

NARRATIVE THEATRE TRAINING

February 2014
Sudan

Narrative Theatre training

The communities are experts of their lives but the facilitator brings expertise through Narrative Theatre in understanding the root causes and strategies of the problems and finding collective ways to decrease the problem behaviour and increase social fabric in the community.

The training programme is structured in phases:

- **Phase one:** Training days; assessment and baseline; Narrative Theatre Forum
- **Phase two:** Practical in the field where the participants have to conduct at least one Narrative Theatre Forum as primary facilitator and at least two as supportive facilitator.
- **Phase three:** Training and evaluation of field activities
- **Phase four:** Practical in field where the participants have to develop an intervention that will facilitate collective healing.
- **Phase five:** Presentation of Intervention strategies and Planning of Evaluation

Aim

To train Community workers to use Narrative Theatre to strengthen social fabric and collective healing in their communities

Objectives

To enable participants to

- understand the concepts of strengthening social fabric through participatory action.
- Understand the difference between individual and collective healing approaches
- understand and explain the principles of Narrative Theatre
- identify problems that can be dealt with collectively by using Narrative Theatre
- organise and implement Narrative Theatre
- create follow-up support from the community for sustainable action
- be able to identify and refer problems that they can not manage
- evaluate results of activities

Theory that will be covered during the training weeks

- Introduction to Narrative Theatre as strategy
- Clarification of terminology: narrative theatre; narrative therapy; theatre for the oppressed and externalisation.
- Experiential and participatory learning as strategy
- Working with people's stories
- Putting problems into a historical and cultural context
- Deconstructing and mapping problem stories

- Identifying strengths and preferred outcomes
- Difference between a problem story and a preferred story.
- Externalisation as technique to separate problems from people
- Enhancing Response-ability and Account-ability
- Mobilising collective community action
- Generating a collective positive identity in communities
- Increasing sense of collective-efficacy
- Drawing up sustainable action plans for the field by the community

Introduction to Narrative Theatre

Narrative Practices

People produce meaning in their lives from the stories that are available in their contexts. Narrative Practices is an approach that has been used as a means to invite people to begin a journey of co-exploration in search of abilities and strengths that are often masked by life problems. The journey helps people to reflect on positive life experiences as it is significance for the individual which helps to reduce the magnitude of problems (White & Denborough, 1998). The story teller often emerges as a courageous victor with colourful and vivid stories rather than a pitiful and pathetic victim (Sliep, 1998). The lived and shared stories do not only change the teller but also the audience, as witnesses to the tale. The facilitator of the process is not the expert on people's lives, and cannot prescribe suitable solutions, but instead acts as a guide in the journey to explore and reaffirm the creative ability to solve problems that exists within individuals and groups (Sliep et. al., 2003).

Forum Theatre

Aspects of Forum Theatre or 'Theatre for the Oppressed' has been included in the methodology of Narrative Theatre. It was developed by Augusto Boal in Brazil in the last thirty years (Boal, 1995). According to Boal (1992) the word 'Theatre' is used in its most archaic application of the word. In this usage all human beings are seen as able to act and can therefore be viewed as Actors. Similarly everyone in life observes and thus takes on the role of a spectator. The purpose of Theatre is for everyone to be involved, actors and spect-actors. Spectactors are seen as active spectators. Boal used the technique to create change and to actively unmask and address practices of power. The methodology is participatory, non-judgemental and accessible to all ages, levels of education and cultural backgrounds.

In Forum Theatre, the audience generates the scene, or a scene that is recognizable to all can be proposed by the facilitator. Participants become involved in the action through an invitation to provide commentary on what is witnessed. Scenes are replayed at the audience's request. The audience act as spect-actors in that they can replace any of the actors at any stage, are invited to stop the action if they are of the opinion that what is played out is an incorrect

presentation of their experiences and if it is unrealistic. A discussion is encouraged when an interruption occurs, thus creating an awareness of the different elements of the scenario. The scenario is then replayed with the new suggested elements resulting in a different ending. The acting and reacting of the scenario with its alternative endings, promote a deeper understanding of the issues involved and a platform for active creativity in finding suitable solutions. It allows for experimentation with proposed and modified strategies for solutions to difficult issues, until satisfactory and appropriate solutions have been developed collectively. Role reversals on the other hand can be used to increase an experiential understanding of the power constructs operating in social systems. At all times, the facilitator is not the expert but merely acts as an assistant for the manifestation of critical consciousness.

