



Summary Report on three-week training and supervised implementation of Interactive Theatre with VSO Nepal

February-March 2018

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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 for advocacy and behaviour change related to VSO's adolescent youth sexual and reproductive health and rights programming.

VSO Nepal, along with VSO in Bangladesh, Rwanda, Swaziland and Tanzania, was chosen as the site of a 3-week interactive theatre training (hereafter referred to as 'pilot project'). The training was led by Rebecca Bogue and Ryan Borcharding of Theatre for a Change, and was delivered from 19th February to 28th February 2018 in Pokhara, Nepal with supervised implementation from 5th March to 8th March 2018 in Dhading and Parsa districts.

Participants took part in a series of 20 skills-building workshops during the first two weeks. These workshops focused on building their capacity to devise, rehearse, perform and facilitate workshops and live interactive theatre performances for preventing child marriage in their communities.

The third week saw the group organise and deliver community performances and peer group workshops, which aimed to pass on interactive theatre devising and performing skills to their peers. Both trainers supported the group in planning, delivering and evaluating these workshops and performances to ensure a smooth transition from the training into its implementation.

2. Planning

Planning for the pilot project had three main areas:

1. The first involved formative research and content planning, ensuring that the needs of the group and community were integrated into the design of the training, and that training aims and outcomes were clearly defined. A project implementation strategy was also developed, which would see a 'core group' of 20 facilitators trained to facilitate the interactive theatre devising process with their peers in the community. Both TfaC and VSO Nepal staff were involved in the planning stage of the project.
2. The second involved developing a training curriculum and related handouts, which were translated into Nepali before the training began.
3. The third involved logistical planning including participant recruitment, venue hire and travel logistics as well as visa, travel and insurance logistics for the TfaC trainers. A VSO staff member and international volunteer were present throughout the training, and another new member of staff was also present during the third (implementation) week.

3. The aim and indicators of the training

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

Overall (VSO) aim: increased school attendance among marginalised girls in Surkhet, Parsa, Dhading and Lamjung districts in Nepal.

Training (TfaC) aim: 20 facilitators develop the ability to devise, perform and facilitate interactive theatre for preventing early marriage – and to lead this process with others.

Indicators: Participants to demonstrate -

1. Knowledge of the principles of interactive theatre for advocacy – i.e. devising, performing, rehearsing and facilitating - and how to lead this process with others.
2. A confident attitude when devising, performing, rehearsing and facilitating interactive theatre, and when leading this process with others.
3. The skills required to devise, perform, rehearse and facilitate interactive theatre, and to lead this process with others.

TfaC conducted a baseline and endline assessment before and after the training to measure the achievement of this aim and these indicators. Results of this assessment will be included in the 5-country Pilot Project Impact Assessment that will be produced by the end of March 2018.



4. The group

TfAc trained a group of 20 participants (16 females and 4 males) from 4 districts in Nepal - Surkhet, Parsa, Dhading and Lamjung. Group members were a combination of Community Mobilisers, Big Sisters and Community Engagement and Leadership Coordinators from two VSO partner organisations: Global Action Nepal (GAN) and Aasaman Nepal.

The youngest participant was 16; the oldest was 34. The average participant age was 22.

In terms of response to the training, the group as a whole was very attentive, clearly motivated and willing to learn. They grasped new concepts easily, and were not afraid to ask questions about the methodology. Their age and limited facilitation experience, however, meant that some of the more advanced concepts and skills of the training proved very challenging for most members of the group. The group also struggled to engage with issues like child marriage, early pregnancy and domestic violence in mature and serious ways.

Their performance skills improved greatly as the training progressed, as did their ability to facilitate learning energisers. The older members of the group also made progress in leading story-devising activities and facilitating interactive theatre performances.





5. Needs Assessment findings

All participants completed a Training Needs Assessment before the training began.

