGUSTO BOAL?

Augusto Boal, the legendary Brazilian dramatist, was born on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1931 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He was a qualified chemical engineer from Columbia University New York. He was greatly passionate about theatre, where he involved in producing stage plays at the early stages in his career. Soon after his time in New York, he was drawn into working with Arena Theatre in São Paulo, Brazil. In 1970s Boal introduced “Theatre of the Oppressed”, which paved the way to many interactive theatre forms that revolutionized the art of theatre performance.

Robinson (2016) noted in the *Ceasefire* - a quarterly publication, that Boal’s theatre approach was inspired partly by Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright and director.

Liyanage (2016) observes that Brecht is widely known for introducing anti-Aristotelian way of doing theatre. His concept - ‘The Alienation Effect’ is a principle of using innovative theatrical techniques to provoke a social-critical audience response. Brechtian tradition does not only connect the audience emotionally with the characters, but also allows to self-reflect on the situation and to critically view the action depicted on stage.

This philosophy was the stepping stone for Boal’s experiments in Arena Theatre, which led to audience’s role to be ‘Spect-Actors’ rather than be ‘spectators’. This means that an audience member has the ability and the liberty to come up on stage and replace the character with a solution they deem fit for a social catastrophe depicted by the play. Boal did not treat theatre as a place to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined and thereby explore the impact of participation of the audience through empowerment (Boal, 1979)

He was driven to invite audience members to demonstrate their ideas on stage, which led the way to practice the change they desired, while collectively reflecting on suggestions by other audience members that inevitably influenced social action.

He expressed that the theater itself is not revolutionary, it is a rehearsal for the revolution. Thereby Boal’s revolutionary life continued when he was elected to the Chamber of Vereadores of Rio de Janeiro, where he used theatre techniques to bring in political change by the public. He hired his theatre crew to be legislative staff in order to create theatre companies that would represent communities in the city. As a result of this innovative technique 13 public laws were redefined and introduced to benefit the public in Brazil.

At the beginning Boal used Image Theatre, which is an expression or an image without words being used. Then he introduced Forum Theatre that can be considered to be the core of Theatre of the Oppressed. Later many derivations of the concept were revealed to reach the people effectively to stimulate change.



Picture 03: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Mannar District / Photo by: Alexanthar Kamilas

### What is Oppression?

It is a continued, unfair or unjust treatment or control implemented by a powerful segment of the community on a comparatively powerless segment. Oppression can be witnessed in many forms such as gender, class, age, social status, racial, sexual, economic, religious, cultural, political, etc. The concept of oppression is not an alien subject for Sri Lankans as the tradition is explored in many local contexts particularly Sinhala, Tamil and Islamic literature and theatrical forms.

# 03

## UNDERSTANDING THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

The core essence of Theatre of the Oppressed is, a stimulating theatrical rehearsal for real life social issues that deprives a community. It was invented through collections of creative techniques, games and practices that paved the way to educators, students, dramatists, interested individuals and communities to transform their actions within contemporary situations.

Although Augusto Boal used Theatre of the Oppressed to address political issues, it is a versatile technique that can be used for other societal oppressions such as Poverty, Domestic violence, Drug abuse, Environmental pollution, etc. Therefore, by and large it is a tool that is flexible to address anything and everything. Theatre of the oppressed also harnesses the given characteristic of theatre education or in other words edutainment<sup>1</sup>.

Theatre of the Oppressed is the Game of Dialogue: we play and learn together. All kinds of Games must have Discipline - clear rules that we must follow. At the same time, Games have absolute need of creativity and Freedom. Theatre of the Oppressed is the perfect synthesis between the antithetic Discipline and Freedom. Without Discipline, there is no Social Life; without Freedom, there is no Life. The Discipline of our Game is our belief that we

must re-establish the right of everyone to exist in dignity. We believe that all of us are more, and much better, than what we think we are. We believe in solidarity. Our Freedom is to invent ways to help to humanize Humanity, freely invading all fields of human activities: social, pedagogical, political, artistic...

**Theatre is a Language and so it can be used to speak about all human concerns, not to be limited to theatre itself. We believe in Peace, not in Passivity**

- Osburn (2010)

During the development of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal employed various communities addressing various problems. Therefore, he had to try many techniques. These techniques were eventually merged into different theatrical styles, each using a different process to achieve a different result. Let's look at some of the different techniques used by Boal.

<sup>1</sup> Programmes that are both educational and entertaining.

# UNDERSTANDING OPPRESSION

**Given below is an example for oppression in a local family context**

Imagine an average family with the following characters; father, mother, and daughter; Father who is a clerk has a moderately low income, regularly comes home consuming alcohol after work.

He comes home, screams his wife's name demanding that she should do as what he says, and then asks to prepare the meal. Unfortunately, since the groceries had run out, she was expecting that the husband would bring something for her to cook. The husband gets furious with anger, pushes the wife on to the floor and, when the daughter comes to her assistance, that elevates the father's ferociousness and beat them both.

The scene ends when father's relentless abuse stops and both mother and daughter lay on the floor crying holding each other's bloodied hands. If the audience looks into the story, closely multiple oppressions can be witnessed through this short dramatical depiction. Following questions can be raised around the story.

- What is the oppression here?
- Is it a common problem in our communities?
- Why it occurs?
- Who is it to blame?
- How can the mother deal with the current situation?
- Is there anyone who can help the mother and the daughter?
- How the community can be involved?

Theatre of the Oppressed affirms that the foundation for solutions for powerlessness or community issues depend on the type of critical questions raised. Augusto Boal believed asking good questions is better than having good answers.







Picture 04: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Jaffna District / Photo by: Alexanthur Kamilas

## 3.1 Legislative Theatre

In Legislative Theatre there is an attempt of democratization by using the art of Forum Theatre to involve the grass-root community in making policies and laws to protect and expand the rights of the involved, the marginalized stakeholders.

A distinct difference of Forum Theatre is that during the performance, a lawyer is present in the audience who would observe and note down the suggestions for change that would be filtered into a legal report that would be directed into the city council, provincial government or the parliament as a recommendation for policy reforms. It aims to transform the citizenry to build in legitimate desires on the law.

During Boal's time in Rio de Janeiro, he managed to use Legislative Theatre effectively to introduce new laws, for example; Law 2384/95, which states - All municipal hospitals must have doctors specializing in geriatric diseases and problems and this happened to be the first law that was approved using Legislative Theatre in Rio de Janeiro. Another law created through Legislative Theatre ensured that all couples would be charged the same price at motels, regardless of their sexual orientation. Thus it became an effective tool for political action and in decision making.

Legislative Theatre is a form of Forum Theatre, but with an attempt to change existing laws or to introduce new laws. Lawyers and policy makers are invited to be in the audience so that they can observe and extract information that would influence policy making to have positive impacts on the community.



Picture 05: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase II / Kandy District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

## 3.2 Debate Theatre

Debate Theatre is an innovative tool that is used to express social and contemporary issues in a form of a debate on stage. The core difference between Debate Theatre and Forum Theatre is very simple as debate theatre looks into only a discussion and not necessarily the public interventions after the play. Hence the issues depicted in the play would be the basis for discussion that encourage sharing of opinions, experience, expertise and clarifications.

Debate Theatre expresses social issues in the form of a debate that would have people proposing and opposing. It helps the audience to get an overview of an existing issue not only by their point of view but also by others' perspectives.



## 3.3 Image Theatre

Image Theatre is mimicking realism into images using actors. This means that the actors absorb certain situations that deprive a community and present it back to the public in a form of an expression.

Usually a presentation is made in public by the actors, where there's a crowd who would be able to observe the presentation. The actors will create an Image in a still position or in other words in frozen posture. The performance is followed up by a facilitator who would be engaging with the public asking their opinions on what they see from the image.

Similar to Forum Theatre, the facilitator stimulates a discussion with the audience facilitating multiple interpretations of the image that they've just witnessed. These different opinions are concluded as subjective elements of certain truths that people experience in everyday lives.

Image theatre mimics reality by using frozen/still expressions in a public forum. Public gets the opportunity to interpret what they see and thereby stimulate a discussion on the issue brought forward.



Picture 06: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase II / Kandy District / Photo by: Asjain Wahid

## 3.4 Invisible Theatre/Disruptive Theatre

Invisible theatre or Disruptive Theatre is demonstrated by actors in a public place - a bus stop, a market, a train station, etc. The public are unaware that there are actors positioned among them. In other words, the actors are in disguise and behave just like any member in the community.

