



Summary Report on three-week training and supervised implementation of Interactive Theatre for Justice with VSO Bangladesh

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Ryan Borcharding
Interactive Theatre Programme Coordinator
Theatre for a Change



1. Background

In June 2017, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and Theatre for a Change (TfaC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together in partnership, with TfaC providing training and technical support to VSO staff, volunteers and participants in the use of interactive theatre techniques for advocacy and behaviour change in support of VSO's work on adolescent youth and sexual and reproductive health and rights (AYSRHR).

Bangladesh was identified as the site of a pilot project due to VSO's existing network of youth clubs that focus on AYSRHR advocacy and behaviour change in their communities, with a particular focus on the prevention of child marriage.

In September 2017, TfaC travelled to Dhaka and trained 17 VSO youth club members and national volunteers in Interactive Theatre for Justice techniques.

2. Planning

Planning for the pilot project had two main areas:

- The first involved content planning, ensuring that we integrated the needs of the group into the delivery of the training, and that training content would directly support VSO's ongoing campaigns and activities to end child marriage and improve AYSRHR in target communities. We did this by consulting with VSO staff and asking each of the participants to complete a risk assessment in advance. A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan and materials were also developed.
- The second involved logistical planning including venue hire, participant recruitment and travel logistics, and visa/travel/insurance logistics for the TfaC trainer. We also prepared for the training in Bangla by translating training materials, and arranging for interpreters (national volunteers) to be present at the training.

3. The aim and indicators of the training

VSO and TfaC agreed on the following aim and indicators in advance of the training:

Aim: to equip a group of youth club members and volunteers with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to be able to devise, perform and facilitate their own Interactive Theatre for Justice performances in community settings. Specifically, the training focused on how to use Interactive Theatre for Justice to prevent child marriage and improve the SRHR of children and youth, especially girls.

Indicators: to develop self-confidence, communication skills, risk management skills, assertiveness, understanding of behaviour change, facilitation skills and reflective practice among training participants.



4. The group

TfaC trained a group of 17 participants made up of 15 youth club members (6 female, 9 male) and 2 national volunteers (1 female, 1 male). The youth club members came from the following areas:

Dinajpur District, Birampur Upazila - 6 participants

Dinajpur District, Parbatipur Upazila - 6 participants

Bagerhat District, Mongla Upazila – 3 participants

Ages ranged from late teens to early 20's. Some participants were still in high school while others were in college. The national volunteers were in their mid to late 20s. The group spoke Bangla and limited English, so translation was necessary.



Participants develop team work skills.

In terms of response to the training, the group as a whole did very well - excelling in areas of team work and communication, and the devising and performing of original Interactive Theatre for Justice pieces based on their own experiences. They had consistently positive



attitudes, high levels of energy, and were always attentive and eager to learn. Their growth and development after 10 days was evident to anyone who attended their performance and witnessed their work.

Other areas like facilitation proved challenging for the group. While group members displayed creativity and innovation in coming up with activities to lead with their peers, the group often struggled to grasp the learning objectives behind them, and how to ask open-ended, reflective questions to facilitate a process of learning within the group both during and after activities. The group also found the task of facilitating audience interaction challenging, but this will become easier with practice and experience.

By the end of the two weeks, all group members were clearly invested in the Interactive Theatre for Justice techniques, and seemed inspired and excited to share what they learned with their communities and fellow youth club members.

5. The training

The training covered the following 10 modules over a period of 10 days:

1. Team Work & Intro to Behaviour Change
2. Effective Communication
3. What Makes a Good Facilitator?
4. The Art of Questioning & Real Listening
5. How to Devise Stories for Interactive Theatre for Justice
6. How to Develop Characters for Interactive Theatre for Justice
7. How to Rehearse and Perform Interactive Theatre for Justice
8. How to Facilitate Interactive Theatre for Justice
9. Reflective Learning Practice
10. Planning for Implementing Interactive Theatre for Justice in our Communities

At the end of Module 8: How to Facilitate Interactive Theatre for Justice, it was clear that the participants needed more time to practice these skills, so the training schedule was adjusted to enable this to happen. Participants therefore spent two days on this module instead of one. As a result, we were not able to spend as much time on facilitating the process of story and character development with a group, but the participants are at least familiar with this process having gone through it themselves. They also made records in their journals of all the activities done at the end of each training day, and they can use these records as lesson plans when delivering story and character development workshops with their peers.



