

Part Two

Types of Alternative Media



Street Theatre



Street theatre is drama taken to the streets and can be performed anywhere, from a street corner or small alley, to a public fair, park, shopping centre, or recreational reserve, with the minimum of props. It is usually shorter than a formal stage drama (about half an hour to an hour). The objective is mainly to arouse social consciousness and often to protest against injustice through entertainment. The lack of elaborate stage effects focuses audience attention on the message.

Street theatre or drama has a long tradition in Bangladesh and gained momentum after the country's liberation in 1971. Street theatre is generally aired in the open on the street or in the community without a stage. In earlier times different theatre groups performed street theatre all over the country to observe different festivals as well as to voice demands for rights and democracy in terms of crisis. These days street theatre has become a useful communication tool to promote the issues of poor people and has become a part of social development. 'Jatra' is another popular open air form of theatre which literally means 'going on a journey' and combines acting, song and dance delivered in a stylised, oratorical, and exaggerated manner. The beauty of street drama is that it costs less time and labour to produce and reaches to a broader audience than other means, and it can deal with serious themes and deliver development messages without sounding too serious or 'preachy'. Different tools like puppets, comics, and popular folk songs, have been incorporated into this modern drama form. Street theatre is very popular in Bangladesh and many theatre groups in the country observe week long street theatre festivals.

Step 1

Organise a team and discuss issues of importance and ideas for potential stories illustrating the issues.

Step 2

Form a team of amateur performers or professionals from the community who are interested to take part in a street play.



Watching a performance in Nagaland



A team of performers from a Nepali village



Step 3

Prepare a story based on the issues discussed with the community.

Sample story: The marketing story – Mopungchuket village in Nagaland

The story is based on marketing of wild green vegetables collected from the forest. Two women meet half way towards the village market. One is going to the town market to sell her produce. The other one gives her produce to a middleman. Later when they compare notes, they realise that it would be more profitable for the first one to give her produce to a middleman as she spends money and time on going to the town and loses a day of getting more products from the forest. Since most of the villagers go to the city to sell these products, the participants feel that if the villagers can be convinced to send only one person (a wholesaler) to the market to sell all their vegetables, then they would save labour and money.

Step 4

Write a script for the performance, and decide who will do what.

Step 5

Develop a storyboard to assist in enacting the play with the characters in place. Use local materials for props and local instruments for sound effects.



A story about a local bazaar

Step 6

Rehearse the play with performers using props and organise the performance as necessary for community events.



Practising a street drama in Bangladesh



Rehearsing a play in Nepal

Puppet Shows



Puppet show in Bandarban, Bangladesh

Puppetry is an ancient art with roots in almost every culture. The forms of puppetry are as varied as the people who create them. They can educate as well as entertain audiences and their simplicity allows the audience to hear difficult messages. A puppet can convey concepts clearly using a language of symbol and gesture, humour and character. Puppets can be used to deliver any type of message - social, cultural, economic, political, or environmental - without raising ill feeling. Sensitive issues can be discussed much more easily. Puppets create a world in which one can identify oneself with the character as the drama unfolds.

There are four main types of puppets, with many variations and combinations.

- String puppets
- Shadow puppets
- Glove puppets
- Rod puppets

Making puppets - simplicity

Puppets do not have to be complicated or expensive. But they do have to be creative and intelligent. They can be moved and can be made from different materials and in any size. However cheaply they have been put together, they all come to life as characters. It's important for puppets to act, not just stand around talking. Let them share jokes, dance around and come alive.

Character development

To help the community identify with the puppet show, the faces and dresses of the puppets should bear a resemblance to the community members. Farm animals, pets, and folk or traditional characters can help make the show more entertaining. Attempts should be made to weave aspects of local atmosphere and flavour into the story.

A good puppet is not necessarily a pretty puppet but one that performs well for the puppeteer.