The actors are very well trained to blend-in with the public, interacting with them is ordinarily a thing that happens and nothing strange. The process is very well informed to the actors to understand the situation and create a scenario that would depict a social issue that would be loud in the public space to attract public attention. During the same time other actors join the play to guide the scenario and engage with the public.

The show concludes without the public knowing that it was the actors who were causing the scenario, or in the alternative the actors may show towards the end of the play that they were actors and the scenario was 'theatre' and 'not reality'. After the conclusion, a short discussion would be encouraged to understand whether or not the issue addressed is relevant, and also to discuss the issue addressed through the public lens.

---

Invisible Theatre or Disruptive Theatre is showcased in a public forum without the public being aware about the play that is taking place. Actors disguise as the people in the community to roleplay. Interventions become a natural reactions to address the issue depicted in the play.



## 3.5 Playback Theatre

This innovative method encourages the audience members to come on stage to share their stories or personal experiences. During this time the facilitator and the actors listen to the story carefully to comprehend it. At the end some questions are directed towards the audience member to make sure a complete story is extracted.

Afterwards the actors get together to serve as a mirror of the experience shared by the audience member, acting out the story using dialogues, improvisation techniques, music, songs and movements. This serves as a playback to the audience to experience their own interpretation of the lives that they experience.

In conclusion the audience member is invited back again to obtain a feedback on, whether the story enacted is realistically close to the experience shared.

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Audiences share their life experience and a story is created by the shared experience, which is displayed in a form of a play by the actors and actresses.



Picture 07: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase III / Galle District / Photo by: Asjain Wahid

Let us look into an Activity that can foster Image Theatre in practice,

Process:

1. Divide the participants into working pairs, one person is **F** (the artiste), the other person **G** (the clay).
2. F silently sculpts G into an image of oppression after the instructions, by the Facilitator.
3. All artistes come to one side of the room, observe the different images of oppression and then join within an image other than their own, taking on the role of the oppressor character, to be depicted by themselves.
4. Next, the facilitator can activate these images using movement, sound, words and dialogue in order to explore the different scenes of oppression.
5. If time permits F and G should change roles.

Key Points	01	02	03	04
	<p>Oppression should be understood as a plural concept, and it's meaning beyond the subject of 'political oppression'.</p>	<p>Theater of the Oppressed is a non-traditional theatre style used to prompt dialogue and promote community-centered problem solving. It is designed to promote awareness of one's social situation and how we are bound by tradition.</p>	<p>Augusto Boal is the pioneer in introducing Theatre of the Oppressed. However, we should recognize that similar forms of theatre expressions were in existence in the local context.</p>	<p>Theatre of the Oppressed gives a prominent space for the audience to be actively involved and engaged for the purpose of demonstrating alternative solutions to the prevailing issues depicted in the play.</p>

08

All human beings use, in their daily lives, the same language that actors use on stage: their voices, their bodies, their movements and their expressions; they translate their emotions and desires into the Theatrical Language.

07

When human beings limit themselves to observe an object, a person or a space, renouncing momentarily their capacity and necessity of acting, the energy and their desire to act is transferred to that space, person or object, creating a space inside a space: an Aesthetic Space. This is the Objective Theatre.

06

Essential theatre consists of three elements: Subjective Theatre, Objective Theatre and the Theatrical Language.

05

Every human being is capable of acting: to survive, we necessarily have to produce actions and observe those actions and their effects on the environment. To be Human is to be Theatre: the co-existence of actor and spectator in the same individual. This is the Subjective Theatre.

## Goals and

The International Theatre Organizations made Principles of the Theatre. The declaration provides of their main goals.





# and Beliefs

Theatre of the Oppressed  
is a declaration of  
Theatre of the Oppressed.  
It is a concise summary  
of its goals and beliefs

01  
The Theatre of the Oppressed  
is a system of Exercises,  
Games and Techniques based  
on the Essential Theatre,  
to help men and women to  
develop what they already  
have inside themselves.

02  
The basic aim of the Theatre of the  
Oppressed is to humanize Humanity.

03  
Every human being is theatre!

04  
Theatre is defined as the  
simultaneous existence-in the  
same space and context-of  
actors and spectators. Every  
human being is capable of  
seeing the situation and seeing  
him/herself in the situation.

16

Theatre of the Oppressed is now being used in approximately half the nations around the world, as a tool for the making of discoveries about 'oneself' and about the 'other', of clarifying and expressing our desires; a tool for the changing of circumstances, which produce unhappiness and pain and for the enhancement of what brings peace; for respecting differences between individuals and groups and for the inclusion of all human beings in the Dialogue; and finally a tool for the achievement of economic and social justice, which is the foundation of true democracy. In summary, the general objective of the Theatre of the Oppressed is the development of essential Human Rights.

15


The Theatre of the Oppressed is neither an ideology nor a political party, neither dogmatic nor coercive and is respectful of all cultures. It is a method of analysis and a means to develop happier societies. Because of its humanistic and democratic nature, it is widely used all over the world, in all fields of social activities such as: education, culture, arts, politics, social work, psychotherapy, literacy programmes and health. In the annex to this Declaration of Principles, a number of exemplary projects are listed to illustrate the nature and the scope of its use.

14

The Theatre of the Oppressed tries to activate people in a humanistic endeavor expressed by its very name: theatre of, by, and for the oppressed. A system that enables people to act in the fiction of theatre to become protagonists, i.e. acting subjects, of their own lives.

13

The Theatre of the Oppressed is a worldwide non-violent aesthetic movement which seeks peace, not passivity.



The Theatre of the Oppressed offers everyone the aesthetic means to analyze their past, in the context of their present, and subsequently to invent their future, without waiting for it. The Theatre of the Oppressed helps human beings to recover a language they already possess – we learn how to live in society by playing theatre. We learn how to feel by feeling; how to think by thinking; how to act by acting. Theatre of the Oppressed is a rehearsal for reality.

09

The oppressed are those individuals or groups who are socially, culturally, politically, economically, racially, sexually, or in any other way deprived of their right to Dialogue or in any way impaired to exercise this right.

10

Dialogue is defined as to freely exchange with others, as a person and as a group, to participate in human society as equal, to respect differences and to be respected.

11

The Theatre of the Oppressed is based upon the principle that all human relationships should be of a dialogic nature: among men and women, races, families, groups and nations, and it should prevail. In reality, all dialogues have the tendency to become monologues, which create the relationship oppressors - oppressed. Acknowledging this reality, the main principle of Theatre of the Oppressed is to help restore dialogue among human beings.

12



Picture 08: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Vavuniya District / Photo by: Alexanthar Kamilas

# 04

## FORUM THEATRE

Augusto Boal believed that every human being is a self-contained theatre, actor and a spectator in one. We have the ability to look into our actions, we can alter or change them to produce an impactful outcome that would benefit the world. Thereby, Forum Theatre is created recognizing every human's innate characteristic of taking action while observing themselves in action. According to him theatre is a form of knowledge: it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it<sup>1</sup>.

**In Forum Theatre, the central theme is usually something of immediate relevance to the audience, often based on a shared life experience. It has historically been used to address oppression - inequality, injustice and decimation. Within the emerging trends, Forum Theatre is also used as a potential tool, to mobilize people from different faiths, ethnic and religious backgrounds to explore the best alternative ways to transform conflict and create action oriented debate on pluralistic and democratic values. The sole target is not necessarily to discover the ideal solution, but to encourage the audience to analyze the situation, try out strategies for countering oppression and to explore a positive and thoughtful approach to social problems.**

In simple terms, Forum Theatre is a play that revolves round a central character who is the *protagonist who encounters an oppression/s or an obstacle/s forced into him or her by an antagonist/s*, who the story portrays to have a severe effect on the protagonist's life. This short story explores on the hardships or the oppression that the central character has to go through and it demonstrates the worst-case scenario to trigger the audience to build a connection with the central character, while thinking about taking appropriate action to help him/her. Even within the context of transforming conflict and harnessing debates on democratic and pluralistic values, the core story will still remain the same.

<sup>1</sup> <http://postww2theatre.weebly.com/> retrieved-11.02.2018

Forum Theatre as the title displays, is self-explanatory, has its equal emphasis given to both the theatrical element, and the forum discussion and debate. It provides a platform for the audience to make direct interaction and debate about the play, making it an invaluable tool for social intervention.

At the beginning, the play is performed once to the audience members and then the discussion begins to understand the possible changes that could be made to overcome the issue.