People's life stories

In Narrative Theatre, the drama is constructed from people's own stories. People are viewed and acknowledged to be the experts of their own lives and thus of their stories. The facilitator is an expert in the methodology for eliciting and working with people's stories with the intent of increasing understanding of the presenting problem while enhancing efficacy in dealing with problems. Through the process of eliciting these stories, opportunities are provided for the identification and deconstruction of problem stories, while active incorporation is simultaneously sought for a preferred, strength-based story. The process aims at decreasing and decentering the Problem story while enriching and centering the Preferred strength-based story. The Problem story and the Preferred story are thus juxtaposed and worked with simultaneously. The starting point is a 'pressing' problem that has been identified either through observation or reporting. The context of the problem story is understood through exploration as well as how it manifests itself in everyday experiences. The presenting Problem story and the reconstructed Preferred strength-based story are simultaneously incorporated. Problems are understood to have been socially constructed and created over time. This understanding decreases the negative overwhelming effects problem stories may have on people's lives. The exploration, discovery and affirmation of local knowledge, strengths and abilities increase self-efficacy, which in turn leads to creative and collective problem solving. In the search for joint solutions, a collective identity is fostered through which social action becomes possible. There is a constant alternation between working to strengthen a collective identity and stimulating collective action, as will emerge in the discussion.

Deconstructing the Problem story

Problems present themselves strongly through individuals with effects on households and communities. These effects often cause divisions and confusion in social relationships and result in feelings of hopelessness and helplessness of all those who are affected. In the conceptual framework, the triangle apex that rests on the individual component symbolises the weight of the problem, while

the apex which can easily be toppled reflects the individual's vulnerability in dealing with problems that have become attached to self-identity. The individual's difficulty in dealing with problems when in isolation from broader social support systems is also reflected. Over time, problems tend to mask people's abilities and strengths and distort the sense of the self. It is for this reason that problems first need to be identified, named and described (White, 1991). This process might be time-consuming because the presenting problems often confuse the root causes of problems. Once consensus has been reached in the group about the name of the problem, it can be externalised as a character in a chosen drama so that an understanding can emerge that people are not the problem, but that the problem is a separate entity that has an effect on people. The process of externalisation is strengthened by the use of particular language and the interaction with the Externalised Problem as a character. The historical development of the problem is explored to uncover root causes so that the social construction construction of problems becomes clearer to the audience. Understanding is further enhanced by the deconstruction of the specific ideas, beliefs, and practices that sustain and support the problem (e.g. constructions of power and gender). Experiential work is included by encouraging participants to play different roles of power and gender (e.g. a chief in the village playing the role of a schoolgirl who is being blackmailed by a schoolteacher to have sex with him). Experiencing the powerlessness in this position enhances understanding of the context. The effects of the named problem on the self and others are also mapped. The drama is extended to include the voices of those affected to make the problem more visible. Special attention is paid to marginalized voices in the process. If, for instance, the work is done around the initiation of young girls, then girls should take part in the discussion. Externalisation is a technique used to help people step back and separate themselves from the problem through a process of deconstruction, where they can untangle themselves from judgment and self-blame. It does not, however, absolve people from their responsibilities for the actions that they take. By making the consequences of actions visible through the affected characters, greater responsibility for actions is encouraged.

