1 Introduction

Vocal empowerment workshop in Guatemala

One rainy afternoon in a cloud-forest village in Guatemala, indigenous Mayan women began streaming into our applied theatre workshop until nearly 70 mothers were present. Speaking only their native Ixil language, they giggled at the strangeness of our vocal warm-up exercises but gamely raised their arms and called out with a strong "ah" sound (see Photo 1.1). When it came time for each woman to declare her most passionate concern, many women voiced concerns about poverty as it related to their lives and the lives of their children. When rehearsing ways they could use their voices to act on these concerns, the group decided to focus on a concern common to the majority of these mothers: their children's education.

I was conducting this workshop for Limitless Horizons Ixil (LHI), whose mission was, and is, to create opportunities for the indigenous youth, women, and families of Chajul to develop academic and professional skills (Limitless Horizons Ixil 2013). As a part of LHI's ongoing efforts, this workshop was specifically designed for women to help increase their vocal confidence in advocating for

Photo 1.1 Beth Osnes facilitating a Vocal Empowerment Workshop in Chajul, Guatemala.

themselves and their children's and families' well-being. Throughout the workshop, the Program Director for LHI, Veronica Yat Tiu, translated as we collectively explored ways these mothers could use their voices to act on their concerns.

Though illiterate themselves, these mothers knew that their children all needed to do well in school to earn a scholarship to continue their schooling. So how could they help their students do well? They all acknowledged that they couldn't understand their children's homework, so were unable to help or even guide them. When asked what could help with this, one woman suggested that mothers could talk to their student's teachers. Together we created a skit to rehearse this solution. We asked for volunteers who had never spoken with their children's teacher to act as mothers in the skit. It became obvious that very few of the women ever had. Three brave women stepped forward to portray the mothers in the scene and another woman volunteered to portray the teacher, since she was actually a teacher in this community.

The scene enacted between them—witnessed by the entire community of mothers present—demystified approaching a teacher to ask for assistance. The teacher assured them that educators were glad to talk with parents about how to support their children and gave the mothers tips for making sure their students were doing their homework, even if they couldn't read the work themselves. She told them to set aside a certain amount of time each night for the student to study in a supervised place in the home, and to check that the entire homework sheet had been written on. In a lively discussion following the skit, it was clear that many of the women felt they could now imagine talking with their children's teachers and discussed how they could implement the teacher's advice in practical terms. They also noted how the intimidating power of an authority figure, such as a teacher, had been somewhat diminished since an actual teacher had just demonstrated how she could be approached, and was willing to give useful advice. More importantly, the women themselves demonstrated to each other how they could effectively begin to act on their concerns.

I want to underscore certain aspects of this applied theatre workshop: one, it provided an opportunity for these women to practice participating in their own sustainable development in a safe, supportive, and creative environment; two, the participants identified their own challenges *and*, most importantly, potential solutions; and finally, participants witnessed and supported each other's empowerment.

Women's participation in sustainable development

Before continuing to explore the use of theatre for women's participation in sustainable development, it is useful to compare what it looks like when women do and do not participate in their own sustainable development.

Without women's participation

Pictured in Photo 1.2 is Isabella who lives in Chajul, Guatemala. In preparation for a visit by applied theatre researcher Jason Bisping to discuss her energy concerns, she proudly lit a fire in the fuel-efficient, clean-burning cookstove that had been

Photo 1.2 A Guatemalan woman named Isabella cooking on a three-stone fire with a gifted clean-burning cookstove burning in the background.

gifted to her by a government program, Proyecto Ixil, in an effort to reduce indoor air pollution. This *plancha,* or griddle-style cookstove, is warmly burning in the background (located in the center of the photo), mounted on a stone table with a chimney taking the smoke out above the roofline.

Note where and how Maria is *actually* cooking though: on an open fire on the ground that emits high amounts of indoor air pollution. When asked why, she said that she does not actually use the gifted clean-burning cook stove because it is too high for her to stir the food in the pot on the burner. She often cooks in big pots since 12 members of her family live in this home. However, she can't reach into even a small pot on this stove. She can't see into the pots, and if she needs to add anything or take anything out of the pots, she has to stand on a stool. Since that is dangerous and awkward, she prefers to use an open fire.

Clearly she—and the other women in her village who are mostly of a comparable height—were not consulted in even the most primary design elements of this stove, or likely in the planning of this project. This photo shows what it literally can look like when women do not participate in development. It illustrates how sustainable development projects that do not authentically partner with women can miss the opportunity to be successful in making real change. Unfortunately this project wasted precious resources and the cookstove is taking up valuable space in her small home.

