

# The evaluation of Narrative Theatre training: experiences of psychosocial workers in Burundi

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*In this article the role of evaluation in Narrative Theatre (NT) is addressed with specific reference to participatory evaluation in exploring the effectiveness of narrative theatre training of psychosocial workers. It is argued that participatory evaluation is not only essential, in that the findings feed back into the ongoing training process, but that the process of reflection is an integral part of the broader aims of Narrative Theatre i.e., social transformation. Narrative theatre practice, as an effective tool to strengthen social fabric and facilitate social action, is best developed through a continuous participatory evaluation process within the context of organizational care and support.*

**Key words:** narrative theatre, social action, psychosocial strategies, participatory evaluation, reflective practice.

## **Introduction**

Narrative theatre is a strategy aimed at facilitating creative problem solving and strengthening social capital to initiate social transformation. Sliep & Meyer-Weitz (2003) and Sliep (2004) discussed the conceptual framework and processes involved in Narrative Theatre (NT) in recent publications in this journal. NT makes use of dramas constructed out of the life experiences of the people involved in the work. The problem story is deconstructed and de-cen-

tered while at the same time; the preferred strength-based story is centred and focused. The problem story and the preferred story are thus juxtaposed and worked with simultaneously. Through the expression of these experiences (or stories in the drama) several processes are stimulated: critical reflection, experiential and experimental learning, as well as creative problem solving. In this way the effects of negative experiences on daily functioning are reduced. Narrative Theatre is viewed as an additional, practical skill for psychosocial workers working with traumatized and vulnerable communities that enables them to work more concretely within a group or community setting in dealing with socially constructed problems. Social transformation, the ultimate goal of NT, can only take root when NT practitioners are able to translate the theoretical constructs on which it is based into practice and when they have adopted and internalised reflective practices. The range of skills required for NT as outlined by Sliep (2004) calls for an ongoing training process and not a 'one off' training event. The participants see ongoing evaluation as an integral part of the training because it not only feeds back into the training process, but also facilitates the development of reflective practices. It is through this process

of reflection, adaptation, and reinforcement that NT skills become internalised for spontaneous and appropriate application. It is argued that the internalisation of NT concepts and reflective practices also contribute to the transformation process within the participants. The skill training therefore not only provides the participants with a useful tool to become more effective as psychosocial workers, but also aids in their own personal development, and to those with whom they interact. The transformation process extends thus from the individual to their family, friends and to the community. The evaluation process is furthermore an integral part of NT practice and of its broader goals.

### **Evaluation process**

There are many ways in which we can describe what evaluation is and how it can be done (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Rothman, 1997; Green & Kreuter, 1998; Nutbeam, Smith, & Catford, 1990; Posavac & Cary, 1997; Patton, 2002; Reddy, Kok, Van den Borne & Yach, 1995; Springett, 2001). Evaluation is essentially about trying to find out whether what you are doing can be improved. To do an evaluation is a learning and empowering process, learning about what your programme or activities can achieve, and methods to improve it. Evaluation involves the collection of information for the purpose of making decisions about the intervention or activities. When evaluation forms an integral part of interventions or activities, it implies a commitment to deliver the best possible activity guided by clear intervention goals, objectives and performance indicators. Moreover, intervention evaluation assists in the further planning and development of activities, as it will provide a picture of what the intervention looks like in practice, will

point to effects achieved, and what still needs to be achieved.

Generally, the users of the evaluation information play an important role in defining: what evaluation information is needed, what key questions should be asked and what issues need to be explored. The definitions of success by the different stakeholders might differ from each other, and it is therefore important to understand the goals of the different stakeholders and their views about the best ways to achieve them (Friedman & Rothman, 2005). In the case of NT, the authors' guide the different stakeholders to the short and long term goals of NT. The broad types of evaluation, namely; formative, process and impact evaluation are relevant and applied to NT.