Reconstructing the Preferred story

Apart from the problem story in every situation there is a story about people's strengths and abilities. The presented framework shows two triangles. The triangle that points downwards places the emphasis on the individual. The triangle that points upwards places the emphasis on the community or collective. Symbolically, the framework reverses the triangle to illustrate that working from a broad base with many voices increases strength. In the reconstruction process of a Preferred strength-based story, the participants are guided through a historical overview of specific strengths and abilities that exist in the individual, group or communities that should be considered. The emerging strengths and abilities are identified and named. To fortify the strength-based story, opportunities are created for the sharing of stories of other situations in which similar strengths and abilities were demonstrated. It is also beneficial to identify unique outcomes of situations where problems did not dominate those affected, and to explore why

this happened. A continued affirmation of strength is ensured by including voices of others who have witnessed a demonstration of these strengths. At times it may be necessary to also externalise the identified strength as a character in the drama to make it more visible. The character can also be interviewed to further enrich the strength-based Preferred story. Reconstructing the preferred story happens collectively within a community and audience context. Through the different activities, sharing and movement, a group or collective identity emerges. During the process less emphasis is placed on differences between members and more on the effect of a problem on everyone involved. The activity gets directed towards evaluating the effects of the problem and taking a united position against the problem (Sliep, 1998; Sliep, 2003a). Solutions and action is generated by the group, based on shared values and norms which also guides future behaviour, ensuring a sense of continuity. Collective action is aimed at using local knowledge and experiences to achieve preferred outcomes decided upon on the basis of consensus within the group. Social strengths as well cultural and historical strengths are actively sought by exploring existing proverbs as a reflection of shared values and norms. The awareness of this common wisdom is another step towards an emerging collective identity. The experience and affirmation of strengths and abilities lead to an increased sense of self-efficacy necessary for creative and independent problem solving. The methodology always works with emerging stories rather than using a topdown approach. This means that the problems that are dealt with will differ from context to context. Problems chosen by the group to work with are usually influenced by prevalence or because of an inability to deal with a particular problem. These range from dealing with the effects of HIV/AIDS, alcohol addiction, and the stigmatisation of epilepsy to other relational problems like domestic violence, bewitchment and conflict. The entry point of the work could be through the presentation of an individual problem as happens in individual consultation with clients, through a household, as would be in the case of domestic violence, or in a community context such as a communal conflict situation. Narrative Theatre provides an entry point at any of these levels and enables one to involve the other levels at different stages.

Theories supporting Narrative Theatre

Narrative Theory

In cultures where oral tradition is the main mode of communication, narratives or story-telling form the way people carry over knowledge, history, values and morals to guide their living. People tell stories about their experiences and the meanings that these experiences have for their lives. Stories not only explain how and when things happen, but also create meaning. In South Africa you will get as many stories and interpretations of our past as there are people. So, stories do not simply tell us what is true or false, but how people have understood and experience what happened.

We work with the stories people tell us; stories about their lives, stories about the past and, with gentle encouragement, stories about the dreams they have for their own future and that of their children. Narrative theory practice seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives.

In a context where people have experienced trauma and hardship, there is generally a range of effects that painful incidents have had on community life. We are not only interested in stories that describe suffering (we call this *problem-based stories*) but also in stories that reveal people's courage, abilities and strengths (*strength-based stories*). This is because exposure to severe violence can rob people of confidence in themselves and even make them forget how strong they were during the traumatic events, but by bringing light to strength-based stories, people start remembering their capacities and competence. This remembering brings forth hope and energy. Hope, energy and awareness of their own capacities and competence can help people find a way of decreasing the effects of suffering.

Bringing people within a community together to share their stories creates a platform on which to rebuild what was destroyed or lost. However, we should always remember the stories which are not told, the silences which persist - for example, around the issue of rape - when it is not safe to tell the story.

When working with communities, facilitators can use stories to illustrate pieces of information the facilitator wants to share with the community. Preferably these stories should be based on local myths or on things that have happened in the real lives of the community people, because they understand and relate to such stories easily. Facilitators can also use local proverbs or invite stories from the audience to illustrate a point.

In Narrative Theatre we ask people to act out stories and in our experience, this method works well with communities who have suffered hardships. Narrative Theatre creates the possibility for people to act out shared stories in a community meeting (called a *narrative forum*) that lasts for about two hours. People try to explore different outcomes for the given story in a realistic way by actively stepping into roles. The Narrative Theatre process has the potential to create a safe space in which to experiment with alternatives and to "step into the shoes of the other" by acting their role. The presence of the community and the community leadership makes it possible to negotiate achievable changes in behaviour.