The mediation between the audience and the actors on stage is handled by a character named joker, who takes the center stage to moderate the proceedings explaining the possible involvement of audience members. Considering the evolving nature of the character 'joker', it is preferred in this manual to use the name, 'facilitator', instead. Instructions are given to the audience to be Spect-Actors, where an intervention point can be suggested by simply raising a hand and saying 'stop'.

Oppression is a common reality in human life and can be found everywhere in a society. Very often people who encounter oppression are the victims of discrimination, inequality, conflict and lack of space to free expression. Under such circumstances, people who are voiceless and powerless become victims. They may not have the social conscience to know that the discrimination is wrong. Through exploration and debate, the Forum Theatre process can provide them a sense of empowerment to effect positive changes in dealing with discrimination, inequality, violence and voicelessness. Also, the focus in some of the Forum Theatre exercises, which require participants to explore aspects of their own personalities or past experiences and can involve exploration of participants' view of themselves, others, and their position in society as well.



Picture 09: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase II / Kandy District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

Protagonist is displayed as the central character in a story, written or dramatized. He/She is at the center of the storyline, ideally makes important decisions that would shift the story and thereby experiences the consequences of those decisions made.

Antagonist is a person or the group of characters that create obstacles or challenges or opposes the Protagonist, in most cases this character is defined as the Villain of the story.

## Key Points

01

Forum Theatre is a short play that revolves round a central character. Forum Theatre story can be about an oppression and social conflict.

02

It triggers the audience to think about taking action to help the protagonist to overcome the sense of powerlessness and to resolve conflict.

03

The play is moderated by a facilitator being the bridge between the audience and the actors, and Traditionally the facilitator is known as 'joker'.

04

The play is re-enacted by the Spect-Actors with solutions they think that would benefit the central character so that he/she is empowered to change her deprivation of power with realistic alternatives.





Picture 10: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Vavuniya District / Photo by: Alexanthar Kamilas



# 05

## CHARACTERISTICS OF FORUM THEATRE

Forum Theatre has unique characteristics ...

### 5.1 Stimulating Freedom of Expression

Forum theatre has the unique ability to stimulate freedom of expression of not only the performers but also of the audience. Importantly, it encourages the audience to realize that free expression of matters in addressing injustice and exploring alternative solutions.

**Being the voice for the powerless:** The core theme of Forum Theatre is to empower the oppressed; to take the oppressed out of their oppression. The audience is given the platform to understand the powerlessness and to encourage the audience members to step forward to take plausible actions and change the outcome. Allowing the audience to ask right questions is highly important in shaping right answers.

**Self-Critic:** During the Forum theatre performance, since the audience becomes the Spect-Actor, being onstage replacing the Actors, the Spect-Actors critically explore the question, “who needs to be empowered and who can bring in positive changes”? Forum Theatre attempts to involve the audience to make critical use of their vital senses. Critical reflection is needed more in Forum Theatre than in simple discussion.

**Discovering self:** Another key characteristic of the Forum Theatre is that, it provides opportunity to the audience for self-discovery. In addition to the realization of powerlessness, the causes of powerlessness, creative ways to overcome powerlessness and being critical of such situations, it helps audiences to understand themselves, which is the first step in personal transformation.

### 5.2 Addressing Injustice

Forum Theatre plays typically reflect an issue or a problem that exists in real life situations involving real people. It also portrays how the society suppresses or marginalizes certain sections such as widows, children, housewives, disabled persons, etc., in the community.

### 5.3 Stimulate Collective Desire to Explore Alternative Actions

Forum Theater aims at targeting a community that is deprived due to social issue. All the characters displayed in the play are a reflection of the community. In there, the collective desire to obtain a solution for their own problem is motivated from within the community. The community is encouraged to find alternative solutions, avoiding violence and aggression that would destroy communal harmony. It is this space that facilitates a positive and a thoughtful approach to deal with social problems.

### 5.4 Stimulate Solutions

The purpose of the Form Theatre is not always to look for solutions. Deep realization of injustice and its causes are highlighted with due importance. Synergizing the local capacity of people and mobilizing critical consensus to help people, not only to look for one solution but many. Play is dedicated to be altered according to the preference of the audience. The aim is not to discover the ideal solution, but to encourage the audience to analyze the situation and to try out strategies for countering oppression.

## 5.5 Shifting Power Back to the People

In a Forum Theatre due to its structural dynamics, the Spect-Actors are equally important as the actors. They become equally powerful in the forum setting. The process of making Forum Theatre gives them the power and the space for deep realization. Now we will explore some of the aspects in which Spect-Actors gain ownership and control in the process.

**Script:** In most Forum Theatre Projects, the scripts emerge as a result of research and in-depth engagement with the target audience. In some instances, scripts are given to the members of the target community to read through and validate. Also during the performance of the Forum Theatre, the audience receives an opportunity to further change the story.

**Actors:** Unlike traditional theatre, the Actors on stage do not possess the ultimate power of control, but the Spect-Actors do. They become the actors who guide the conversations, change the actions, and receive the control to change the outcome of the entire play.

**Intervention mechanism:** It is the right of the audience to have the privilege to stop the play any time they wish; to comment, to give feedback, to intervene and to change the situation. Also during the time of intervention, the Spect-Actors take up the role of evaluators, where they directly contribute to the monitoring and evaluation process of the implementers of the forum theatre production.

**Setting:** The Forum Theatre performance can happen in any setting that can gather a crowd and does not necessarily have to be a controlled environment. It may happen in a canteen, playground, market, bus stand, or even on the street, thereby making the general audience comfortable with the environment, and not the actors or the members of the crew.

## 5.6 People Driven and Participation

The performers and the Spect-Actors, participating together to explore the choices made through interventions, ideas and personal experiences are sharing a sense of solidarity among the people involved to generate social change. Although this resource was developed to support the use of Forum Theatre as a tool to address issues of equality and discrimination, the process can be used in many different environments. It can be used with people of all ages in community centers, workplaces, and schools; with the homeless, disabled, or anyone who has experience oppression. Forum Theatre encourages people to find solutions that are action led, rather than purely verbal.

## 5.7 Harnessing Versatility the Biggest Advantage

The biggest advantage of adapting Forum Theatre is its natural ability to harness flexibility to any given situation that depicts a social issue. There's neither a restriction nor a rule imposed when reaching out to the masses. Therefore, it can be presented in a form of a street theatre performance on a floating stage or within a fixed stage scenario in a closed Hall. Moreover, the preparation too can be adapted with limited knowledge in performing art, but with a basic knowledge on forum theatre. The only knowledge that needs to be absorbed is the knowledge of the issue at stake.

Most often, Forum Theatre performances are brought to the public by actors and actresses who are picked from within the community, therefore they cannot be considered to be professional actors and actresses, but since it upholds the authenticity of the storyline, the effectiveness of the play is greater as it is presented by people who are familiar with the audience, thus reducing the gap between the actor and the audience further.

Forum theatre also encourages minimum use of props, costumes, music and songs, when possible, which may work as catalysts widening the gap between the audience and the actor. Therefore, simplicity is the order of the performance day.

## Key Points

01

Forum Theater fosters freedom of expression, giving the freedom to think, have an opinion, voice out and to discover-self, by encouraging the audience to take center stage of play. It creates a sense of empathy between people in different opinion groups.

02

Unlike conventional theatre, it shifts the power back to the people by giving an opportunity to change the actors, the script, the storyline and the setting, in keeping with their preference, and the way they would want to see it.

03

Forum theatre explores the possibilities of getting a community come to a collective solution that could endorse to benefit the people themselves, thereby creating a safe space to practice the solution by action.

04

Forum Theatre is designed to stimulate solutions that the audience can change the consequences that would benefit the life of the protagonist, which can be explored by changing the 'Oppressed or the Neutral' characters.

05

Forum Theatre productions are simple events done with the masses, or where the masses gather, it requires minimum props, costumes or set-ups in which lie the versatility.

06

The play displayed during a forum theatre performance is solely dependent on the audience involvement or the Spect-Actors involvement, as it is the main component to execute interventions.



Picture 11: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV Mannar District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer



Picture 12: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Kilinochchi District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

# 06

## FORUM THEATRE METHODOLOGY

...Presents a scene or a play that must necessarily show a situation of an oppression that the Protagonist does not know how to fight against, and fails. The spect-actors are invited to replace this Protagonist [or the Oppressed] and act out - on stage and not from the audience - with all possible solutions, ideas, strategies. The other actors improvise the reactions of their characters facing each new intervention, so as to allow a sincere analysis of the real possibilities of using those suggestions in real life. All Spect-Actors have the same right to intervene and play their ideas. (Boal, 1979).