– Carmen Osbahr and John E. Kennedy,
Puppeteers for 'The Puzzle Place'





Tips for making a puppet

- Puppets should only be made after determining the target audience and choosing the type of story.
- The puppet characters need to be acceptable to the audience and should reflect their customs and dress code.
- If the audience are children, make sure that creating the puppets is part of the fun.
- The size of the puppet will depend on where it is to be used. Puppets designed for outdoor use need to be bigger so they can be seen from a distance. Larger puppets can be made from foam or hard polystyrene material, the lighter the materials the easier it will be to manipulate the finished puppet. However, small puppets are cheaper and easier to dress with fine clothes and decorations.



Characterisation of a puppet

How to prepare a puppet show

A puppet show can be organised for any community event.

- Step 1** - Organise a team and choose a topic based on the issue
- Step 2** - Identify the target audience
- Step 3** - Develop a story and script based on how, why, and what
- Step 4** - Think of the type of puppet to be used and where it is to be used
- Step 5** - Make puppets using locally available materials
- Step 6** - Use music to give sound effects
- Step 7** - Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse
- Step 8** - Present the show to the audience



Preparing a puppet show

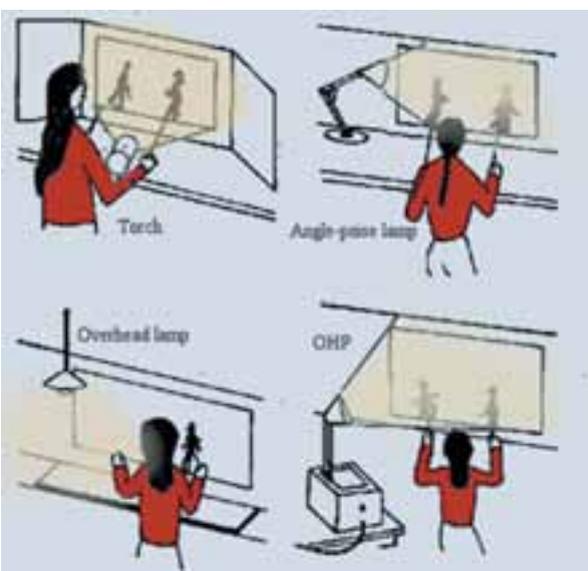
Shadow Play



The actors in a shadow play are shadows of people, puppets, or cutouts. This way of presenting a story avoids personalising the characters in real terms and is a good option for conveying difficult messages.

A shadow play can be performed by a group of people or by puppets behind a lighted screen. Shadows can be depicted either behind a screen or in front of a screen with enough lights. As in other forms of communication, the show can be a mixture of a drama and a puppet show. The difference is that the activities are shown on the screen.

When the shadows are from people, the actors act in front of the (preferably white) screen and the light system is arranged at such an angle that the shadows are reflected on the screen, making the characters look big and different to their usual selves. Accessories can also be used in such plays as in theatre or dramas. Use of music and sound effects makes the show livelier and adds value to the entertainment.



If a shadow play is performed with puppets, then the shadows of the puppets are projected on the screen from behind and the audience does not see the puppets, which are manipulated in the same way as in an open puppet show. A strong light is required to project the puppets on the screen. Shadow screens must transmit as much light as possible, but at the same time, be opaque enough to hide the puppeteers. The screen also needs to be tight enough so that the puppets can be pushed against it lightly without it sagging, and thin enough to give sharp edges to the shadows.

Shadow puppet play

The show can get boring if the puppets only move back and forth. To overcome this, it is advisable to use different sized puppets at different heights on the screen. This makes the show look as though it has three dimensions and makes for a much more interesting stage picture.

The light brings the shadow puppet alive on the screen. In a rural setting without electricity, oil lamps can be used on bamboo frames between the puppeteer's face and the screen. There are several factors to consider when choosing the light - intensity, spread, colour, and angle. Several light fixtures have been used in shadow puppetry. Probably the most popular is the simple 'clamp lamp'. They are inexpensive and adjustable, but you'll need a good, solid place to clamp the lamp. The angle of the light is also important. Light can come from below, from above, or from the side. Each gives different effects. Light at a bad angle can show all of your control rods and even the puppeteer's heads.