Reflecting theory

To reflect is to think more deeply about something. You can, for example, think deeply about something you see. Look at a woman that walks past carrying

wood on her head, water in her hand, a baby on her back and another child holding her hand. Look at the man who walks next to her with empty hands. Think about what you see. Does it happen like this all the time? Why? Could it be different?

We can also think about the feelings we have inside us and about the behaviour between people. When we reflect on certain issues, and especially if we do this together, we can discover how the issue became the way it is now, and think if it is possible to change anything in the future.

Reflecting theory focuses on four matters: *discussing power, discussing traditional rules on right and wrong, negotiating accountability and responsibility, and creating local committees.*

Power. Situations are what they are because power has been, and continues to be exercised. It is important but difficult to know and understand how power works, but reflection - thinking deeply about it - will grow our understanding. Each of us forms part of the presence of power in a situation. For example, if you are a facilitator you have power as an "expert". If you are a man in Africa, as someone who is physically stronger and has cultural practice to back you up, you usually have more power than a woman. If you are an adult you can make decisions and have resources that give you more power than children. To know that you are part of situations of power, and what your part is, calls for a process of reflection to develop what we call "critical consciousness" (an ability to look more carefully at the different ways in which things happen in one's surroundings and responding with new insights).

Growing your understanding of how power works can help you to find ways to strengthen everyone and then be able to shift power. Make use of chances to revisit the same problem from different directions. You can ask questions such as, "Who in this group controls the way we get materials? Who makes the decisions? How are weaker people protected in this situation? How can their voices be heard?"

Knowing that power is being exercised in every situation and greeting it face to face is certainly not always easy. It is important to make certain that you talk about power in a safe space because people who have power usually like to hold onto that power and not have it questioned. It is also important to realise that there are some situations where power is exercised in ways which make it unsafe for those who are threatened to discuss the issue with those who have the power.

Traditional rules on right and wrong. Traditional rules are rooted in the history and culture of a community. When the circumstances change, traditional rules may become dysfunctional. That means they need to be adapted to the reality of here and now. For example, the payment of lobola was traditionally a form of

payment to the family of the bride by the man who wants to marry her, in order to show respect and thankfulness. The payment was often done in the form of cattle and other gifts. If the parents of the bride take the lobola it means that they agree that she can now become part of the man's family and belong to his family. Nowadays it is almost impossible for the man to pay lobola and the effect is that traditional marriages cannot take place. The young people will live together "in sin". If the family can reflect on these circumstances and accept that their children *do* want to get married but have not got the resources to marry in the traditional way, then perhaps different ways of showing respect and thankfulness can be agreed upon.

It is the task of the facilitator to help the community reflect on traditional rules, and what their effect is on different people. Then the community itself has to decide what is right or wrong and what change is needed. The facilitator must ensure that as many different voices as possible are heard in the discussions, especially those from groups who do not usually speak up. So, for example if we are talking about all forms of abuse, you want to include as many women and children as possible living in that area. It is important to agree how to make sure that everyone will be heard before deciding what to do and the group itself should say how they want to achieve this.

Negotiating responsibility and accountability. When decisions are made in a community meeting, it is important to reach consensus on who is supposed to do something (responsibility) and how the responsible person must show the others that he or she has done what was agreed, or why he could not do it as agreed (accountability). It is important that the people themselves are involved in making decisions about this; it is not for the facilitator to preach what should be the outcome of the discussion.

Often, the more power we have, the more responsibility and accountability we have. For instance men are usually physically stronger than women and children and they can easily abuse this power. It cannot be the responsibility of women or children to stop domestic violence and child abuse. They may be able to alert others when it is happening but they won't be able to stop the violence if the men do not take responsibility.

In a meeting in a village in another country, everyone reflected on domestic violence and agreed that they wanted it to stop. They decided together that it is not the right of a man to do what he wants to in his own home, if that means he is harming others in his house. The decision was followed by more reflection and a deep discussion about how things had been done traditionally in the past, when there was discipline in the house but it was done with care, whereas nowadays men often beat women and children, especially when the man is drunk and the woman or child has done nothing wrong. To put the group decision into practice, the women agreed that they were going to make a noise on the pots when they

heard a beating happening and the men agreed that they would go inside the house and remove the abusive man.