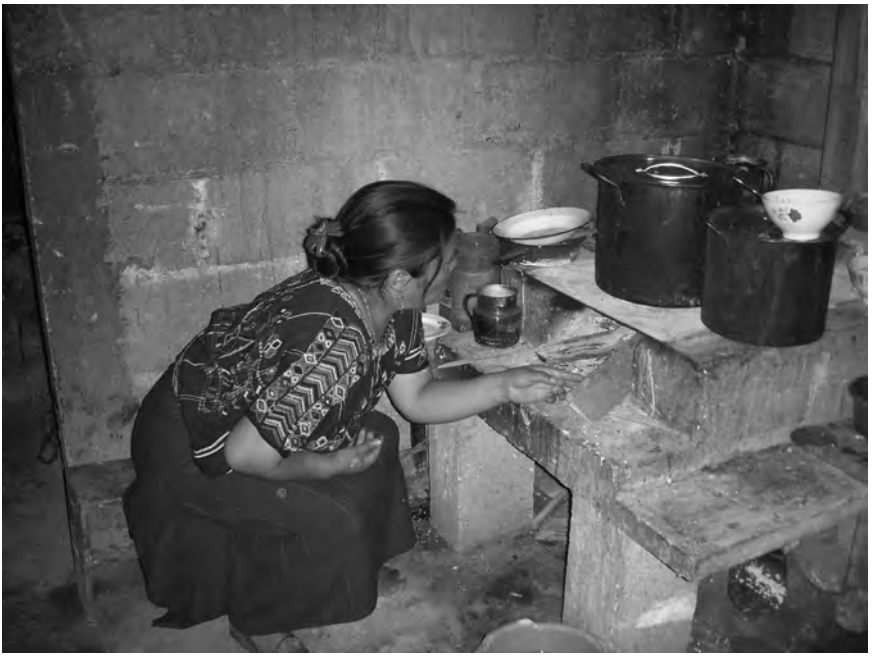

Photo 1.3 A Guatemalan woman named Rosa tending her clean-burning cookstove.

With women's participation

Pictured in Photo 1.3 is a woman named Rosa, also from Chajul, Guatemala, who is inserting wood into the clean-burning cookstove that she received in partnership with a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), Limitless Horizons Ixil (LHI). When asked about the stove, she said that she likes her stove because it uses the same amount of wood in a month that an open fire uses in 20 days. Because her family purchases wood, the efficiency of the stove meant substantial savings. Notice the appropriate height of the stove so Maria can easily see into it and reach the pots in which she cooks.

LHI has utilized applied theatre in its programming to actively engage women and men in discussing what clean energy solutions are appropriate for their lives and values. In 2010, the Philanthropiece Foundation sponsored Jason Bisping's use of applied theatre to assist LHI in collecting the input from families in the area about what problems they experienced with open fires and what they liked about clean-burning cookstoves (Bisping 2012). At the time, LHI had sold a few cookstoves to local families, but wanted to discover how they could get more families to adopt them. Bisping visited families that had cookstoves (both gifted ones and ones purchased from LHI), and families that did not yet own a cookstove but were interested in the technology.

To gather this input, Bisping developed a form of applied theatre to actively engage family members in identifying their energy challenges and how the

clean-burning cookstoves improved their lives. Bisping adapted a popular form of applied theatre originated by Augusto Boal, known as *image theatre* (Boal 1985), into a new form of *digital image theatre*. Interestingly, he conducted this directly in the homes of the people he was visiting. This allowed people to interact with their own energy situation while enacting scenes of their energy use, and to critique their energy situation in context. After participants had self-identified a problem associated with using an open fire, he asked them, "Can you show me what that looks like?" Once family members created the scene that dramatized the problem, Bisping took a digital photo of what they enacted. Leaving that pose, they all gathered together and looked at the image displayed on the camera's LCD screen. Together they discussed the problem, using the photograph as a point of reference.

In Photo 1.4, this woman is dramatizing how she has to prevent her children from playing near the fire so they do not get burned.

Photo 1.4 A Guatemalan woman dramatizes how she has to prevent her children from playing near the fire so they do not get burned.

Photo 1.5 A Guatemalan woman dramatizes how she repeatedly burns herself in the same spot on her arm because her open fire is placed in the corner.

In Photo 1.5 this woman is dramatizing how she repeatedly burns herself in the same spot on her arm because her open fire is placed in the corner, and she is forced to reach across pots.

The woman in Photo 1.6 is dramatizing how she has a constant headache from the smoke from her open fire. Her daughter (pictured) approached her during the digital image theatre performance and seemed to console her mother.

Family members were also asked to dramatize scenes of what they identified as benefits of owning and using a clean-burning cookstove.