Effective deployment of a Forum Theatre play has three main stages: play, discussion and forums. First, the situation of oppression is presented in approximately 15 minutes with the characters and their interactions. Characters of the forum theater are constructed to stimulate immediate action by the audience and to feel for the protagonist. During the Theatre display, following steps can be taken into consideration.

## Invite and Unite

This can be done through theatrical games, singing, drumming and dance, or interactive games with the audience. There is no hard and fast rule in this. However, it is very important for one to make sure that the audience is highly welcomed, encouraged, respected and indicated that they are the key party in the day's drama.

**Introduce your team:** It is very important for the performers to introduce themselves and try to associate with the audience.

**Unite the Audience:** It is vital for the forum theater troops, that the audience trusts the performers, that they are interested in the drama, and that they are emotionally united and ready to engage the performers and the performance. To unite the audience mentally and physically, the facilitator can engage them in various games and exercises. However, no one should undertake or continue any exercise or game if they have some injury or condition, which might be exacerbated by taking part – a back problem, for instance. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, no one is compelled to do anything they don't wish to do.

01

02

### Introduction

The facilitator presents the expectation and the purpose of the forum theatre performance.

Eventually, the facilitator will introduce the oppressed and the goal of the central character. Finally, he/she will invite the crew to perform the first round of play.

03

### First Play

First, the play is performed as a conventional theatre of approximately 10-30 minutes. The entire story of the play would be depicted in 5-6 scenes that would be revolved round a protagonist (explained in the earlier sections).

The stem scene (first scene) would give an introduction to the issue at hand and would continue to showcase the real life impact, the issue has on people, specially the protagonist. The story will end in a climax that would be the worst experience, the central character has to go through because of this issue that is being addressed.

# 04

## Repeat Same Drama

After the first run of the play the facilitator comes back on stage, conveniently bringing his voice onto a low pitch that would suit the tragedy that was depicted. He/She would then ask the audience, how they feel about the play, whether the story shown is real or just a story. 'If you are given an opportunity to change what happened, how would you do it? Or who would you change?'

After receiving some reactions from the crowd, the facilitator can instruct how to proceed with the play. The facilitator stimulates the discussion about the relationships between characters and the position of each performer in the play: oppressor, oppressed, their allies, neutral characters, etc., and gives a moment for the audience to discuss among them and to share ideas on what was displayed.

During the discussion, the Facilitator asks the audience to give a summary of the show, by pointing out the issue portrayed by the performers, and asking the audience if there is anyone among them who has experienced a similar story and to share, if it will not make the audience member uncomfortable. The facilitator needs to motivate and encourage the audience to come up with realistic solutions or improvements to the situation presented to them, and to enact on stage with their own interpretations.

Finally, before the 2nd run of the play, the facilitator needs to give clear instructions on how the audience can get involved by waiting till the performance replay from the start and then when they feel there's a need for a change, they can put their hands and say 'Stop'! This would mean that the audience member would receive an opportunity to get involved and share his/her thoughts to bring in a solution for the issue.

# 05

## Interventions

The public can change all the characters as they deem fit, according to their comprehension of suitable solutions for the issue.

Each Spect-Actor can intervene during the re-run of the play by the instructed method, when the actors will "freeze" and remain motionless on stage while members of the public come and replace the actor they choose in the play.

The aim is for the audience to 'replace' the characters who did not take a stand and who can change in a positive course of action to help the oppressed and take a decision that can sustain and develop him/her positively or empower the oppressed character to take a stand against the Oppression or injustice, as portrayed in the play by himself/herself.

Therefore, the Spect-Actors can intervene in every scene of the play, and at any moment of the scene, while the scene is moving forward so that all possible solutions are discovered.

The Spect-Actor can do many things in the intervening stage. He/she can:

- a) come in as a new character
- b) replace a bystander
- c) replace the protagonist and offer a solution from the character's perspective

After some resistance that normally exists in a realistic situation, the antagonist party will give in depending on how powerful the offered solution is and the Spect-Actors are able to see the problem unfolding with a positive change.

After choosing solutions, discussions take place about how it might be implemented in everyday reality in the community, that face issues discussed in the play.

## Intervention Guidelines

1. The Spect-Actor comes up on stage and takes the place of one of the characters who they believe could create a positive solution to the problem presented.
2. They should take the place of someone they think they might become in the future. The Spect-Actor should not take the place of the oppressor.
3. The original actors left on-stage, work with the audience member with whatever tactic they may try.
4. No physical interventions: If you think your character might do something physical, please call a “time-out” and discuss the outcomes of those actions.
5. When the audience member finishes his/her intervention, the facilitator debriefs the audience member, the actors, and the rest of the audience.

Let us look into an Ice breaker game that can be done with the audience to unite them emotionally and to get them prepared to engage in the drama.

### Tongue Twisters

This is a fun game that can be done with the audience to make them comfortable before the show. Invite all of them to participate on voicing out the following Tongue Twisters.

There's a chip shop in space,  
which sells space ship-shaped chips  
I like New York, unique New York, I like  
unique New York Rubber baby-buggy  
bouncers Floppy fluffy puppies, floppy fluffy  
puppies The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's  
sick

#### Note

You can also create tongue twisters using your local language

Sinhala words

*'Chooty Teacherge chooty torch eka'*

Tamil words

*'Kokkunetakokku,  
nettakokkuittamuttakattamutta'*

### Sound Card Game

Invite the audience to listen to you carefully, to a pair of words that sounds the same but has a subtle change. Then you instruct the audience to repeat the words according to the sequence that you command.

The pair of words can be - Tomato and Potato  
- you can create your own sequence  
tomato, tomato, potato, tomato, potato

Sinhala words

*'Karapincha, Haapancha'*

Tamil words

*'Soru, Sambal'*

#### Tips

No Negative opinion - You may not now, you may not be aware, it looks like you are sleeping, you feel so tired It could be a very famous song.





	01	02	03	04	05
<b>Key Points</b>	When discussing strategies, do not ask if the interventions were realistic, because this type of questioning reinforces a feeling that change is impossible. Instead, ask if the interventions are possible.	What is about and what is not about? The point is not to show what we think other people should do - it is not theater of advice. The point is to discover what we can do.	Forum Theatre is not a decision making tool or a method for capturing the views of the audience.	One of the first things that Spect-Actors realize is that, as in life, if they don't intervene, nothing will change. So, forum theatre is not just passive talk, advice, and making of opinions.	The next thing Spect-Actors find is that doing just "something" is not enough, it must be a strategic something. And therefore, the action should be strategic.

# Forum Theatre Games and Exercises

Every process of the Forum Theatre performance involves lots of practical exercises, for the performers to establish the groups' dynamics, understand theme of the performance, break physical barriers, understand the issues of oppression, stories and roles, and overall performing processes. Following are some samples.

## 01. Duels

### Objectives

- To strengthen group dynamic
- To equip the group to explore the principles and themes of Forum Theatre

Divide the group into pairs. Ask each pair to face one another and place their hands on their own knees. They must 'duel' and try to score points by touching the knees of their opponent (their weak spot). To do this, they will need to take their hands off their own knees, thus leaving themselves vulnerable to 'attack'. As the duels continue, build up the tension and competitiveness by calling, "First person to 3 is the winner", or, "Next point wins".

### Variation

Divide the group into different pairs. Ask each pair to face one another, placing one hand behind their back with the palm facing out, and turning their other hand into a 'sword', with the index finger being the tip. They must 'duel' and try to score points by touching the palm of their opponent (their weak spot) with the tip of their sword. As the duels continue, build up the tension and competitiveness by calling, "First person to 3 is the winner", or, "Next point wins".

### Useful Questions for Feedback

How did it feel to win/lose?

Did your partner overpower you?

Did you get carried away with the competitiveness?

How did you celebrate winning?

## 02. Explore the Face

### Objectives

- To help break down physical barriers
- To continue the exploration of sensory work

Ask participants to find a space for themselves in the room. Then ask them to close their eyes and remain completely silent. One by one, guide participants gently through the space and pair people up randomly. Shape each pair so that everyone is standing facing their partner, touching palms, with their eyes closed. Ask each pair to begin by exploring their partner's hands through touch. Then invite them to make their way up the arms to the shoulders, neck and then face. Participants can spend time exploring the face and head, all the while trying to build up a picture in their mind of who they have been paired with. When both individuals have had their turn, they can open their eyes.