6. What went well and what was challenging?

- There was excellent planning, organisation and communication by both organisations in the lead-up to the training.
- There was also good flexibility and responsiveness to challenges as they arose throughout the training – e.g. switching venues after the first training day.
- There was great participation from the group who worked very well as an ensemble, and showed high levels of commitment, energy and enthusiasm for the work.
- There was also tremendous growth and development among participants in a short amount of time, as evidenced by their successful delivery of Interactive Theatre for Justice performances in Dhaka and Parbatipur. It's clear that the training had a great impact on them, and is already starting to have impact on their youth clubs and communities.
- The methodology seemed to have had a powerful, immediate impact on the community during the performance in Parbatipur. Feedback from power holders suggests that the performance helped them internalise the problem of child marriage, and helped them realize what role they can play in stopping it in their community. One memorable comment came from the district chairwoman, who said that the performance helped her realize that she could do much more in her current role to end child marriage in her community, and that she was prepared to act after seeing and participating in the performance.

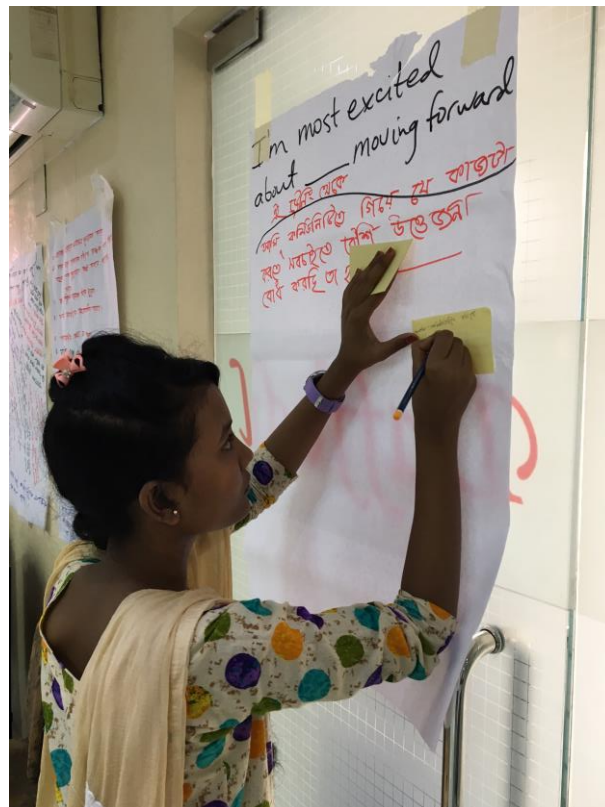
Course evaluations were completed by participants on the last day of training and, at the time of writing this report, these evaluations are still being translated. A separate Impact Assessment will be carried out once all materials have been translated and reviewed by both organisations.

However, training participants did give some feedback on the training during a reflection activity on the last day of the training. Some highlights of their feedback are as follows:

- The most interesting things about the training were the warm-up games, the theme of equal participation, and learning how interactive theatre for justice works.
- The things they want to remember the most from the training are the team work skills they developed, and the process of devising and facilitating interactive dramas.
- The hardest thing about the training was learning how to facilitate.
- The one thing they want to get better at the most is facilitating in an interactive way, especially using open-ended questioning.



- Most said they would not change anything about the training. 1 participant said it could be an hour shorter each day, and another participant said it should be extended to 12-15 days due to the vast amount of learning that happened in such a short amount of time (i.e. 10 days).
- They are most excited about delivering their learning in their communities and making a difference in the areas of child marriage and SRHR.



A participant responds to a question during a reflective learning session during the last day of the training.

