



Advocacy Authority engagement Empowerment of women Sensitisation  
Social cohesion Theatre

 Democratic Republic of Congo

# Interactive and legislative theatre as a means of awareness-raising and advocacy

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## The theatre approach

With financial support from the START Network via the partnership with Oxfam, the interactive and legislative theatre approach was introduced in 2016 in order to build the capacities of the community protection structure members. It has been a great help to these structures in implementing awareness-raising and advocacy activities.

Interactive theatre is an approach through which the members of the structures present a piece of interactive and participatory theatre for the members of their communities, which enables them to present the problem situation and critical moments in a creative way and to propose solutions in terms of changes in behaviour. Through the play, the actors show what behaviour/habits they can use to change the situation. Legislative theatre is an approach that allows actors to carry out advocacy actions via the presentation of a play that aims to provoke deep emotions and feelings among the authorities, which are themselves represented by actors in the play.

Interactive and legislative theatre are types of theatre developed by the organisation Theatre for a Change (TFAC). This involves sessions where members of community protection structures such as community protection committees (CPCs) and women's forums (WFs), together with community members and authorities, engage in participatory and inclusive role-play. They visualise the options/alternatives for responding to specific subjects, such as women's and girls' inheritance, the toll barriers erected on farming roads, arbitrary arrests, etc. The sessions are held in public spaces, such as the market for interactive theatre targeting community members, and during mixed meetings for legislative theatre targeting authorities and community members.

What makes the theatre "interactive" is the fact that the actors (both protagonists and antagonists) in the play about a certain problem situation are structure and community members who, during the presentation, interact with the participants using the "touch tag" system. This allows the participant to touch an actor to replace him/her so that he/she can, by playing the role, present his/her opinion on how to resolve the situation in question. It is also called "legislative" theatre, because it facilitates discussion with the authorities about aspects of law and governance at the local level. For example, community protection structures used the theatre to raise awareness among the authorities about the problem of women's and girls' access to their inheritance, which they could not access due to the pressure of traditional customs. Following the session, the authorities agreed to allow women to access their inheritance and to mention this in the event of a death in the community. In the middle plateaus, the structures also presented the problem of toll and food collection barriers erected by the

authorities every market day on farming roads, where some women were beaten or held up. The authorities removed some barriers, reduced the quantity that each person must give and appointed a village head to monitor how the authorities assigned to that place collect the food supplies without causing concern to the people passing through.

## Added value of the interactive and legislative theatre approach

According to the WF, one of the community protection structures consisting exclusively of women. This approach allows illiterate women, who sometimes struggled to carry out formal awareness-raising, to interact easily with women and men.

This approach has proved to be an appropriate methodology for attracting a significant audience for awareness-raising actions.

It reinforces the horizontal communication between the structures and other community members (the community structure members and the participants are all actors) and reduces the tendency towards verticality (the structure members set out their solution and wait for feedback).

With the advocacy usually carried out by the protection structures, some women found it difficult to address the authorities, but with legislative theatre, they act in the plays and thus carry out advocacy, though some women are still reticent in light of the restrictions traditionally imposed on them.

Too few people participate in the traditional advocacy actions of the community protection structures. Legislative theatre ensures that the entire community protection structure gets involved, which makes the activity more participatory and reduces the fear that some members have of addressing the authorities.

This approach has helped to reduce the perception of certain authorities as authoritarian. Even though they were usually reluctant to be involved in the role play, they participated by means of proposals, which made them more familiar to members of the communities.

Participatory and legislative theatre allows members of community protection structures to accurately represent the problem. It has made certain authorities more sensitive to the problems presented and encouraged them to make more commitments.

## The community's perception of interactive theatre

In the locality of Kihande, in the middle plateaus of the Uvira territory, the wife of the leader of the locality of Ruvumera, who participated in the awareness-raising session of 21 November 2017, on the topic of non-inheritance of property by a woman, provided this testimony: ***"aka gakino kariko gatabara abagore kubera kariko gatuma abagabo bavuga iby'abagore barikuyivugira bonyene, kandi, kariko g'atabar'umugore uwagize imisi minshi mukarengane kubera, umukogwa n'umugore ndi yari kuvuga chang'wo gukina bene kano gakino na bagabo hano mwisoko, oya !!! chane chane k'umugore w'umunyamulenge"***. This can be translated as "this play helps women because it makes men put themselves in a woman's shoes and feel what they would really feel if they were women, and it enables women who have long been victims of the violation of their right of expression to express themselves by acting alongside men at the market, which had never happened before, especially for women from the Banyamulenge tribe".

In the community of Mutarule, in the Luberizi grouping, in the Ruzizi plain, during an awareness-raising session by members of the WF on 14 December 2016 on the role of women in the community, a woman from the Bafuliiru tribe stated that she was happy because it was the first time since a number of dreadful massacres had taken place that she had been able to meet, act and laugh with women from the Banyamulenge and Barundi communities.

A male member of the Rusabagi community protection structure, during a wrap-up activity after an interactive theatre awareness-raising session on property ownership security, told the other structure members that he had been on the point of leaving the structure because he felt incapable of carrying out awareness-raising activities, but he felt motivated and capable of raising awareness thanks to this interactive theatre approach.