Feedback from this assessment indicates that all participants had some facilitation experience prior to the start of the training, ranging from 7 months to 4 years. On average, the group had 2 years of previous facilitation experience.

Participants mainly cited Little Sisters, Adult Champions, teachers and parents as the groups they mainly work with in their communities. A few of the older participants also listed local political bodies.

Participants indicated that the key SRHR issues for their participants and communities were: child marriage, stigma and discrimination against girls when they are menstruating, lack of communication between parents and children regarding SRHR, teachers avoiding teaching lessons on SRHR, and unspecified sexual rights abuses.

Participants indicated that they wanted to develop the following skills as facilitators during the training period: leadership skills, performing skills, speaking skills, and increasing their self-confidence.

Participants indicated that they planned to share the knowledge and skills gained from this training with their Little Sisters, Big Sisters, Adult Champions, and other community members.

Many participants expressed excitement at being able to use this training with their communities. Some of the potential barriers that participants thought they might face when implementing the training included: lack of attendance/participation from communities during performances, lack of community interest in their work, insufficient planning, different levels of awareness and understanding among target communities, and poor time management.

These needs were addressed throughout the training in the following ways:

1. *Strategies for targeting and mobilizing audiences* – the group learned how to select performance locations based on the audiences they wanted to target – e.g. secondary school girls and boys when it became clear that, in some districts, the children themselves were initiating child marriage rather than their parents – and how to mobilize audiences for performances through radio advertising, word of mouth, on-site music playing, and inviting power holders in the community in advance.
2. *Strategies for engaging with audiences during interactive theatre* – the group learned how to prepare audiences for interactive theatre participation by facilitating warm-up activities with them before performances begin. The group also learned strategies for engaging with audiences during the interactive part of the performance, such as how to use open-ended questions to elicit feedback, and how to support audiences in turning their ideas into action as part of the story. New activities were also introduced



– e.g. performances in remote communities began with Nepali songs - and/or adapted
– e.g. activities originally delivered in English were translated into Nepali - to suit workshop participants and audience members.

3. *How to plan for interactive theatre workshops and performances* – we supported the team in planning for workshops and performances during the supervised implementation week, so they are now in a good position to continue this planning themselves. We also supported the management team in exploring potential strategies for sustainability, fundraising and scaling up the work.

6. The training

The training covered the following 10 modules over the 3-week, 15-day training period:

1. Team Work and Communication Skills
2. Participatory Approaches to Facilitation
3. Open-Ended Questioning
4. Participatory Approaches to Formative Research
5. How to Devise Stories for Interactive Theatre
6. How to Develop Characters for Interactive Theatre
7. How to Rehearse and Perform Interactive Theatre
8. How to Facilitate Interactive Theatre with an Audience
9. Reflective Learning Practice
10. Implementing Interactive Theatre Performances and Workshops in our Community



Participants developing team work, cooperation and communication skills.

7. What went well and what was challenging?

Successes included:

- *Participation and engagement from group* – there was consistent attendance and participation from group members throughout the training period. By the end of the third week, every participant had facilitated workshop activities, devised and performed interactive theatre stories, and facilitated parts of interactive theatre performances.
- *Increasing the confidence and skill level of the group* – the participants' growth and ability to perform interactive theatre and facilitate workshops was evident through demonstration of these skills. The group's ability to reflect on their own work also increased noticeably as the training progressed.
- *Motivation to continue* – motivation among participants was very high at the end of the training to continue developing their devising, performing and facilitation skills. It

would be useful to put an action plan in place as soon as possible to capitalise on this confidence and motivation (see recommendations section).