In *formative evaluation* the aim is to improve the planning and development of NT. The information gathered during formative evaluation is to be used to plan, refine and improve NT practice. *Process evaluation* is useful to document the delivery of NT to better understand the processes involved in the implementation of NT. In this regard it is important to understand the factors that play a role in facilitating NT but also those that impose barriers to effective practice. These evaluation processes view NT implementation as a repeated process of experimentation, adaptation and improvement. At each phase of this process, new goals and strategies are set in accordance with the knowledge that is gained through information collection, and in collaboration with the various stakeholders (Friedman & Rothman, 1999; 2005).

However, to determine whether NT was successful as a tool to foster social fabric and to develop independent problem solving within communities, an *impact and outcome evaluation process* is necessary. Impact and outcome evaluation measures the

immediate impact and ultimate outcome of NT. In NT this can be done through community surveys measuring social fabric i.e., bonding and social networks, as well as through objective community measures such as reported cases of violence (including domestic violence and child abuse), alcoholism, suicide and depression, etc.

As the primary focus of this paper is on the effectiveness of NT training, the evaluation of NT training is best viewed as a sequence of different phases and an ongoing process. It is similar to the process of mastering NT skills. The objectives of the evaluation phases correspond to the aims and objectives of the training, as discussed in our previous work (Sliep & Meyer-Weitz, 2003; Sliep, 2004). Because these aspects were addressed in a recent publication in this journal, only brief reference will be made to the relevant knowledge and skills addressed during the basic skills training sessions. In the first phase of NT training, the participants need to develop some understanding of basic concepts and some basic skills. Afterwards, they need to gain some experience in NT practice. The content of the next phase of training is dependent on the feedback gained from the ongoing formative and evaluation processes that will ensure relevancy of the training for further development and improvement of NT knowledge and skills. The objectives of the NT basic skills training are as follow:

*Knowledge:*

- 1) Understanding of what NT is i.e., the aim, objectives, and the basic methodology.
- 2) Understanding related concepts such as Narrative Therapy and Forum Theatre.

*Skills:*

- 1) Be able to apply a community approach for NT:
  - Have knowledge and skills related to a community approach (appropriate to the

culture that the work is taking place in).

- Be able to negotiate community entry and set-up a community meeting.

2) Narrative Theatre skills:

- Identification of a problem that needs to be addressed: naming the problem
- Explore the effects/consequences of the problem (assessed through a case scenario) at the: Individual level, Interpersonal level, Community level, Organisational level
- Ability to externalise the problem
- Ability to interview: the 'Problem' (causes of the problem, manifestations), the feelings/emotions associated with the problem, the characters associated with the 'problem'
- Identification of strengths within each character and potential for change: Explore histories of abilities, Explore barriers to change, Explore facilitating factors for change
- Ability to weaken the problem: Diminish its destructive power by a fuller description of the strengths available to overcome the problem, Ability to guide and facilitate change through centring the strength-based story, Demonstrate the ability to deal with sensitive issues.

3) Facilitate social change (Ultimate goal of NT over time)

- Building of resilience through strengthening human capacity, social fabric and cultural values: Providing an impetus for social action by mobilising the community to solve their own problems. Explore the following: Accessing resources and influences, Innovation, Engagement, Skills and empowerment.

Different strategies can be developed for the evaluation of NT training as depicted in Table 1.

As a first step in evaluation, the facilitator is required to revisit the basic concepts of NT throughout the training process. This is to

**Table 1:**  
**Outline of evaluation strategies for the different training phases**

Narrative Theatre training workshops	Evaluation Methods
<b>Phase 1</b>	
<p>Training: Mastering of basic NT knowledge and skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Create continuous opportunities to demonstrate understanding of NT concepts</li> <li>b) Role plays to demonstrate skills</li> <li>c) Observation and recording of process</li> <li>d) Participant evaluation through an informal or focus group discussion and a short questionnaire re: training session.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2</b>	
<p>Narrative theatre in practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Participatory evaluation through interviews and focus group discussions with PSW</li> <li>b) Interviews with PSW supervisors and with management</li> <li>c) Field Case study (observation of NT in practice)</li> <li>d) Survey on social fabric (PSW and community) longitudinal study</li> <li>e) Continuous monitoring of community indicators e.g. acts of violence (child abuse), suicide, number of homeless people, etc. Training (identified training needs in previous phase)</li> </ul>
<p>Training (identified training needs in previous phase)                      Reinforcement of NT skills with specific emphasis on difficult processes like externalization. Sharing outcomes of evaluation information with the larger group and facilitate discussions around emerging issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Observation and recording of process</li> <li>b) Role plays</li> <li>c) Participatory evaluation process</li> <li>d) Surveys and community indicators as referred to above.</li> </ul>