## 03. Break the Circle

### Objectives

- To explore the struggle of the protagonist
- To explore the theme of defeat
- To explore tactical approaches to oppression and discrimination

Ask the group to stand in a circle and invite 1 volunteer to stand in the middle. Explain that the volunteer's objective is to break out of the circle and that the rest of the group should physically stop the volunteer from breaking out by linking together. Encourage the volunteer to try and look for alternative ways of escaping. Take a feedback from the group and invite few different volunteers to try the exercise.

## 04. Guess the leader

### Objectives

- To begin to explore issues of possible oppression (e.g. power of group over individual, gang mentality, power of knowledge, struggle of the discriminated minority, struggle of the protagonist)

Ask the group to stand in a circle and invite a volunteer to step forward. Ask this volunteer to leave the room for a few moments. Then invite a second volunteer to step forward from the group. Explain to the group that this person is the leader. The leader should begin a continuous movement, which the rest of the group should copy. Encourage the leader to change the movement regularly.

Explain that the volunteer waiting outside the room is going to return and will have to try to guess who is leading the movement. At this stage, brief the volunteer, who is waiting outside the room, invite them to return to the circle and try to figure out who is leading the movements. The leader and the group should do their best to disguise who is leading, but the leader must remain the only one who is leading the movement.

Repeat this activity, allowing different participants from the group to step forward and volunteer.

## 05. Bomb & Shield

### Objectives

- To explore the theme of danger
- To explore strategic thinking

Ask the participants to walk around the space. While they walk, ask each participant to select 2 other individuals. They should keep these choices to themselves and not indicate who they have chosen. One person is the bomb and the other person is the shield. Explain that the aim of the exercise is to keep your shield between yourself and your bomb.

After a few minutes, you can call, “Freeze”, and check in with the group to see how they are doing. You can also give a countdown to the bomb explosion and then check with the crowd to see if they are safe.

### Useful Questions for Feedback:

- Did you panic?
- Did you use tactics?
- What were those tactics?



Picture 13: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Mannar District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

# 07

## ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

The facilitator, traditionally known as jockey, is the bridge between the audience and the actors. He/she should not represent the interest of any individual party. He/she creates a link between what is presented in the show and the reality of the audience. An ideal Facilitator must strive to do the following To make the Forum Theatre, a successful production; He/she makes sure the performance achieves its goal, therefore should have a strong knowledge of the targeted social issue in depth. He/she must be aware of the community background as well as the possible legal implications of the issue depicted through the play. It is important to have a knowledge on human rights, democracy, politics, community power structure and health in a language that allows the spectators to perceive the importance of the information in their daily lives.

**01**

He/she is not an instant change maker therefore, his/her task is not to advise people, but to encourage them to think critically and rationally.

**02**

Explain the power dynamics in the drama. Support and motivate the actors. Master his/her own feelings and not try to educate people every time.

**03**

Ask open, pertinent, and stimulating questions in order to encourage audience participation. Better to ask less number of but powerful questions that lead the audience to talk.

**04**

Use humour as a tool to break the tension and good, clear communication to always gain the trust and attention of the audience and keep them at ease.

**05**

Observe the emotions portrayed by the audience and be sensitive to empathize. Manage the conversations between the audience and the performance to foster positive idea generation.

**06**

Identify and react to the challenges presented to the audience before, during and after the show. Composure to maintain order, discipline and respect of others during the play.

**07**

The Facilitator must be a diplomat, there may be occasions where an audience member disagrees with an intervention by someone else, and this needs to be handled swiftly and sensitively.

**08**

The joker's role is to get the debate going, get down to the real issues and make sure that the discussion is not skirting around them and getting bogged down in specifics.

**09**

If needed in a quick poll, voting to mobilize common consensus, try to shape culture of Silence dealing with silence.

**10**

Keep bringing it back to key questions, rather than forcing the debate with opinion or steamrolling.

**11**

Need to appreciate and thank every effort made by the audience, not allowing anyone to leave the change feeling defeated.

**12**

Be quick on feet to analyze issues to summarize certain situations and to find comprehensive answers to the questions raised.



Picture 13: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase III / Kalutara District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

# 08

## REHEARSAL PROCESS

Rehearsal is one of the most fundamental steps that need extremely careful attention in making a Forum Theatre Program successful. The following are the possible stages preferred to make the process of rehearsal effective.

1. Start with warm-up - Do a warm up exercise to build team spirit. This can also help the actors to get their voice and body prepared for the performance.
2. Brief about main conflict - Brief the audience about the main conflict/issue or point of concentration.
3. Make it one line - Ideal way to brief the actors about the core issue/conflict of the drama is to tell that in one sentence. It has to be single, specific and simple (3S)
4. Explain characters - All the key characters at once. This will help them to understand characters that are in the drama.
5. Explain the character biography - Detail reading of all the characters - their physical nature, emotions, behaviors, wounds, dreams and confrontations.
6. Explain who is an antagonist, a protagonist and neutralists including their characteristics and goals.
7. Inform the team that the story is about the protagonist. Explain the whole story first - it will help the team to organize themselves.
8. Explain the key intervention points - however, these will be decided by the audience eventually. Ask questions to see if the actors have understood both, individual characters and the story.
9. Practice action by action - explain all the key elements needed to be concentrated on - stage balance, eye contact, voice, position, check if the character reflects given traits, engage other members for the discussion.
10. Explain scene by scene. Do a full rehearsal. Give a rehearsal schedule for any follow-up rehearsal Explain the logistics of future events.

### Tips

01

Everyone should participate equally and help audience to understand characters.

02

Hot-sheet exercise - ask key details from the biography give chance to Q&A.



Picture 13: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase II / Training Workshop / Photo by: Muhammedu Aswer



# 09

## STORY DEVELOPMENT

There is no story and therefore no forum without a conflict or central issue. It is necessary to have a conflict or a central issue to captivate the audience and to maintain entertainment and imagination. Once you've come up with a conflict or central issue, it needs to be transformed and resolved through dramatic actions that are connected by the characters in the drama. For a Forum Theatre performance to be effective, it is advisable to focus on one major conflict or issue at a time.

### **01. Conflict and Oppression**

Conflict and oppression are two different concepts. Conflict causes oppression. Also, the person who is being affected by the conflict can be the oppressed. In some cases, the oppressed can be someone closer to the one who is affected by the conflict.

### **02. Develop Powerful Characters**

A character in a simple sense is a vehicle that carries the story. In the context of Forum Theatre, characters are mostly human beings, a person that you see in your daily life.

The audience will discover similarities in values, customs, physical attributes, emotional attributes, experience, interests of a good character. In a Forum Theatre, characters should appeal to the audience and should give a sense of "familiarity". The character - he/she should be seen like someone in the community. Also remember that each character:

- is unique in nature
- has different physical natures
- has unique behavioral natures
- is driven by unique emotional needs
- has a wound
- has a dream
- has internal confrontation
- acts towards the need of the story

### 03. How to Develop a Powerful Character?

There are various ways in practice to develop emotionally powerful characters. What is given below are just some of them.

1. Remember, you have a conflict or issue identified.
2. If you do not have a conflict or issue identified, you may need to do that first.
3. Brainstorm it, before you begin to character development.
4. Divide your participants into groups of equal numbers.
5. Minimum four to five groups is ideal.
6. Ask each group to discuss and relate their conflict/issue with one person that is more close to their heart.
7. Tell them that this person has to be living in their setting, who is familiar with them, or who has more relevance to the conflict.
8. Give them flip charts or A4 sheets.
9. Ask each group to develop minimum one character.
10. They do not need to intentionally develop, protagonist, an antagonist or neutrals. They need to concentrate only on establishing one powerful character.

#### **Guide them to ask following questions in their groups**

- What is the family background of the chosen character?
- How do you describe the unique physical nature of your character?
- What are the unique behaviors of your character?
- What are the unique emotions of your character?
- What are the needs of your character?
- What is the wound of your character?
- What is the dream?
- What are the inner confrontations of your character?
- How other's in the community would describe your character?
- Tell how unique is this character in your community?

Some time it is very hard to differentiate; who is the hero of the story? In many stories, the roles aren't clear-cut, or they can change throughout the drama. Some stories might have many protagonists or antagonists. What about the words, protagonist and antagonist themselves? What do those mean, and to which characters do they refer in stories?