Songs and Dances

Songs and dances are a major historical form of entertainment in most cultures. Epic stories about historical events were often depicted in the form of cultural dances and songs. This type of entertainment is widely popular and still very alive in rural and urban areas. Songs and dances can be used very successfully to share messages of social importance in communities.



A song and or dance event can be performed indoors or outdoors. In a rural setting, it can be performed as an open air event, which is open to a larger audience. But it can also be performed in a community hall or auditorium.



Singing a two-part 'response' song in Nepal

As for other media, songs and dances need a script for the final product. The major steps are:

Step 1 - Needs assessment

Step 2 - Selection of message(s)

Step 3 - Form a team of people who are willing to participate and have fun. For singing, it is essential to have a group of people with confident and strong voices. For dancing, the group must be willing to learn and rehearse.

Step 4 - Prepare the script (song or dance routine) incorporating the message(s) to be delivered. In a dance sequence, emphasise the use of facial expressions and actions, as actions speak louder than words.

Step 5 - Rehearse and present to the community.



A woman dancing at a village gathering in Nepal

Cultural Events



A cultural or sports event is a good platform for sharing social messages and knowledge. Such events can be organised as part of a festival or during fairs where a large mass of people can be drawn together.

Cultural events need to be well organised and coordinated to reach out to as many people as possible. To organise and manage a mass event, the organisers have to be creative and think of a variety of things to include, for example, stalls, performances, sports, demonstrations, and awareness programmes aired through loud speakers. Decoration is important to attract a crowd and make the event feel more organised. Decoration can be done for the display tables and stalls, through a nicely decorated gate, and in other ways.

Many activities can be organised.

- Display tables can be set up for people to share items from other cultures or villages (such as clothing, dishes, pictures, and crafts)
- Food stalls are always important at any event. Local people can be invited to host the stalls and sell traditional food and drinks to the visitors attending the event.
- Performances like dances, songs, poetry recitals, and storytelling can be organised with local issues and social messages for the targeted communities. Each performance should be kept within a time limit to increase entertainment and decrease boredom among the crowd.
- Demonstrations can be shown on any technical matter that could be useful to the community. Likewise, demonstrations can be conducted on any type of art, skill, or training to raise awareness. The idea is to share knowledge and to demonstrate it to the crowd to get the maximum impact.



Combined sport, cultural and alternative media event in Chitral



Organising a cultural event

- Step 1** - Bring together active local bodies and relevant development practitioners to set up an organising team and develop an agenda
- Step 2** - Identify intermediaries who will participate
- Step 3** - Think of a theme and issues that could be useful to share, discuss, and demonstrate at the event
- Step 4** - Plan activities to be conducted and hosted
- Step 5** - Publicise through word of mouth, local institutions, community leaders, and religious institutions
- Step 6** - Gather people for the event and impart knowledge and information to all levels of society including children, women, and elders. Demonstrate new technologies useful to the community, and organise any form of media display (drama, songs, dances, and so on) to share information on development issues that could be relevant to the community.