ensure that the participants understand the theoretical constructs but are also able to translate it into practice. The level of skills acquired during the training should be assessed at regular intervals through role-play and active participation that reflects both an understanding, and insight into NT. Because reflection is an integral part of NT, the participants are guided in this process throughout the training. While this reflection is initially directed at both the problem and strength-based stories from which the dramas are developed, it is also alluded to in the importance of self-reflection, and to assess the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches in NT practice.

Similar to most other training sessions, each NT training session should be evaluated by the facilitator, either through informal and focus group discussions or a short questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the participants are able to express their views about the training process, the extent to which they have acquired new skills, the skills and expertise of the facilitator, and general views about the training. This information is useful to the different stakeholders as part of a monitoring and evaluation process, and it may also inform other training sessions not only about the particular needs of the participants, but also about their likes and dislikes.

The next phase of the evaluation can only begin once the participants have had some independent, practical experience of NT in the communities in which they work. As previously mentioned, this ongoing formative and process evaluation phase is central to NT training, the information gained will inform subsequent training and be directed at improving NT skills and strategies for practice. To assist the participants in this process, they can be provided with work-

sheets to record information on each NT session they conduct (see Box 1). This worksheet can be adapted to the specific needs of organisations and communities. Support for the implementation and evaluation of NT from the employing organization is of the utmost importance to the success of NT (Sliep, 2004). Moreover, this process further requires that the practitioners of NT reflect critically on their own practice and thus forms part of the broader aims of NT. These aims are best achieved through a participatory and action evaluation approach that was followed to evaluate the training.

### **Participatory evaluation for the evaluation of NT practice**

Participatory evaluation is an interactive qualitative methodology directed at the humanisation and personalisation of research and evaluation (Fetterman, 2000). This is derived from the close contact of the evaluator with the programme, the procedures of observation, and the nature of the interviewing process. In participatory research and evaluation, the participants feel that their views are respected and valued (Kushner, 2000). The active participation in evaluation supports the development of ownership of the inquiry process and the findings, and is viewed as a 'bottom-up' approach (Patton, 2002). Moreover, the process of collaboration and democratic dialogue and deliberation by all relevant stakeholders, facilitates action learning, an appreciation for inquiry and reflective practice (Patton, 2002). By participation in the evaluation, a process of self-evaluation is also thus generated. Although Uphoff (1991) stated that this process is in itself not the most important aspect but rather what is learned from the discussions and the process of reaching consensus.

## **Record keeping during field visits**

### **Monitoring of Community Activities**

Date: .....

Area: .....

Name of the Village: .....

Number of community members who attended: .....

Names of the Facilitators: .....

Use the space below to write about the following: .....

1) Problem Description: .....

2) Describe the intervention: .....

3) Describe the process and the outcome: .....

Rate the success of the community activity on a scale of 1 (not successful) to 5 (very successful) and provide reasons for your rating

1            2            3            4            5

.....

However, it can be argued that participatory evaluation and inquiry are means to create both a personal and organisational culture committed to ongoing learning and reflection (King, 1995). The institutionalisation of evaluation logic and process (Wildavsky, 1985) is instrumental in improving the evaluation capacity of any programme or intervention, and is a prerequisite for its self-sustainability (King, 1995).

In most instances evaluation is seen as being 'done to people'. But when people are involved as active participants, they become co-researchers. In the latter case there is no clear distinction between the producers and users of the knowledge (Friedman & Rothman, 1999). A greater consciousness and openness about the objectives and ultimate goals of activities might assist reflec-

tions on what constitutes success and what kind of adjustments are needed to improve outcomes, and ultimately project goals (Rothman, 1997).

