



INTRODUCTION

The Social Theatre Toolkit consists of five guides describing different approaches to social theatre in West Africa. This toolkit was created as part of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) awareness raising approach in West Africa

Due to its educational and transformative approach, social theatre is an important means of stimulating debate around social issues and sensitive topics.

IOM regularly uses it in the framework of community actions to engage audiences about safe migration, local opportunities and risks to irregular migration.

Social theatre is used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, as it can address certain socio-cultural realities by speaking directly to the target audience.

This toolkit shares knowledge and practical tools. It is intended for artists, facilitators, educators, teachers, and cultural and humanitarian workers who wish to use theatre for social purposes.

Included are tutorial videos, which help practitioners, amateurs and even the non-experts, to learn the basics to lead a theatre workshop or how to put on a show.

In this toolkit, the following five social theatre approaches practiced in West Africa are featured:

Theatrical Storytelling

Popular Theatre

Forum Theatre

Collective Creation

Improvisation Battles

This toolkit presents the basics of each of these approaches. It does not claim to provide a single definition, rather these guides are a proposal that can be used as a basis for experimenting and combining different approaches in order to develop new forms of theatrical expression.



FORUM THEATRE

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FORUM THEATRE MAIN EVENTS IN WEST AFRICA

Forum Theatre is an interactive and participatory theatre approach, which invites the spectator to become an actor of their own choice by bringing them on stage to reflect on a given problem, and thus opens a space for exchange and collective reflection.

Created by the Brazilian theatre artist Augusto Boal, Forum Theatre was born in the 1960s in Brazil.

It was originally practiced in the favelas of Sao Paulo and addressed situations of conflict and oppression experienced by local people. Augusto Boal developed several social theatre techniques as a response to the political dictatorship in his country.

For him, theatre is inherently political. He considered it a very effective instrument that the lower classes had to re-appropriate. It is a theatre that aims to transform society and raise the awareness of oppressed minorities.

A theatre “made by the people and for the people” in the words of Augusto Boal, with a basic principle: “Anyone can make theatre, even actors. And you can make theatre anywhere, even in theatres”.

In the 1990s, several West African groups adopted this approach in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, and later in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mali. Each group adapted it in its own way and in relation to its social environment.

The actors, whether professionals or amateurs, perform one or several sketches illustrating situations of oppression or inequality.

They are then performed again, but this time the spectators, henceforth called "spect-actors", can interrupt the course of events.

They have the opportunity to go on stage to replace a character and/or add one and try to break the situation of oppression and present concrete solutions.

Before the performance, it is important to define the theme that will be addressed.

Remember that the theme highlights a conflict situation (e.g. domestic violence, violence at work, environmental problems, etc.).

Once the theme has been defined, either research is carried out on the subject or interviews with people who have lived through a similar situation who will share their life experience.

Next, there is the dramatization: this is the actors' improvisation phase. They play a short sketch that presents a problematic situation without providing solutions.

Forum Theatre actors do not need to be professionals. The idea is that the scene be acted well enough to make the situation believable and elicit strong reactions from the audience.

Actors need to be well informed about the issue in order to feel comfortable with their characters. They must also practice improvisation techniques to be able to deal with the audience's interventions in the scene.

The approach relies on an experienced facilitator called the joker. They act as an intermediary between the actors and the audience by moderating their interventions.

First, the joker presents the general problem in the form of a difficulty encountered by a person or a group. Then they introduce the characters and the rules of Forum Theatre.

For example: “First, we will play the initial scene, which has an unfortunate/unhappy outcome.

Then we will discuss what is happening in this situation to help the protagonist explore alternative actions in the conflict. Those who wish to do so can come on stage to replace the protagonist.”

During the audience interventions, the joker listens to and rephrases the different points of view expressed by the audience.

Then, in the light of these exchanges, the joker invites the audience to come on stage to replace the protagonist and explore the effects of a new behaviour.

The performance takes place in three steps:

✓ 1- The set-up: This is also known as the initial scene. In this step, the performance is presented as if it were a regular show.

✓ 2- The trial: The actors appear before the audience, which judges them on the basis of their behaviour in the play. In Africa, particularly in Senegal, those who have acted badly are brought in "under the burning sun" and those who have acted well "in the shade". And in the middle, those whose fate will be speculated upon.

✓ 3- In the third step, the joker asks the "spect-actors" if they agree with the solutions proposed by the protagonist and invites them to replace him/her in an attempt to find a better solution. The spectator has to say where they want the scene to be replayed. The actors then start to replay the scene with input from the audience. This is an improvisation game where the work on the construction of the characters will enable them to react in a credible and coherent way.

The aim is not to find a single solution to a given problem, but to experiment collectively with possibilities.

The performance can be adapted to any environment and does not depend on major technical means.

A play can be performed in the city under electric lighting, or in a village under the moonlight.

A good production depends more on the commitment and conviction of the actors than on technical means.

Forum Theatre is often performed in the street or in public spaces, to reach out to the audience. It is also usually performed in the local language so that it can be understood by as many people as possible.

✓ Burkina Faso

Atelier de Théâtre Burkinabè (ATB), Ouagadougou

Website: www.atb.bf

Bienvenue théâtre du Bazega, Kombissiri

Website: www.bienvenuetheatre.com

Company Marbayassa, Ouagadougou

Website: www.compagnie-marbayassa.com

✓ Bissau Guinea

GTO-Bissau (Grupo de Teatro do Oprimido)

Address: Escola Nacional da Educação Física e Desportos

ENEFD 652 - (Alternativo) Bissau, Guinée-Bissau

✓ Guinea

Nimité Théâtre from Conakry

Email: nimitetheatredeguinee@gmail.com

✓ Senegal

Company Kaddu Yaraax, Dakar

Website: www.kadduyaraax.jimdofree.com

Company Brrr Production, Dakar

Website: www.brrrproduction.com

✓ Burkina Faso

ATB's National Forum Theatre Competition in Burkina Faso (Concours national de théâtre-forum de l'ATB au Burkina Faso)

✓ Senegal

Senegalese Forum Theatre Festival in Dakar (Festival sénégalais de Théâtre-forum de Dakar)

Forum Theatre Marathon in Ziguinchor (Marathon de théâtre-FORUM THEATRE de Ziguinchor)

For more information

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✓ 2. BOAL Augusto. Théâtre de l'opprimé: La Découverte, 2007.

✓ 3. GUERRE Yves. Le théâtre-forum. Pour une pédagogie de la citoyenneté: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1999