- *Real stories told and represented* – the participants expressed great enthusiasm at this aspect of the methodology. Much of what the Little Sisters experience, and Big Sisters are attempting to address, is taboo. The group felt that in presenting these real stories explicitly, they were able to touch community members and initiate open dialogue previously kept limited.
- *High overall quality of training* – the VSO Nepal team mentioned this as a success during our final meeting. After Country Director Jay Lal visited the training, he mentioned that if TfaC holds another training, he will want to take part in all 10 days!
- *Good participation from power holders during performances* – two police officers attended the participants' first performance in Pokhara. The Pokhariya Deputy Mayor, an influential teacher, a local doctor, a district councilman, and a police officer attended the Parsa performance. In Dhading, the headteacher and another influential teacher attended the performance held at their school. All powerholders in all three locations actively engaged with the characters in the story, modelling ways in which they could stop child marriage in their communities, and then making those same commitments to the audience after the performances ended.
- *Strengthening of partnerships* – between VSO and TfaC, the four districts (Surkhet, Parsa, Lamjung and Dhading) as well as relationships between local organisations and communities.

Challenges included:

- *Recruitment* – most of the group did not meet the participant selection criteria, which resulted in the trainers adjusting the curriculum as well as their expectations for the group as the training progressed.
- *Venue* – the initial venue was too small in size, but our VSO colleagues responded promptly and secured another venue that ended up working very well.
- *Timing* – VSO Nepal cited timing as a major challenge for the training due to other activities happening at this time.
- *Interpreting and capacity* – the interpreting was initially done by one VSO member of staff who was also completing the training herself, coordinating all training-related logistics, and keeping up with her other work-related duties and responsibilities while in the training for the full 10 days. Interpreting was eventually shared out among two English-speaking participants and another VSO member of staff.



- *Third week logistics and organisation* – although impressive teamwork was demonstrated to deliver workshops and community performances during the supervised implementation week, it was agreed by both VSO and TfaC that this strategy needs to be much simpler and easier to organise and manage in order to be sustained. See the recommendations section below for some suggestions on how to do this.
- *Peer groups* – there was a lack of clarity regarding who the peer group members might be, both in the workshops delivered during the third week and in the upcoming months. See the recommendations section below for suggestions on clarification and cascading strategies.
- *Presence of children at performances and workshops* – there were many children present – some accompanied, some unaccompanied – at performances and workshops, and this raised some concern about their safety and well-being in relation to the mature subject matter being addressed. For example, in the Dhading workshops, one single mother who could not afford child care brought her toddler with her to the workshops. After seeing a rehearsal about a story of domestic violence, the toddler then imitated what she saw by walking up to the girl who was playing the protagonist in the story and hitting her repeatedly.
- *Facilitating Interactive Theatre* – the most challenging aspect of Interactive Theatre – facilitating Touch Tag – proved challenging to most of the group. By the end of the training, only one facilitator could demonstrate an ability to do this successfully, despite all group members having had several days of practice. Most participants also struggled to maintain the energy required to facilitate audience engagement, but this was mostly due to their lack of confidence around this specific skill. This will hopefully change, however, as the group becomes more skilled and experienced.



8. Next Steps and Recommendations

Theatre for a Change would recommend the following to ensure sustainability and impact:

1. *Forming a WhatsApp group* – creating a forum for the trainee facilitators to share inspiration and learning via tips, images and videos that arise from workshops and performances in their communities. VSO international volunteer Abebalynne Icamen has offered to coordinate the set-up of this group.
2. *Integration of methodology into ongoing VSO/partner organisation practice* - to ensure realistic sustainability, it will be essential to introduce and integrate aspects of the training and methodology into current VSO awareness-raising programmes. Sisters for Sisters was identified during the evaluation meeting as a good place to pilot an integrated approach.
3. *Planning and managing future performances* - each group to develop an action plan for the duration of the project that includes the following points:
 - a. Organisers of workshops and community performances – this can be a combination of community mobilisers, community coordinators and international VSO volunteers.
 - b. Number, locations and times of weekly planning sessions, workshops and performances each month. If in a remote area, for example, perhaps a day



could be spent doing a short tour of performances in neighbouring villages, schools, open grounds etc. Specific locations can include school events, child clubs, Parent Teacher Association meetings, and central outdoor community gathering spaces. Workshops and/or performances can potentially be combined with existing weekly/monthly/annual meetings and events.