Challenges included:

Facilitation – the participants found facilitation challenging, especially the process of facilitating the interactive part of live performances. One participant commented that the Interactive Theatre for Justice process was “too deep”. Some participants also struggled to understand their role as advocates for social change, and the implications of this in terms of responsibilities and risks – e.g. being willing to challenge ideas from the audience during live performances, even if those audience members are older and respected community members.



Health – 9 of the 17 participants became ill at different points throughout the training period. This seemed to be due to a variety of factors including difficulty adjusting to food and transport in Dhaka (for most participants it was their first time in the city), the training venue being air conditioned, not getting enough sleep at night, and the amount of energy expended each day doing physical activities in the training. Some participants who became ill only missed a few hours of training but others missed a few days, which affected group morale and progress.

Language – the trainer and participants found it challenging to communicate with each other, even with the national volunteers offering translating support. As a result, a lot of the subtlety and nuance of the methodology seemed to get lost in translation - e.g. the types of questions/language to use when facilitating interactive theatre. This meant that only the larger aspects of the methodology - e.g. performance technique - could be monitored and given feedback on by the trainer.

Scheduling – a major VSO project was launched the week before this training began, so many VSO staff found it challenging to give this training their full time support. The translating of the training materials could also have been given more time.

Cultural Differences – one of the first questions that an Interactive Theatre for Justice facilitator asks the audience is who the main character could go to for help in the story. The group found this question problematic because, in the case of the child marriage play, it was felt that the child only had one option of who she could go to for help that was culturally acceptable, and that was her husband (who, incidentally, was responsible for creating the problem in the first place). We spent some time reflecting on the importance of the word 'could' in the question – 'Who could Jolena (the main character) go to for help?' – which is different from asking who *should* she go to for help, or who *would* she go to for help. The group eventually realized that their job as facilitators is to help the audience see possibilities that they haven't seen before – i.e. to help open up pathways of justice and advocacy that don't currently exist in their communities. Still, it was challenging for the group to accept that a 14-year-old girl should have enough agency to seek out help from anyone other than her husband in this situation which, of course, limits her recourse to justice and her chances of improving her sexual and reproductive health.

7. Next Steps and Recommendations

Theatre for a Change would recommend the following:

1. The enthusiasm of the group is built on by rehearsing and delivering Interactive Theatre for Justice performances in their youth clubs and communities. This process should be carefully planned with input from community leaders, and the group should engage in a process of reflective learning after each workshop and performance, to ensure that they are actively developing their skills as facilitators and performers by identifying opportunities for growth



and improvement, and taking proactive steps to develop in those areas. As this methodology is still quite new to the group, they will likely need a great deal of mentoring, organisational and technical support to do this, which could be provided by individuals within VSO who possess certain skill sets in these areas – e.g. ICS Project Manager, Theatre for Development volunteer, national volunteers who participated in the training, etc.

2. Create a Facebook group for the participants to share videos/photos and learning that arises from workshops and performances in their communities.
3. Continue building alliances with key stakeholders in target communities, who can both support the planning and delivery of interactive performances, and support the channelling of enthusiasm and energy generated by the performances into real action in support of ending child marriage and supporting girls' and women's empowerment.
4. Evaluate the impact of performances on communities, and share this learning with TfaC and other VSO country offices.
5. An Impact Assessment of the training will be carried out once evaluation materials have been translated and reviewed by both organisations.
6. Once the group has had the chance to practice performing and facilitating in their communities, offer additional training and support to further develop their facilitation and leadership skills. With the current cohort, we would recommend following on this training with further facilitation training. In the case of training trainers in this process, we would recommend recruiting an older, more experienced group of participants who would be more capable of managing and leading trainings for youth club and community leaders in these techniques.

8. Conclusion

It is clear that this pilot project was a great success and was effective in enabling the participants to understand how Interactive Theatre for Justice works, and how they can use it in their communities. Their confidence and communication skills increased as the training progressed, as did their understanding of behaviour change, assertiveness, risk management, facilitation and reflective practice. Participants clearly enjoyed the training, and are keen to implement what they have learned. We look forward to following the work of this group, and supporting them and VSO however we can in the implementation and roll-out of this technique on a national level.

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The participants with their certificates.