Once an agreement has been reached about responsibility and accountability, it is time to put things into real action. To facilitate this, it is important to talk about what is needed for the activities and changes to take effect, safely. If, as in our example above, it was agreed that when anyone witnesses domestic violence, they will try to stop it, then it should be done safely and there should be good general rules to ensure that it is done safely. The group must agree on these rules, including who to report to and what action to take if the rules are broken. In our example the men and women made plans to stop the violence in ways that were collective and realistic. So it became possible for people to take responsibility – they claimed the ability to respond to a situation they wanted to change.

Creating local committees. Another useful way forward is to create local committees, jointly elected by the local people and approved by the local leaders. People working together can exercise more power than individual efforts. Committees that represent all the groups of people in a community can keep that community focussed on its development, its healing and its plans for a better future and are more likely to find the resources that are available in the community. If the work of the committee is seen and liked by people from within and outside the community, this will encourage committee members to take on their responsibilities with more energy and optimism. It is therefore important for such committees to also have the support of the community facilitators.

Social capital theory.

Social capital refers to all the knowledge and skills in a group and all the links between persons, families, friends and groups. It includes matters such as mutual trust, shared norms and values, cooperation with other groups in networks and links with decision-making government bodies. Communities that have a high level of social capital are generally also healthier and stronger communities.

We can distinguish three levels of social capital: social bonding, social bridging and social linking.

Social bonding refers to what ties people in a community together, such as norms or standards of behaviour, and the level of mutual trust and respect. Social bonding results in a feeling of belonging and makes people more resilient when they have to face difficult situations. However, social bonds in a community do not always include all community members and are sometimes used to reject others.

Social bridging refers to connections between groups of people, such as between communities and interested parties like community based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Bridging brings people into contact with supplies, materials, knowledge, assistance and new forms of real or symbolic power.

Social linking brings people from different levels of power together. The people who have a position in social linking are usually in government positions or in Funding organisations.

Adult education theory.

According to adult education theory, adults learn best and are most motivated when the learning is *voluntary and when they are actively involved in the learning process*. This happens when facilitators invite them to *share their own experiences*. Subject matter is most likely to be retained if it can be applied immediately in their everyday lives and work.

The biggest challenge for facilitators in adult education is creating a learning environment that stimulates critical thinking. Critical thinking in the context of community work includes an understanding of the ways in which power operates amongst us and the effect it has on us.

During the training a safe environment has to be created where participants are given the opportunity to name and unmask operations of power. The participants are continually encouraged to look at how behaviour always has an effect on self and on others. They can only make informed decisions about your actions if they have a critical understanding of their situation as well as themselves.

Examples of important questions that can be asked are: Does your action serve self interest? How does your behaviour serve the interest of those in power even when it works against your interest? Are people who are in power looking out for people who are vulnerable or marginalised. How are people kept in power by your every day actions?

If kept in mind, the four theories summarised in this chapter may help us to understand what is going on in communities and how community members can be engaged in ways that promote collective healing and strengthening of the social fabric of their community. They can help community workers themselves, to reflect on what they experience in the field, to plan their interventions in a systematic way, and to understand unexpected reactions of community members.

Working with community in a dynamic context

Working with individuals suffer from traumatic events differs from working with communities who have been exposed to high levels of trauma or violence. Instead of working with one person you are working with a group of people. By strengthening the relationships between people you are also helping the healing process and building social fabric.

Community entry and lines of communication

Promoting the rebuilding of social fabric and healing in a participatory way, is a process that takes time. The strategy of working with communities rather than working with individuals offers the possibility of collective healing, through approaches such as the Narrative Theatre Forum.

Work in a community needs to start with permission from the “gatekeepers”, meaning the people with authority in that community. The method and intention of the work need to be explained in a way that enables agreement of a shared vision. The incoming worker (that is you) also needs to know as much as possible about the community in which the work is to be done.