In participatory evaluation qualitative methods are used, as they are understandable, teachable and usable by people without extensive knowledge or experience of research inquiry (Patton, 2002). In line with the constructionist perspective of NT, different stakeholders involved in the initiative should be consulted in the evaluation process as all their different perceptions, constructions and experiences of NT are considered worthwhile to explore and of equal value for: the management, the programme supervisors, the psychosocial workers (PSW) themselves, and the community. The focus of this paper is

on the experiences of the PSW, however. While the evaluator facilitates the evaluation process, the PSW and/or the community control the process, as all collaborative approaches in evaluation require power sharing. Nevertheless, it is expected that to be effective, the evaluator would need the following skills:

- Sound theoretical and practical understanding of programme evaluation with specific understanding of participatory evaluation
- Understanding of the dynamics and complexities of social and behavioural change
- Knowledge of NT in order to: identify important outcomes within a specific context and situation, and to identify further training needs

### **Background to the co-researchers in the study: Psychosocial workers of TPO in Burundi.**

The psychosocial workers who shared their experiences and their views with us are employed by the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) in Burundi. The project for Psychosocial Interventions for Victims of Violence in Burundi was started at the end of 1999 after a pilot intervention. The aim of the programme is to provide psychosocial help to a group of approximately 150.000 internally displaced people and refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The PSW are daily faced with major challenges ranging from support of survivors of violence and human rights violations to HIV-infected and AID patients. Major challenges also include support for people who are affected by the devastating consequences of poverty and disintegrated social systems.

The PSW in Burundi are Kirundi and French speaking. Although a few are able to

follow a basic conversation in English, the majority are unable to do so and therefore necessitate communication through interpreters. They work in three regions in Burundi called: West, North and East. The PSW of the West region, who participated in the discussions, consisted of six female and five males. Of the six females, three had been employed by TPO for a minimum of three years while the other three had been with TPO for less than a year. Three of the male PSW had been with TPO for three years or more, and two for less than a year. The age range of the PSW is between 28 and 41 years old, with an average age of about 36 years old.

Of the PSW in the North region who participated in the discussions, four were females and three were males. All the PSW have been employed by TPO for about a year and their ages ranged from 28 to 34 years old with an average age of about 31 years old. The PSW of the Central region consisted of four males and one female. In this region the PSW had been employed by TPO for about a year as well. The youngest PSW was 28 years old and the eldest 48 years old with an average age of 38 years old. The communities, to which the PSW provide services, differ in terms of population numbers and geographic location. They work in close cooperation with the different community leadership structures and seem to have well-established relationships with them, as all community activities have to be sanctioned by them.

### **Collection of evaluation information**

During a week's follow-up visit, four months after the initial training, the effectiveness of the NT training was explored through a participatory evaluation approach. A combination of focus group dis-

cussions and individual narratives were employed to gain an insight into the practice of NT by the PSW. The discussions were conducted in English with the assistance of interpreters who translated it from English into Kirundi or French, and vice versa. Interviews and discussions were held separately with the PSW from the West, North and Central regions, and in the groups they work with in their respective regions.

The narratives of the PSW were specifically employed to understand their skills and the application of NT within their work situations. Their perceptions of the impact NT has made with regards to aspects of social fabric, collective problem solving and social action within their communities were also explored. A community NT session in one region was conducted to observe the application of NT within a community context. Due to financial and time constraints, community visits to the other regions were not possible. Although not the focus of this paper, a community baseline survey was conducted with items adapted from the World Bank's Shortened version of their Social Capital questionnaire to measure aspects of social fabric namely: bonding, social networking and support.

During the discussion the following aspects were explored:

- The effectiveness of an experimental and experiential learning approach for the mastering of basic skills in NT
- The level of NT skills acquired and maintained by the PSW
- NT as practiced by the PSW
- Facilitating factors and obstacles to the practice of NT
- Additional training needs required by the TPO
- Improvement in levels of social fabric and creative problem solving in communities

## **Outcome of the discussions**

*Opportunities for NT in the community.* For all PSW in the different regions, a minimum of two NT forums per month was held, while some PSW were able to conduct three to four NT forums per month. Opportunities for NT arise from problems or specific issues that need to be addressed in communities identified by community members, community leaders or by the PSW themselves.