#### **Antagonist**

Antagonist is usually "The bad guy", but better thought of as the opponent of the protagonist or the central character. An antagonist is often called the villain. The best way to discern the antagonist is to ask who is standing in the way of the story's goal?

## 04. Character presentations

Character presentation is an exercise where the group members explain/present the full biography of the character they developed. Once all the groups have presented their characters, paste them together on a white board or on a wall.

1. Eventually, try to imagine the best appropriate link - relationship between each of the characters.
2. The best link will easily guide you to a powerful story. However, do not try to construct a story at this stage.
3. By now, there should be a realization that each character is unique.
4. Each character clearly demonstrates a unique goal.
5. You will be able to discover who the protagonist and who the antagonist in the story.
6. Remember, you are going to construct a story only around the central characters. However, other people - characters have strong stakes in his or her own story.

## 05. Storylines

Storyline in the context of Forum Theatre, is the line of actions by the central character, in reaching his/her goal, facing potential obstacles, challenges caused by the antagonist. At some point, some actions can place the central character heavily oppressed and the antagonist highly dominant. Creating a logical line-up of storylines;

1. Read through the storylines.
2. Try and change the possible order of the storyline in your story.
3. Break them into scenes.
4. Maximum number of scenes can be three to four.
5. Make sure that at the end of every scene there is strong oppression.
6. At the end of the final scene there should be a strong oppression.
7. Try and act out these storylines and pre-test the strength of your story.
8. Make necessary changes, if you still see room to make your story more powerful.
9. This is the story you are going to perform.



### Protagonist

The central character or the one who is oppressed or the one whose name comes to mind when you ask the question, "Whose story is this?" A Forum story ought to have just one protagonist but a novel can have several.



### The Bystanders:

The bystanders are the ones who witness this oppression and are at a position to prevent it from happening.



Picture 14: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Kilinochchi District / Photo by: Alexanthar Kamilas

# 10

## ESTABLISHING CHARACTER THROUGH ACTING

In the context of Forum Theatre, developing emotionally powerful characters itself will not be sufficient. The Actors/Performers have great responsibilities to understand the characters/roles, internalize them, and to represent them in acting.

Ask the participants these questions:

How many roles are we performing in our daily lives?

How do we project ourselves in each of the different roles?

Aren't we acting sometime other's characters?

Performing which character, do we become real?

Sometimes aren't we seeing theatre and people everywhere?

Why is it so easy for people to act naturally in real life?

Come to the conclusion that even in real life we become characters  
Therefore, it is very vital that Forum Theatre actors understand the following questions throughout their acting.

# Key questions for actors

## 01. Who am I?

You as an actor/character should have specific answer as to who you are, what is your physical nature, emotions, your memories, social life, family, wounds, confrontation, ambition, etc. Facilitators can always ask the actors if he/she has answers to this question.

## 03. When is it?

You should be aware of your time and setting. Particularly, what season is it, what year, what time of day, etc. We tend to carry ourselves differently in different settings and in different time periods. Facilitators can always ask the actors if they have answers to this question.

## 02. Where am I?

You should know where you come from. We usually behave differently, depending on our surroundings. You need to establish your relationship with your environment and people in the environment, because this affects the way you represent yourself. Facilitators can always ask the actors if they have answers to this question.

## 04. Where have I just come from?

You know that you are not just jumping on stage from behind it or the curtain and you have a clear knowledge as to what's just happened in the scene before? Have you just had an argument? Have you just been proposed to? Just think about real life: do you always enter your house in the same way every night? No. Where you come from will have conditioned your mood.

## Effective Acting

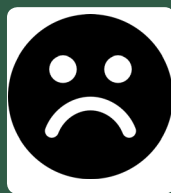
Acting in Forum Theatre performance is a key element that might attract audience. Some argue that Forum Theatre may not need professional acting. In acting, it is important to control our voice, body, mind - creativity and emotions. It is expected from an actor to have more ability than a normal person to communicate with his/her audience.

## Recommendations



### Not only Feeling:

Feelings are being expressed with rationale - therefore, do not just express them always when you are acting. It is part of your emotional journey.



### Not just Emotion:

People display their emotions depending on the objective or the situation of their life. Therefore, playing objectives can lead to the desired emotions, but just playing an emotion itself is impossible in theater.



### Don't over act:

Majority of people do not over act in their real life and also most people do face circumstances using natural reactions. It is their natural personality traits that dominate when they face such circumstances. Try to be real on stage.



### Don't be selfish:

Even if you are the lead actor, Forum Theatre is not all about you. It's not all about any one person. The performance belongs to everybody, and everybody deserves an opportunity to have their moment in the play.

### 05. What do I want?

This is a key question. You should know what is your dream and what do you want to achieve in your drama. It is very important to know what you are struggling for. You are aware of your intention, your motivation, and your action? You should never walk on stage just to play a scene. You should always have a reason to be in the scene.

### 07. What will happen if I don't get it now?

The consequences of not getting what you want should always be very important to you. If the high stakes are not clear to you in the play, you need to invent them, otherwise it will come up, and that you're not bothered at all about the outcome.

### 06. Why do I want it now?

You should understand what exactly you are going to do now? This is crucial in acting and in Forum Theatre. You should have clear knowledge as to why your motivation has to be right now, not before, not later but now.

### 08. What must I overcome?

Every actor in Forum Performance carries an inner and an outer obstacle. Inner obstacle is something that you go through within yourself. The outer obstacle is the resistance (usually the other character) to obtain your action. There must always be a problem you are trying to overcome.

## Controlling unwanted gestures

Ask your actors to speak without having any movements in their body - just words. This is for them to realize that we need to control unwanted body gesture.

1. Again, ask the actors to use only the body gesture not words to communicate something.
2. Simply explain them about posture, gesture, emotions, moments, voice.
3. One word may have several meanings.
4. See how you use each of your body part to communicate - legs, hands, head, lips and other body parts.

Therefore, it is important for the actors to realize how their bodies work with words and emotions.

- You must read and understand the storylines first. It will help you to easily understand the ARC of the total story you are to perform.
- Know the setting of the characters so you are aware of your place and time in the drama.
- Understand the relationship with each character so it will be easy for you to understand what you have to do with them in the drama.
- Understand the dialogues - it is important to do all what was indicated above. Then the understanding of dialogue will become so easy for you.
- Discuss in your team how unique your character is in your community.
- Act repeatedly, its important than just memorizing.
- Discover interesting and effective ways to display your character that would create a memorable moment on stage.
- Spend your time to listen to audience because what is in their mind is not in your script and what is in your script may not be in their minds.



Picture 15: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Vavuniya District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer



# 11

## PLANNING A FORUM THEATRE INITIATIVE

In this section we look into the planning aspect of Forum Theatre initiative with the best practices that have positively contributed to implementing successful projects in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Following are some key steps:

### 01. Needs Assessment



Needs Assessment is a process in which the project team will gather accurate information that reflect the needs of a community. The data collected during needs assessment will be helpful for the implementers, primarily to identify issues, cases and effects, formulate goals, define objectives for the intended project, identify existing projects, potential allies, challenges, etc.,

As a result of the needs assessment, the project team will have clear knowledge about demography of your target community, and their background - history, cultural diversity, social and economic situation, religious believes, etc. Needs assessment will help to determine the levels of knowledge, skills, and aptitude of the target audience.

Tools such as baseline survey, focused group discussions, document reviews, personal interviews, direct observations, SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) are used to determine the needs.



Picture 16: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase II / Training Workshop / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

## Collecting Information

Following are some important aspects of collecting information from the field;

Make your approach polite and respectful. Explain the purpose of the research. Make sure you build confidence and gain respect in your community. Portray that your project is both fun and important.

Practice active listening. Focus your attention on the speaker and suspend your own frame of reference. It is useful to paraphrase back to them what you have heard them say. Include not just their words or story, but also their underlying emotions.

Your posture should be open and empathetic towards them. Always avoid expressing a judgment. Keep in mind that your job is to gather information, and not to evaluate!

It is important to evaluate the quality of information they give you. Do they seem to be sugarcoating a situation? What are their biases? Do these biases shed light on the community's conflicts, etc.?

Ask simple, open questions that don't have clear yes or no answers. Ask how, who, what, where, when, and why. Why - a good follow-up question is: Don't assume you know why everything is important, it's important to have an open mind to ask the significance.

Take notes - Take notes of all the key information you collect. Keep in mind, however, that a notebook can make people uncomfortable. Therefore, ask their permission to take notes. Remind them it is for information purposes only.