- c. Clarity regarding location of performance in relation to permission (if necessary).
 - d. Specific aims and indicators for these workshops and performances.
 - e. Workshop and performance planning and organising tasks and deadlines.
 - f. Monitoring strategies and tools to use, when, and by whom.
4. *Following up on commitments that power holders make* - VSO Nepal to decide who will lead on this and when it will happen.
 5. *Alliances with stakeholders* – we recommend that VSO continue building alliances with key stakeholders and district leaders in target communities, who can support the planning and delivery of performances.
 6. *Interactive Radio Drama training* – this was discussed at the VSO meeting as a possible next step in order to scale up the impact and reach of live performance work.
 7. *Monitoring and evaluation* – to develop a schedule for MEL for each of the 4 districts, with support from Theatre for a Change. VSO and TfaC to discuss next steps and share recommendations and learning from other countries, including with VSO in Bangladesh.





9. Feedback from Participants taken from Evaluation Forms

Having read the Evaluation Forms which the participants completed on the final afternoon of the two-week training, feedback is mostly very positive, with the average score for each section as follows (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree):

Statement	Average score
1. The objectives of the training were clearly defined.	5.0
2. Participation and interaction were encouraged.	4.8
3. The topics covered were relevant to me.	4.8
4. The content was organized and easy to follow.	4.7
5. The materials distributed were helpful.	4.5
6. This training experience will be useful in my work.	4.8
7. The trainers were knowledgeable about the training topics.	4.9
8. The trainers were well prepared.	5.0
9. The training objectives were met.	4.7

When asked how this training impacted them personally and professionally, participants responded in the following ways:

“By showing the real life events of our village, neighbour, community or society, this has given the people in our community knowledge/capacity to decrease/stop child marriage.”

“I think the training on interactive theatre has great positive influence in my life. I learned how to speak before the audience/participants, learned how to attract their attention. And I would apply the knowledge and understanding, I have gained, in my community and also in my working field.”



“This training has helped me to reduce the problems in my personal life. And I have learned to realize the causes and consequences of problems, so that I can stop them come to my life. Similarly, because of the performance of the community events, it would greatly help me, in my working field, to depict the real event in the community and help to solve it, as well as help to stop events such as child marriage. Therefore this training is very important.”

“I think this training has greatly affected me both personally and professionally. I have to admit I am not a very outgoing person, through this training, I have significantly increased my level of confidence in talking/speaking in front of a big group. Professionally, the process of how to facilitate a workshop/training has helped me and gave me a broader knowledge and skills that I am sure I can utilize and apply in the upcoming activities that I will be holding.”

“Training was very effective to me and I personally felt it was very important training for personal growth as well as professionally. I have been working with many girls those who sure not confident. I got many ideas to encourage them. First of all I used to feel I am not good in leadership but it also develop leadership quality. Thank you Ryan & Rebecca for your facilitation. I am very glad to have you guys as a facilitator. I will miss you. I hope I can also facilitate as you delivered.”

10. Conclusion

Despite the participants being significantly younger and less experienced than anticipated, the training was very successful, with many participants expressing significant impact on both their personal and professional capacities – including increased confidence and workshop facilitation skills. They enjoyed the training, and it is clear that most participants understood the methodology and its benefits as evidenced in their workshops facilitated to peers who left feeling emboldened - particularly the women.

In every district, there is at least one confident facilitator who is enthusiastic to implement the training in their own organisation and community. The younger facilitators will require ongoing support to accumulate the experience required to increase their confidence.

Theatre for a Change will continue to collaborate with VSO staff and volunteers to support the trainees in realising their goals. We look forward to pursuing the outreach possibilities already discussed with VSO. This could include further training in Interactive Radio Drama.