Many of our communities are represented by ward committees and councillors working for municipalities. In addition to these formally elected leaders, there are other persons who are influential in managing and developing the community. These include priests, pastors, notables, heads of associations, and school principals. Before any work commences in the community, negotiations with all the “gatekeepers” have to be done. Good relationships and a shared understanding of the challenges will lead to greater ownership by the local leadership in the long term process.

During the initial meeting/s with community leaders you and they assess together what are considered to be behaviour problems in the community. You then negotiate the possibility of having a Narrative Theatre Forum in the community, where the community members themselves will participate in naming the problems and prioritising what problems will be handled first. You have to take care, from this early stage on, to point out that although material and structural problems are real problems, the only issues you can take on as psychosocial workers are the behaviour problems people experience. You will also clarify that the basis on which all the work will be done is a process to revive the values that people themselves found important in order to have strong communities and societies in the past.

For instance, people may say they suffer and do not live well with their neighbours. Instead of turning to outsiders for help you can ask how they used to overcome problems in the days before the war. They may then remember for example, that they had overcome drought and fires in the past by standing together and helping each other. Usually people want to be strong and self-sufficient again and it is your work to help the community to see themselves in a stronger and more positive light.

Clarifying roles

Once it has been agreed that work can commence in the community, the role of everyone involved needs to be considered. The local leadership will call a community meeting and do an opening address in which the purpose of the meeting is discussed. With the presence and support of the leadership, decisions

can be made and taken through to action. Without their presence, this would be difficult.

The meeting is usually done at a time of day and week when people are not involved in other activities. The community workers then facilitate a Narrative Theatre session. At the end of the session an action plan is agreed on by everyone involved in the community. Depending on the problems identified, the community - with no interference from the outside facilitators - elect what they call "wise people" as a local committee.

The role and purpose of the committee will be to help bring about any action plans that are generated during the Narrative Theatre sessions. In the process of providing this help, the committee will aim at enhancing the people's ability to solve problems, to cope, to relate peacefully with each other and to link people with resources and services. For this to happen, the values that people have asked to be revived need to be continuously revisited and they need to explore how this can best be done. The community worker can offer support to the committee members in developing their own strengths.

Recognising limitations and maximizing benefits of the collective approach

The forum gatherings provide opportunities for increasing knowledge and awareness on the effects of trauma on individuals, families and communities. By increasing their understanding of each other, people will be able to give each other better support and enhance the healing possibilities for all.

A climate of conflict exists in communities where there has been extreme violence and aggression. Arguments can easily get out of hand and result in further fighting and abuse and further possible loss of lives. During the gathering the facilitator can explain this and the community can reach agreement, to involve a committee member and/or someone else they trust to help resolve differences as these arise and if necessary, try to prevent an escalation of violence.

The approach is strength-based. The idea is not to only highlight problems but to help people to remember how they collectively overcame problems in the past. Usually this approach generates energy in people who are generally feeling hopeless and helpless. Once people feel more involved and remember how they functioned before the massive scale of violence hit their society, an atmosphere of wanting to move forward tends to develop. During the follow-up activities people can be stimulated to join small projects to further boost their morale as well as their productivity.

The main purpose of following a collective approach is twofold. Firstly, it raises awareness around the effects of trauma, not only on one's own person but also on others and it encourages a common and therefore stronger commitment to change. Secondly, the collective approach develops the ability to recognise, manage and refer people who show symptoms of trauma. In situations where

trauma has happened on a big scale there is an increase in psychosocial problems such as rape, domestic violence, child abuse, hate speech and discrimination. These challenges are extremely difficult to manage on an individual level. You have to reach an understanding of the deeper cause as well as the effects of this kind of behaviour. Once people have collectively agreed they do not want this behaviour to continue, you can make agreements on how the community want to take their concerns forward. At this stage action plans are developed which have a reasonable chance of success because as many people as possible understand and support the plans. Part of the planning is agreeing on how decisions will be made; clarifying the common ground values and negotiating what everyone's rights and responsibilities are at each stage in the process.