Male PSW: *'The problems were brought to us and we decide if NT would be the best way to address the problem.'*

Male PSW: *'The community leaders assisted in that they become aware of my skills and would contact me if they have a problem in the community.'*

Female PSW: *'I learn of problems in the community and then I call a meeting to address them.'*

Decisions about the appropriateness of NT as a strategy to address problems are at the discretion of PSWs. The PSWs used different strategies to decide about the appropriateness of NT as a way to deal with problems, such as the nature of the problem or cultural constructions of the sensitivity of the issue.

Female PSW: *'One can use NT for most cases – it is only maybe when something is personal that one would use person to person contact.'*

It seems also that the community leaders play a central role in community mobilization and have the responsibility to arrange the community forums for NT.

Male PSW: *'The leaders would assist in the mobilization of the community and get the group together. ... Our leaders are very cooperative and assisted me in addressing problems in the community.'*

Other innovative ways of creating a community forum is used, for example: *'we use the beating of drums and traditional dance because it helps to bring the audience together and then we follow with the drama. Now we have a bigger audience.'*

The number of people in an audience varies from community to community and

also depends on the time of the year and weather conditions. When people are working in the fields during the planting or harvesting seasons, or on rainy days, it is more difficult to get community members together. However, on most other days the numbers of the audience seems to vary between 40 and 80 community members.

*Application of NT in community settings.* Narrative theatre was not used in a consistent way by all the PSW. This difference was noted in the different ways in which actors for the NT were identified and used. Some preferred to identify actors in their communities, or from their clients, and to train them for the NT forums in their communities rather than to request volunteers from the local populations to come forward to act out the characters of the story.

Female PSW: *'We got our clients to be our actors. We prepare them by giving them ideas on the problems and how to act it. But they also bring out their own ideas through the acting.'*

Female PSW: *'I have used my clients, as I know them and they are free with me. They make their*

*own story of the problem and then after they prepare we go to the community.'*

These 'actors' would accompany the PSW on community visits in which NT forums were planned. The reason offered why it was better to identify actors before the forum was that community members are unlikely to volunteer as *'they are not free ... they find it difficult to act. It is our culture.'*

Actors were also identified by requesting volunteers at a community forum after some time was spent to prepare them for the theatre. In accordance with the training they received, actors were identified from the audience and then encouraged to act out the characters in a spontaneous way.

This process was explained as follows:

Male PSW: *'I use the actors of the community. They act out the theme of the problem and they use their own story, the way it is in the community. After this we share ideas about the problem and we give feedback on the problem. We ask the community their ideas to the solutions of the problem. They guide us to the solutions.'*

Psychosocial workers have applied Narrative Theatre in a community context to a range of psychosocial problems depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Psychosocial problems addressed with Narrative theatre**

Psychosocial problems	Frequency
Domestic violence	12
School dropout	2
Purposeful poisoning	1
Child abuse	9
Polygamy	9
Alcoholism	12
Family Disputes	6
Rape	2
Early Marriage	1
Cohabitation	1
HIV	7
Epilepsy	5
Drug abuse	1

*Usefulness of NT versus other methods.* Very positive attitudes were expressed about the use of NT as a strategy to address problems within a community setting. The reasons offered for these positive feelings include the following:

Male PSW: *'What is good about NT is that the community can understand it better, they can see the effects of a problems on others, it is their own problems, and it is true that it is happening in that way.'*

Female PSW: *'It is better than the participatory method. The community focus on the theatre and understand the problem better. They can also see their own solutions.'*

Male PSW: *'They can see the consequences better and they can also see how to change.'*

Female PSW: *'The community comes to understand it very easily for it comes from the people they know, the stories and the problems they know.'*

The use of narrative theatre has not only contributed to improved knowledge and problem solving among members of the community, but has also raised the awareness of the psychosocial services offered by TPO in the community.