Reach a cross-section of the local population - You need to capture a diverse spectrum of stakeholders based on age, gender, job, education level, social status, belief, etc.

## 02. Compiling Information



Compiling information is putting together all the information that you found through different sources, to make one meaningful document. During this step the crew would be exchanging information among the members who actively took part in the research process. There are various programmes that would help you such as - MS excel, SPSS, etc., used to compile the data you collected



Picture 17: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Mannar District / Photo by: Alexanthar Kamilas

### 03. Forming Objectives



Having a concise objective is highly important to know the purpose of the project, determine the strategies, activities, timelines and the resources needed. Unlike goals, objectives are more specific and easy to measure.

**The difference between Goals and Objectives,** The major difference between goals and objectives is that a goal describes a destination and the objective would be the measuring tool for the progress that is necessary to reach the desired destination. Also goals look into the broader perspective with a long term and outcome based, but objectives are narrowed down to the specifics, which look into the short term achievements.

#### Goal #1

To create critical mass (a decisive number of people) in the plantation community on the impact of Gender Based Violence (GBV)

#### Objective #1.1

To capacitate 25 young Artistes from central province on how to use Forum Theatre as a potential tool to address the impact of GBV in the plantation community.

#### Objective #1.2

To prepare the young artistes to present 10 Forum Theatre performances highlighting the impact of GBV in the plantation community in the central province within a period of 3 months.

#### Objective #1.3

To host 20 Forum performances and to initiate dialogue on the impact of GBV in the plantation sector during a period of 12 months.

**Strong objectives are always determined by its unique characteristics mentioned below:**

**Specific:** Objectives should be concrete, detailed, focused, and well defined in terms of defining desirable outcomes of the Forum Theatre programme. Need to specify what you want to achieve.

**Measurable:** Objectives should allow measurement of the outcomes and progress towards their achievement - preferably in quantitative and qualitative terms.

**Attainable:** Objectives should be attainable with a reasonable amount of effort and resources available.

**Relevant:** Objectives should be relevant to local context.

**Time-bound:** Objectives should indicate a start and a finish date in relation to what is to be accomplished.

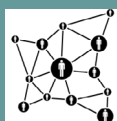
## 04. Selecting Participants

Applications are called in keeping with the objectives, to select participants, hire the trainers. Choose a suitable location for training, including the final performance. There are effective and cost-effective ways in which you can attract right participants for the programmes.



### Use social Media:

You can use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and other social media networks to reach the public effectively. You can engage your partner organizations to use their respective social media platforms to do the same. Also it's important that you use a #Hashtag so that you can filter information or reach a specific audience who will be interested.



### Use your own Networks:

You may have your own network and list of past youth who participated in the past programmes. Inform them about the call for applications. It will be useful to reach out to other organizations and networks, interested in Forum Theatre. Formal communication will be helpful to get the necessary support required.



### Engage Local Authorities:

You can request recommendations from District or Divisional Secretariats, Arts and Cultural Ministries, Divisional level cultural officers, Samurdhi Officers, School Principals, Drama teachers, etc. In some districts religious leaders might be maintaining strong links with youth groups. This can also be used.



### News Paper Articles:

You can post articles in the newspaper to reach out to the masses. If you have a budget allocated, you can go for press advertising as a last option.

### Selection process

- You should have a criterion to select your participants. Depending on your objectives, you may consider factors such as- age, ethnicity, region, relevance, gender, etc., as necessary.
- You need to understand whether it's important to reach out to any special communities - example - people with disabilities, war widows, aged community, etc.
- You should understand the availability of participants during training, performance and whenever it is necessary, according to the project timeline.
- You need to consider the past performance of the participants, whether they are practically capable of handling tasks assigned, with a proven track record.
- You need to understand whether the selected participants are team players and they are willing to help each other to grow by sharing knowledge.

### What will be your next steps?

- You can call the participants for an interview, which can be conducted one on one basis.
- You can organize an audition or a demonstration to understand the level of competency of the participants.
- Once you've selected the participants you need to have a file dedicated to each participant to understand his/her profile and to monitor progress made.
- Inform them formally that they are being selected for the program. During the process you need to inform them on the training schedule, performance location, date, logistic arrangements and contact details of the officials.

## 05. Selecting a Suitable Trainer

It is extremely vital to have an excellent trainer and have him/her involved in the project from the very beginning. Trainer is mainly responsible for training the participants on forum theatre performance -- that will include supporting participants to develop strong scripts, supervising rehearsals and coaching teams on acting. The trainer should have a deep knowledge on the profile of participants, sound understanding of the findings of need assessments, knowledge about target community and issues that are to be dealt in the play.

What to consider when selecting a Trainer?

- Need clear Terms of Reference (ToR). It should provide clear guidelines to achieve expected standards, timeline and deliverables.
- Written selection criteria before evaluate him/her.
- Sometimes trainers may have excellent knowledge on Forum Theatre, but poor understanding on the selected theme.
- Make Sure Trainer is sensitive to the theme you have selected. Talk to organizations where the trainer has conducted training in the past to understand his/her approach.



Picture 18: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Mannar District / Photo by: Alexanthar Kamilas

# 12

## LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENT

In order to plan a successful Forum Theatre program, the forum crew or implementers should have a deep knowledge on logistic requirements. This would include identifying a compatible venue for training, rehearsal, performance and lodging. In addition, plans for meals, transportation and payments are also part of the logistics.

### 01. A training venue should have following key elements

**Basic Requirements:** Specially meals, sanitary facilities, space for the training, equipment for training - flipcharts, pens, papers, resource manuals, multimedia, etc.

**Accessibility:** The selected training space should be easily accessible to reduce the estimated time and effort to travel. Also make the families of the participants comfortable, the location should be decided to be within a reachable distance as it may go on for about two weeks.

**Ambience:** Natural setting of the training venue would be a catalyst to maintain the activeness and fun nature of the of the programme, which will be essential to build the team spirit.

### 02. Performance Venue

When Choosing a place for Forum Theatre Performance, make sure that it has;

- Access to the public to witness the performance without restrictions.
- Space large enough to accommodate the attending audience at any given time.
- Accessibility by means of travel that foster convenience.
- Good acoustics that will help voice projections if it's not supporting, then the necessity of hiring a sound system well in advance.

Forum Theatre doesn't have to be performed in an open space or a playground. This can be performed even in a class Room. However, if a large audience is targeted, one may need to consider above.



Picture 19: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Vavuniya District / Photo by: Alexantrar Kamilas



# 13

## ART MANAGEMENT

Art Management is the area that concerns the overall operation of the Forum Crew. This includes day-to-day operations to fulfill the project mission. Following are some of the key aspects of art management;

### **Aesthetics**

planning and managing artistic elements of the project - musical instruments, props, costumes, make-up, backdrops, etc.

### **Finance**

planning budgetary affairs such as basic income and expenditure, daily & weekly payments, and managing back accounts for the crew.

### **Public Relations**

This includes advertising and promotion of the project and the performance. Tools such as community visits, public announcements, leaflets, posters, banners, social media, Newspaper articles, etc., can be used.

### **Fundraising and Reporting**

Having funds will be the main determinant of the overall functions of the project. Therefore, reaching out to potential donors or sponsors is important. Building a good rapport and trust is the key for this. Also reporting of the project transparently and keeping the donors updated, before meeting deadlines would ensure positive results in maintaining sustainability of the project

### **Cast Membership**

This will include the performers of the Forum Theatre to play for the public. This section will be responsible to produce the Forum Theatre play exercising the essentials discussed in the Planning for Performance section.

## What to do after finding the ideal location?



It is important to give prominence for promotion and publicity of the Forum Theatre play. It is always important to inform the local authorities specially the Divisional Secretary's office, Local Police, and *Grama Sevaka* and ensure that the team has permission to perform in a public space. Having permission will only benefit longevity of the performance if there's an issue with the public.



It is very important to use relevant means - posters, billboard, leaflets, SMS, Twitter messages, social media updates, newspaper articles about the performance to mobilize people.



Using Public Address (PA) system is very effective to inform people about drama.



Some Forum Team members would approach organizational heads - principals, Heads of sports clubs, well-wishers, Heads of youth networks, Civil Society Organization (CSOs) to inform their friends and students about the drama.

## Preparing cast members for the planning of performance

The selected group of people who will be part of the crew, must be familiar with the Forum Theater method that would involve developing necessary skills to be on stage to portray a character by acting a role; use theater exercises, games and knowledge on the structure of Forum Theatre. The participants would learn about subjects or social issues close to their heart, to have a deep understanding of the root causes and plausible actions to mitigate them. The team should be guided to understand the connection between existing community issues and the project objectives to maintain consistency.

