

Practical tips

for using theatre and culture in development

Opportunities

Theatre in development provides a creative way to engage with a local community or target group and to learn from it.

Spend time researching local cultural issues – talk with people, including community leaders, religious leaders, NGOs, artists, craftspeople, storytellers, young people and elders. Include some of their ideas in the work, so that it is local and fresh.



Photo: Tim Prentki

What is the impact of theatre on the audience?



Photo: Anders Thormann

Encourage the use of local cultural forms, including music.

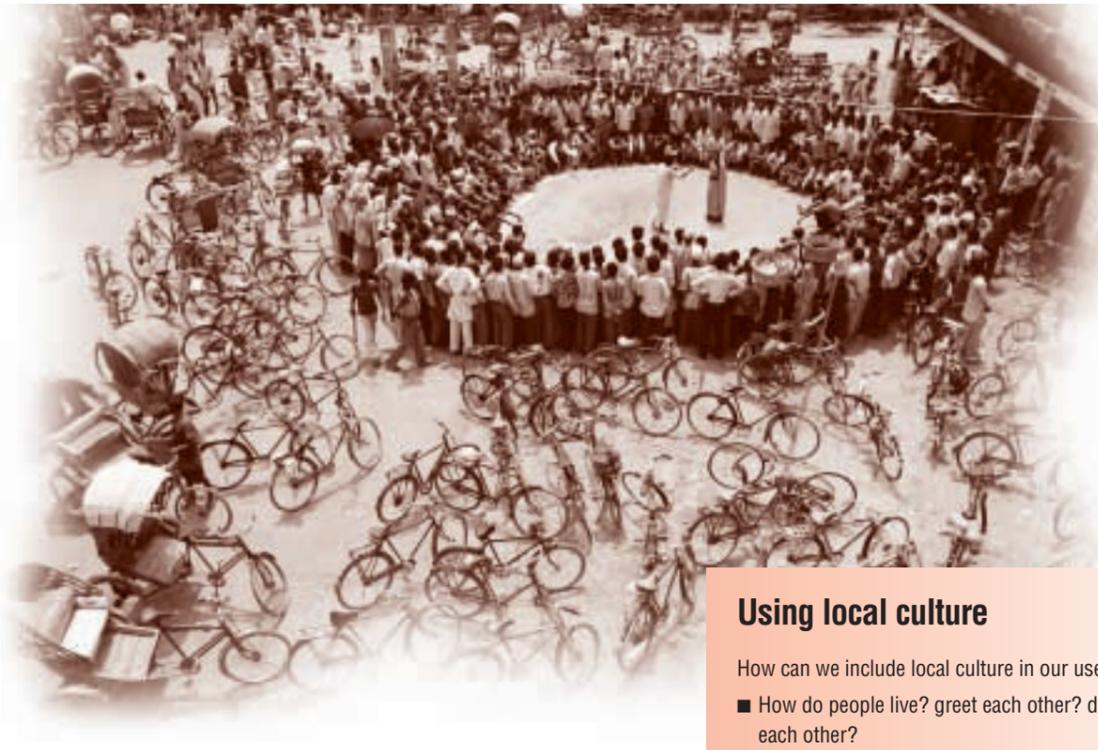


Photo: Anders Thormann

Using local culture

How can we include local culture in our use of theatre?

- How do people live? greet each other? dress? joke with each other?
- Can we include cultural forms such as dance, stories, games, music or visual images? What problems could there be in using these?
- How can we use cultural activities to encourage lively participation and communication?

Remember that some groups may not be able to participate in certain forms of creative activity, such as dance or music. Will our activity enable everyone to join in or will some people feel left out?

How can the programme be adapted to ensure that everyone can be included. For example, should separate performances be given for women or different castes?

Planning

What are we trying to achieve? Why could including local culture be an effective way of achieving it?

What are our key issues and concerns? What are the cultural factors that affect these? These could include issues such as traditional practices, seasons, attitudes and taboos and local communication methods.



Photo: Isabel Carter

A role play in Brazil about marketing.



Photo: Alex Mavrocordatos

Village musicians listening to their music – recorded for the first time!

Evaluation

Set aside time and resources for evaluation. Remember that many changes happen long after the work is finished – can we find out later what has happened as a result?

How will changes in attitude and practice be measured? Can we measure them creatively – for example, using drawing, mapping, participant diaries or video?

Do collect stories about the impact of theatre on individuals, their families and communities. Theatre may affect them emotionally, financially, socially, politically. Could you track four or five people before, during and after?

Cultural rights

Respect for people's culture is important to the process of development. The UN Declaration of Human Rights says some important things about cultural rights:

'Everybody, as a member of society, has the right to the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for their dignity and the free development of their personality'

'Everyone has a right to participate in the cultural life of their community'

The UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child also says that children have the right to nationality and identity, to their culture, freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion and beliefs, and to participate in cultural life, play and recreation.



Photo: Isabel Carter

'This information is in our own language – Yoruba!'

Management

Who will supervise the theatre work? What experience do they have of combining cultural issues with development issues? Which people in the community will be able to advise?

Who will monitor our progress and activities? Are there people in the community or local NGOs who could help with this? How can we make sure that the activities represent the values of our organisation or church or donor?

Will participants be safe?

Be flexible – creative processes often have unexpected results!

How will the work be followed up?

Compiled by Helen Gould, Coordinator of Creative Exchange, a network of 170 organisations and practitioners in 26 countries who are using arts and culture for social change.

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