Female PSW: *'We have many more people coming to talk to us now and get counselling. Even if you only go to the community, even if you do not have actors, people feel now very free to talk to us.'*

The skills acquired in the training has impacted on the PSW own lives and as a PSW said: *'In my family I have used this technique by making use of externalisation, people can now change because you are not attacking them, you are attacking the problem.'*

*Problems experienced with NT.* The majority of the problems centre on compensation for the actors. The PSW feel obliged to give them something, while the actors in turn also expect to receive some form of compensation. In the case of trained and travelling actors this need is even greater. It is explained as follows:

Male PSW: *'I have a problem with my mobile*

*actors – they use a lot of their own time to come with me and I can not compensate them.'*

Male PSW: *'...they do not need a salary, just a refreshment, a bottle of something ...'*

This aspect of compensation generated an active debate among the PSW, with some expressing strong arguments for using actors from the audience rather than using 'mobile actors' precisely because of the problems surrounding compensation. On the other hand, others argued strongly that the audiences are 'not free' and find acting difficult. It was stressed that *'in Burundi culture to say something out (loud) is very hard, it is difficult to disclose. So to select people that can play a role, you need to teach them a lot, so that they can open up.'*

From this discussion a need was expressed for *'techniques that will make it easier for them to act.'*

It was learned that the PSW have found it very difficult to use NT for issues that they, and the community, consider as sensitive and of a private nature such as issues around rape and sexuality. While they felt that the community could benefit from NT around these issues they did not know how to approach these issues within this context.

Male PSW: *'I would like to look at rape. It is too difficult for NT and the actors are too pessimistic to act it. In my community I have a problem that a girl was raped and now the family has condemned her and chased her away. They say that she has brought it upon herself. They blame her. It is too difficult to use NT and I only talked to the people. It is a hidden issue in our community because of our culture – it is not easy to talk about it.'*

After some probing on other difficulties in NT it was established that the PSW have problems with 'externalization of problems' a key element in the practice of NT where characters are given concepts like anger and power. These characters then need to act out the roles they play in different contexts.

An argument put forward for not using externalization was that *'the community do not really understand it well. If it is an educated group it is better, not people with a low level of education. We do not do it. Maybe we need to learn it better.'* While a few indicated that they *'try to use'* externalisation, problems were experienced with abstract concepts like respect, justice, peace and strength. This further training need was also identified during the community NT forum.

*Understanding of the concepts of Social Capital.* Social capital was understood as social cohesion and not necessarily that of social networks. The PSW provided some examples of change that they had observed in terms of social cohesion in their communities since the application of NT techniques over the four-month period. They shared the following experiences:

Male PSW: *'After I worked on depression, the community now looks after those that are depressed. They did not know about them and now they visit them and make contact with them. They share time with them. This is really good.'*

Female PSW: *'I have an example of a person who died – she was dead for three days before anyone knew. I had a workshop and drama around caring for our neighbours. Now people talk to their neighbours and know if they need help or if they are sick.'*

Male PSW: *'Now we see that after these theatres, the community have learned something. If there are problems in the community, they do not always call us. They help each other. This is very good. They also discussed the solutions and what to do with each other when there are problems.'*

*Support and monitoring.* The support from the supervisors and thus from the management of TPO in using NT was perceived as central to their successes. NT was integrated into their everyday duties. The fact that they had to monitor their NT forum activities were experienced positively: *'It is good*

*because it shows that it is part of our job description.'*

The PSW reported on the frequency of NT activities in the community. It seems that most of them had conducted at least two to three NT forums per month over a period of six months. The supervisors stressed the fact that they encourage the PSW to use NT because they perceive it as a very useful tool in community care and support.

### **Field case study**

In this section a brief summary of the NT forum that was conducted in a community setting will be presented as a case study. This will serve as evidence of acquired NT skills and further training needs. Observations and comments will be made within the text to point out the strengths and deficiencies of NT practice, as demonstrated by the facilitators. It should be noted that parts of the narratives might have been lost due to the translation process.