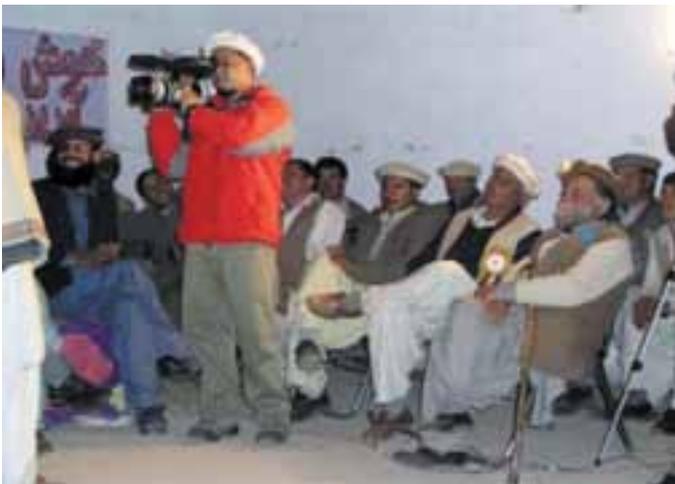
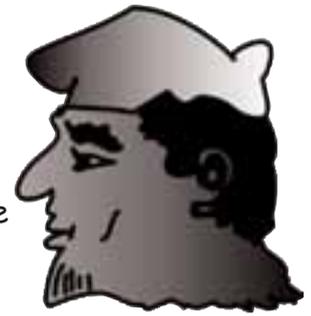
A polo game at the sport and cultural event in Chitral

Technical Demonstration – Biosand Filter Technology

The committee members of the District Council (Chitral) contacted some organisations in the search for a localised solution to the problem of obtaining sufficient clear drinking water. In response, the bio-sand filter, a simple technology made of local materials, was provided to the community by the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology. The simplicity and importance of the technology was demonstrated practically at a cultural event. The simple apparatus was able to generate clean drinking water from muddy water within a few minutes. The overwhelming reaction from the audience showed how successful the knowledge transfer had been. As a result, the local people invited the community leaders to hold demonstrations in their areas and disseminate this local technology to wider audiences.



Poetry Symposium

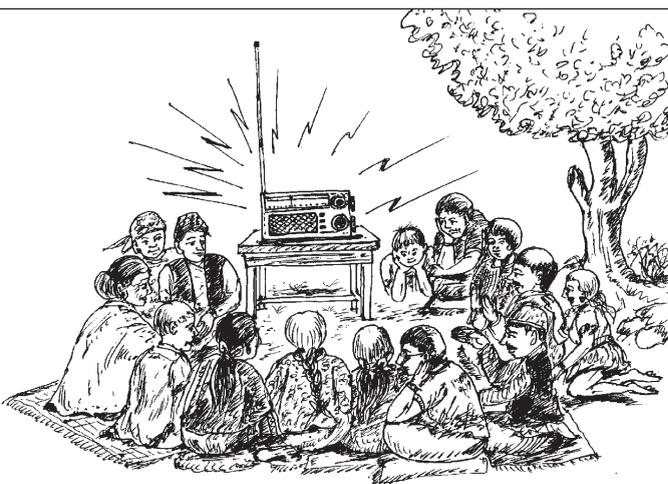


Listening to a poet reciting a poem on environmental conservation in Pakistan

A poetry symposium, also known as a Seerat Conference in Chitral can be a very entertaining and educational way of sharing knowledge and information. Many otherwise unsaid messages can be delivered through poems. In earlier times, poems were well known as a means for exchanging words of love or expressing love for people or nature in a very romantic manner.

A poetry symposium can be conducted by gathering local poets who will be asked to write and recite their poetry on a selected topic.

Radio



Village radio



Radio is not necessarily a community event. But in many rural areas, local radio stations exist that are targeted to, and may be owned by, local communities.

Thus certain radio programmes can also be considered 'alternative media' in the sense used in this guide, and can be prepared in a participatory way by communities as described for other forms.

Radio can be used to channel information developed with alternative media concepts like plays, poems, and songs. The programmes can be adapted to a community's interests and concerns and can be produced in local languages. As with other alternative media, radio has the advantage of reaching people who do not read or write.



Postscript

We find that using alternative media to reach communities can be highly stimulating, popular, and effective. We hope that you will feel encouraged to try more of these approaches in your work, and we would enjoy hearing from you about any activities that you have tried or know of in this direction.

The ICIMOD-IMCO Alternative Media Team



A fascinated audience in Bandarbanh, Bangladesh