Let's take a look at a few activities that can be done when preparing the team for production



### Activity 1 Funny Chairs

(Can be used for Team Building as an Icebreaker for the team)

Process:

The group sits in a circle with a volunteer standing in the middle. The volunteer says “The Tsunami comes and takes everyone” and adds a piece of personal information that the other participants might have in common (“everyone born in Gampaha!”)

Those who share the statement have to get up and find a different chair, with the volunteer trying to get into one of the free chairs.

Suggested themes for the participants are objective truths (clothing, jewelry, etc)., things you like/do not like, family/community, fears, dreams, etc.



### Activity 2 Three to tango

(Can be used as a Team Building activity and to explore Improvisational Skills)

Process:

The participants divide into small groups and are asked to find out three things that they all share (those who like pop music/those who like chicken Fried Rice or Cheese kottu, etc).

They will have to perform these three things with the other groups who have to guess what it is they share.



### Activity 3 Playback

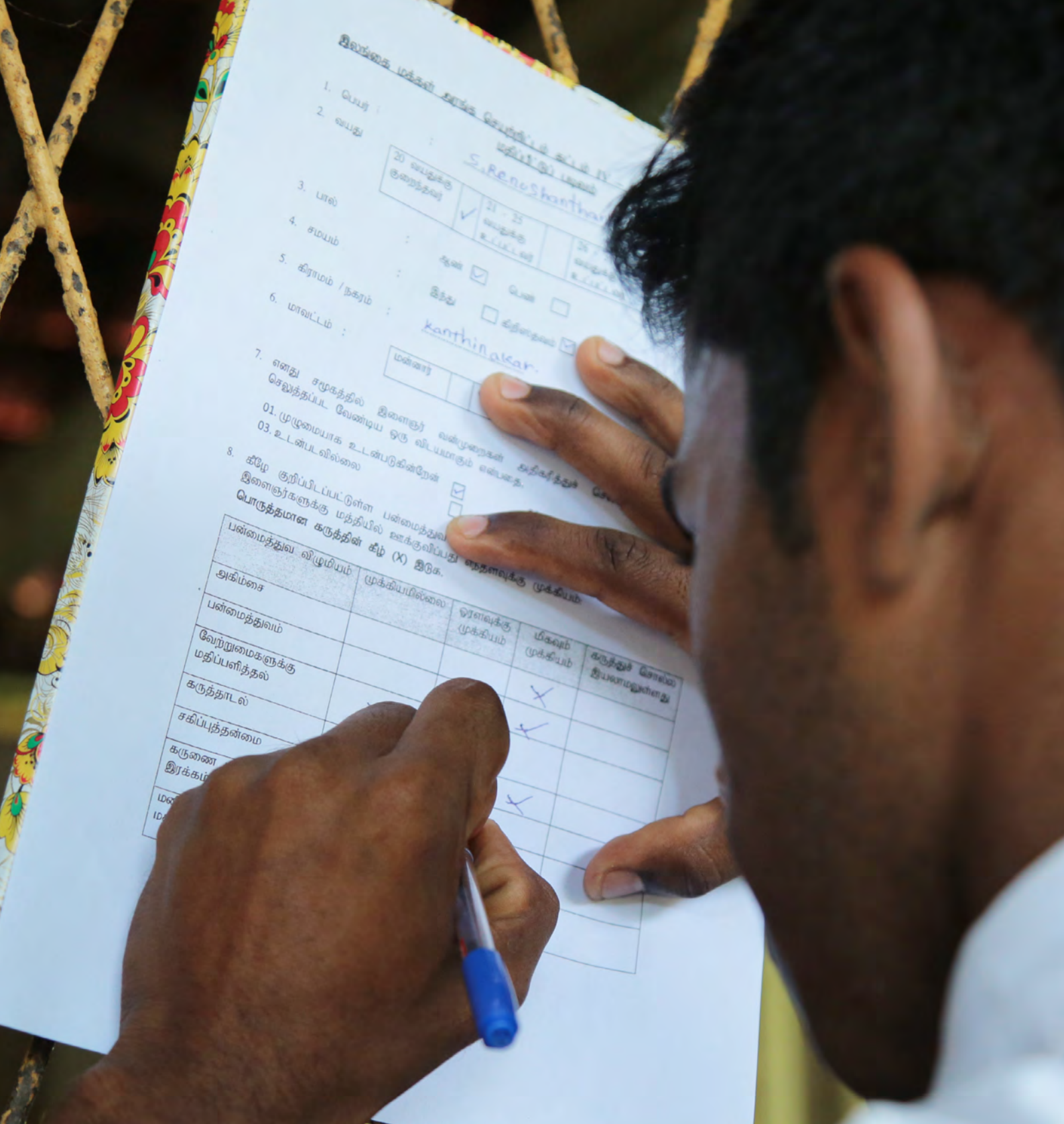
(This activity can be used for Improvisational Skills of the participants)

Process:

The participants divide into pairs. The Facilitator asks each participant to briefly close his/her eyes and think of a really existing place that is very special to him/her. He/she is asked to imagine the place in detail, remembering the colors, smells, shapes, etc.

Afterwards, with their eyes open, the participants take their partners on a tour of their favorite places by leading him/her through the workshop space and describing the place in great detail.

The listener plays back the emotional content of the space as well as the way how the teller described the space.



Picture 20: Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Programme - Phase IV / Vavuniya District / Photo by: Mohammedu Aswer

There is no one single proven way to evaluate Forum Theatre Projects. Depending on the overall nature, goal and length of the project, one may need a completely new approach to evaluate a Forum Theatre Program (FTP).

# 14

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation is one of the key elements of any Forum Theatre project implementation. Some believe this to be the final component of the project, which will help to determine the success of the project towards the end. However, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) remains to be an integral part of the overall project.

### 01. Monitoring

Monitoring is the systematic collection, analysis and use of information from projects; to learn from experience and to improve practices and activities in future, in order to maintain the internal and external accountability of the resources used and the experienced results; to take calculated decisions on future productions; and to empower the participants or the crew members to improve further.

### 02. What is evaluation?

Evaluation is assessing, as systematically and objectively as possible, a completed Forum Theatre production. Evaluation appraises the data and information that inform strategies to improve for future forum theatre production – in preparation of the delivery. Ideally evaluations should stimulate the following key points at the conclusion:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability

### 03. How to evaluate a project?

The only logical way to sustain any project is by constantly finding openings to improve the overall effectiveness. Therefore, following steps are recommended to initiate the monitoring and evaluation of the Forum Theatre production;

**Baseline survey:** This is to get a holistic view on the mindset of the audience before the performance, where information can be gathered by carefully filling up a questionnaire or by conducting a focused group discussion.

**Post-performance evaluation:** This is to explore the effects/influence, following the performance, therefore a genuine feedback needs to be promoted. Initially interviews or focused group discussions can be documented soon after the performance, followed by another evaluation, scheduled 2-3 months after the performance to explore the long term impact.

Following tools can be used for evaluation purposes



Focused Group Discussions (FGDs)



Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)



Questionnaires (Online and offline)



Internal evaluation through interviews



Observations



Participatory videos

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*Forum Theatre: Learning Manual* is a source book inspired by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal. Boal is a theatre practitioner and a theorist who developed the notion of Forum Theatre and made the spectator into a Spect-Actor in the process of performance. He was formerly influenced by key theatre practitioners such as Konstantin Stanislavski and most importantly German theatre director, Bertolt Brecht. Boal's theatrical approaches have also been influenced by famous Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his revolutionary educational theories.

This student manual is developed through a series of workshops, seminars and performances initiated under the Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Program, and implemented by the Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) in collaboration with Ministry of National Co-Existence Dialogue and Official Languages, Provincial Education Ministries and Educational Departments (Northern, Central, Southern, Eastern, North Central and Western), two universities - University of the Visual and Performing Arts and University of Jaffna. This program series was funded by U. S. Embassy in Colombo.

This learning manual is a timely attempt to showcase Forum Theatre activities conducted in post-war Sri Lanka and how this form of theater can be used as a tool in promotion of social cohesion, non-violence and pluralistic values among the young generation to capacitate them as resilient peace and change makers.

*Forum Theatre: Learning Manual* is also a valuable source book for teachers, community activists, educationists as well as students who wish to make positive changes in their own communities and beyond.

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