*Context.* Members of a specific community gathered in an open field among a few trees. The audience consisted of about 60 people which included: old men, old women, young women with children, quite a few young men and some older children – more boys than girls. They were all sitting on the ground but some chairs were set out for the guests i.e. the facilitators, elders of the community and the researchers.

The chief welcomed the guests and the PSW and provided a short introduction after which the process was handed over to the PSW. One of the PSW provided a short overview of TPO and the different services they offer. The theme, alcoholism for the NT forum was introduced. A request was made for volunteer actors from the community to act out a problem story of the abuse of alcohol in their community. A few community members indicated a willing-

ness to do so and requested a few minutes to prepare their story.

*The drama.* The volunteer community members acted out the following scene of a household in which a mother and her children are waiting for the father to return home after work. He arrives home, but he is drunk and becomes angry with his wife when he learns that there is no food. The wife tries to explain that there is no money in the house, as he did not leave her any, even though she had requested money to buy food. The husband becomes furious and attempts to hit her. The wife and children flee from the home in fright. The husband continues to shout abuse at his wife, after which the neighbour comes to enquire about the problem. The neighbour is a man and is very calm; he talks to the husband in a quiet voice. He also holds the husband's arm while he is talking to him. The neighbour asks him to go to sleep and tells the husband that he will return in the morning. (*The next scene*) The neighbour comes back to the husband. He explains to him that he was not able to talk to him the previous night because he was drunk. The husband denies that they met the previous day. He asks his neighbour if he knows where his family is? The neighbour explains to him that he chased his family away while he was drunk and wanted to beat his wife and children.

### **Discussions that emerged from the group after the drama**

After the scenes were acted out, the PSW initiated a discussion with the audience. The mapping out of alcoholism as a problem and its effects on the members of the family and others close to them received adequate attention. The drama in this context was merely used to illustrate to the audience the impact of alcoholism on rela-

tionships at a basic level and some consequences of drinking e.g., violence, lack of food, poverty and losing one's family.

Female PSW: *'We have come to you to make you understand alcoholism as a problem in the home and in the community. Alcoholism is in the community. ... Maybe if you know the consequences you will drink less.'*

No use was made of externalization, for example by asking a member of the audience to act out 'alcohol' to illustrate the role of alcohol in the process. The drama was also not used to play out a strength-based story, although a story of strength in overcoming alcoholism emerged from one of the members of the audience. However, it was only considered as a contribution from the audience, and thus the opportunity was lost to build on community capabilities in overcoming problem drinking.

Yet, the drama was very effective in initiating involvement of the audience. It was evident that they enjoyed the drama as they laughed, and provided comments and suggestions to the actors. The drama also attracted enough attention that some bystanders walking past decided to join the audience.

A lively discussion emerged after the drama that indicated the effectiveness of the drama to stimulate discussions. Many shared their experiences and opinions related to alcohol use with the audience. The discussions provided opportunities to inform the audience of liver diseases related to alcohol, the importance of appropriate and sound nutrition, and of the importance of responsible drinking. Safer drinking practices were explored with the audience.

Male PSW: *'When is drinking a problem? When is it bad? A certain amount is OK, if too much it is a problem. There are occasions or ceremonies when it is acceptable to drink - people share food and drink, the family is together, and drinking at weddings is also fine.'*

Female PSW: *'Once you drink too much and it overtakes you, it is a problem... We know alcohol is part of our culture – it is only a problem when it is abused. ... All of us drink but we have to know how much we need to drink.'*

Another important theme that emerged was HIV transmission through irresponsible and unsafe sexual practices associated with the use of alcohol. It was clear that some misunderstandings exist with regards to HIV and that a need for information is necessary.

Female Participant: *'I heard that when you get HIV it can stay with you for 2 days and it goes away.'*

PSW: *'You are asking about HIV. Next time when I come I will talk about HIV. But if you get HIV it remains inside of you – it is not true. But next time I will talk more about it.'*

The use of questions and reflections were used effectively by the PSWs and the summaries of comments were done at timely intervals to reinforce the messages around safer drinking practices. It was at times necessary to focus the audience on alcoholism, as the discussion tended to move into other content areas, as illustrated above. The concluding remarks were appropriate and brought the process to a close.