A challenge with taking a community approach, however, is that some people can dominate the discussions. These tend to be people who have the highest status and power but this does not necessarily mean that they are the best people to make a particular decision, or that the issues they raise are in fact the priorities of the community. Nor does it mean that a safe space has been created for the issues of vulnerable and marginalised groups to be spoken about. Decisions should not be made for people who are not represented, for example members of a certain ethnic group, nor for people whose issue is deliberately silenced.

Even when the issue is a priority for the majority of people however, it is crucial to remember that people experience the same situation differently and you want to create a space where as many people as possible will feel safe and free to participate. Poverty violates people's basic human rights and they feel confused on how to view the world and make judgements on what is right or wrong. Generally people will tend to feel frightened, insecure and betrayed.

Creating a safe forum

During times like these it is difficult for people to meet in bigger groups as they may be filled with suspicion. Ensuring that there are no tensions and accusations during the meeting is of utmost importance.

Do not get into a situation where people are accused or blamed. Rather show how the problem is having an effect on everyone. Once people understand that it is the problem that has to be tackled and not the people you have a better chance of involving everyone in collective problem solving.

So, how can you make sure that the voice of as many as possible people is heard in such challenging circumstances?

Firstly people need to know that they will be safe during the Narrative Theatre Forum. The presence of the community leaders and chiefs should also make people feel that their safety will be protected after the meeting.

In the forum process, a useful practice is to divide the people up into smaller groups of equal status and power. Often people who have less power and status also have the biggest problems. In this way at least one space is created where their voices can be heard.

After brainstorming in the small groups, a representative of each group can give summary feedback to the whole community on what was said in his or her group. This offers protection for the people who speak out in the small groups. This does not only happen once, but whenever you have a larger group meeting. With time, many different problems will emerge and people will get more relaxed and trusting as plans are made that strengthen everyone and not only a few people.

The process of behaviour change, in individuals or communities, takes place over time. It does not help to just tell people that certain behaviour is bad and needs to stop. It is vital that people become aware that there is a problem before they can consider if they are willing and prepared to change the behaviour around the problem and what the obstacles or the perceived benefits are to changing the behaviour. They can be encouraged to consider what the effects will be if the behaviour continues, as well as what possible strengths and resources they can draw from if they they commit themselves to change, and how they can sustain the change if it starts.

Some useful ideas for committee members

Communities have their own rhythm

Communities are not static entities. The issues and the relationships change all the time. Whenever outsiders come into the community it has an effect on the community. This does not need to be a problem as long as the committee members ensure that they and the broader community remain open to discussions with everyone. At different times different issues will emerge as priorities or temporary distractions that need to be taken into consideration. For example, more tension can be expected during election times, but this can be normalised by speaking openly and asking people how they would like to ensure that elections happen as peacefully as possible in their area.

Ethics of working as a volunteer

The committee workers have to be aware of the ethics attached to their work even if they are working as volunteers. The community worker/facilitator can help committee members reflect on the purpose of their work and the intended outcomes, by stimulating some reflection using the questions below.

Ask questions in a respectful way to help increase participation. These are questions we can ask of ourselves as psychosocial workers, but also of the volunteer committee members and the communities, to set the spirit in which the work is taking place:

Why are you doing work in or with this community?

What is in it for you?
Who are you dealing with?
Who are you not dealing with and why?
What do you think needs to change and why?
What issues do you find difficult to engage in?
What are the hot issues at this moment that you can engage with to increase participation and incorporate some challenges you want to address?
What do you hope to achieve in this community?

Conclusion

Working with communities is different to working with individuals, households or couples. Over time the psychosocial workers and the committee members realised they needed to enhance their knowledge and skills in particular areas in order to do their work effectively. Change cannot happen without the support of the leadership; peace cannot be maintained without knowledge of, and skills in mediation; people cannot heal if their symptoms are not recognised and attended to, and communities will only become strong again by developing themselves and supporting each other. It is essential to have a good knowledge of the resources in your area and to be able to link people up with local projects and organisations. By reviving the values that people feel they have lost, the social fabric of communities can be restored and strengthened.