Male PSW: *'In summary we have looked at the consequences of alcoholism - on yourself, your family and the community – you disturb your neighbour, and you disturb your health. A strategy to adopt is to reduce the amount of alcohol you use and to help others by giving them advice. You can also come to us for help. We also need to teach our future – our youth. We need to teach them – teach our children to help them when they are still young that they do not follow in the path of their parents.'*

*'Thank you for your participation. You can refer others to me for help. You are most welcome to visit me in my office. I work every day and receive people every day. You can also refer others in the community to us.'*

Male PSW: *'Thank you for your ideas. Can you tell me what you have learned from this workshop?'*

Young male participant: *'I have learned about alcoholism – about the consequences and the dangers of the local beer. It is now to each person how to use it - and when your neighbour does not know how to use it, we must teach the others, and give ideas on how to reduce it. Each person is to look after himself, his family and his neighbour.'*

## Phase 2: Training

Interactive methodology was used in the second training session in which the different training needs that emerged during the discussions and the field study were addressed. The evaluation information was discussed in the group to share the perceptions and experiences of the PSW working in the different regions with each other. This phase of training is instrumental in moving NT skills from a basic level to a more advanced level of practice. At this level, the training is directed at cultivating and building on existing strengths that would foster empowerment and social change.

The level of participation and engagement of the PSW in this phase of training were based on a higher level of insight. Special attention was paid to the application of 'externalization' and role-play was done to practice the skill. With regards addressing sensitive issues like rape, the facilitator in conjunction with the PSW created a drama to demonstrate aspects of the issue that can be addressed with relative ease, i.e., the consequences of being shunned from one's family after being raped. It was demonstrated that sensitive issues like rape are not done using an experience that really happened to someone in the audience, but with a story that reflects a scenario of something that could happen in that situation. A drama was also created around HIV to

explore externalization in this situation. The use of gender role reversal as a technique to decrease the sensitivity around particular behaviours was also demonstrated, and then reinforced by role-play. The training session also served to reinforce existing skills.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

From the discussions and interviews with the PSW it was evident that the first training week contributed to the mastering of the basic NT skills. The participatory evaluation process provided an opportunity for the PSW to share their experiences of NT in practice. The PSW demonstrated a solid foundation in the application of basic NT skills and showed creativity in overcoming factors that hindered the practice of NT. An issue that they will continue to debate is the use of mobile actors and compensation for these actors. It is also envisaged that strengthening and improving NT skills could also address the problematic issues surrounding the use of 'mobile actors' and compensation, so that the PSW would be able to motivate the audience to participate as actors in a more spontaneous way.

An enthusiasm was noted among the PSW for continued effort to improve and develop their skills in NT. This can partly be ascribed to levels of empowerment and control over their own development by determining, to a great extent, the content of their follow-up training sessions through action, and participatory evaluation process. As the mastering of skills is understood by the PSW as a process in which refinement in application is acquired along with experience and reinforcement of skills over time, the process and outcome of reflection is valued. The support from management on a supervisory level made it pos-

sible for the PSW to translate the training into on-going implementation. Without this support the likelihood that the PSW would integrate their knowledge and skills into their daily practices would have been greatly reduced. NT will not only be an important tool for application within their roles as PSW, but also form part of their personal capacity development in which the integration of new knowledge informs and enrich all their practices. A significant return can thus be expected by TPO on the financial and human investments they made on staff development through the appropriate support and encouragement they provide to the PSW in general, and specifically by integrating NT as part of their daily functioning.

While the development of social capital in communities through social cohesion, collective problem solving, and local networks is a process and a long-term goal of NT, the change that has occurred in individuals and among community members is noteworthy and should, therefore be the impetus for continued community engagement. The continuous monitoring and evaluation of NT activities are essential strategies for the development and full internalization of NT skills in the repertoire of tools available to psychosocial workers in strengthening social fabric, self-reliance, and to bring forth social transformation in the communities they serve.

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