To dramatize how a cookstove emits less smoke into the house than an open fire, this man in Photo 1.7 is enacting how he can sleep in the same room as his clean-burning cookstove without smoke waking him.

Digital image theatre captured an image of this woman in Photo 1.8 pantomiming making a tortilla near her clean-burning cookstove, affirming she liked that the chimney removed most of the smoke from the house.

Bisping reported that no participant refused or claimed to be unable or uncomfortable with creating an image. To the contrary, many participants enjoyed performing, and they needed very little instruction. Because community members had physically and mentally invested in expressing their concerns through this theatrical method, the resulting discussions were most likely more richly detailed than they would have been had the community members simply been asked their views. The photos resulting from this unique process demonstrate what women's participation in sustainable development through applied theatre can look like. It

Photo 1.6 This Guatemalan woman is dramatizing how she has a constant headache from the smoke from her open fire.

Photo 1.7 A Guatemalan man (right) dramatizes how he can sleep in the same room as his clean-burning cookstove without smoke waking him.

Photo 1.8 A Guatemalan woman pantomiming making a tortilla near her clean-burning cookstove.

stands as a testimony to the untapped potential of people to express for themselves their preferences and values surrounding their own sustainable development

Introduction

Development researchers have learned that the participation of women is essential for effective sustainable development. However, many development professionals who want to support women's participation still lack culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive tools for including them, especially women living in poverty. Many current tools used in development favor the skill set of the development practitioner and are a mismatch with the traditional, gendered knowledge and skills that many women who are living in poverty bring to development. Applied theatre is an effective and appropriate tool for women to participate in their own sustainable development. Theatre can serve as a dynamic tool for women to imagine, discuss, and rehearse solutions to the obstacles that constrain their participation in sustainable development. Applied theatre can provide a safe forum in which ideas can be rehearsed and tested by women in the context of their community before actual resources are invested and without fear of negative consequences. Theatre also serves as an informal tool to promote acceptance of women in public, decision-making roles and for dissemination of new social arrangements at the community, national, and global level.

The concept of applied theatre used throughout this book is inspired and informed by the "pedagogy of the oppressed" developed by Paulo Freire (Freire 2000), the "theatre of the oppressed" by Augusto Boal (Boal 1985), and by feminist theatre methodologies for embodied work towards equity and social justice (Armstrong & Juhl 2007). Applied theatre generally refers to theatre that involves a given community in exploring its own concerns, often in a process-oriented way, and usually in a nontraditional performance space. Applied theatre may or may not result in a performance. The performance may not be as important as the resulting empowerment of the participant/performers. The Forum Theatre techniques established by Augusto Boal have been adopted and used by theatre practitioners in various forms. These have proven effective in actively involving women. Because applied theatre necessitates that participants take an *active* rather than a *passive* role, it promotes critical engagement and growth in consciousness of one's oppression and potential. As supported by the theoretical foundation for this study, this book establishes that this active engagement is necessary for any kind of sustained social change.

Sustainable development, a term that has come into popular usage in the last few decades, is a concept that most people grasp but that many would be hard-pressed to define. The 1987 publication *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development puts it quite simply. It states that sustainable development is development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987, p. 8). The idea of sustainable development evolved along with the collective understanding that environmental preservation and poverty alleviation are interconnected. Ecofeminist scholar Vandana Shiva further developed this idea specifically as a women's issue through her work with women in India. She writes that, "Indian women have been in the forefront of ecological struggles to conserve forests, land and water. They have challenged the western concept of nature as an object of exploitation and have protected her as Prakrati, the living force that supports life" (1989, p. xvii). She rallies against the commodification of the earth's resources for the maximization for profit, and advocates for a balanced existence with nature that recognizes and honors it as the source that sustains all life.

Sustainable development and the fight against poverty may thus be viewed as two sides of the same coin (Johnsson-Latham & Miljövårdsberedningen 2007, p. 16). Clarification of how poverty is understood is important for building support and the political will to relieve the effects of poverty. The United Nation report *Rethinking Poverty* includes the following insights on poverty:

> Extreme poverty does not entail just having unsatisfied material needs or being undernourished. It is often accompanied by a degraded state of powerlessness. Even in democratic and relatively well-governed countries, poor people have to accept daily humiliations without protest. Often they cannot provide for their children and have a strong sense of shame and failure. When they are trapped in poverty, the poor lose hope of ever escaping from their hard work for which they often have nothing to show beyond bare survival. (United Nations Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs 2010, p. 2)

The implied social justice aim permeating this book is positive social change for those living in poverty. Bethany Barratt in *Human Rights and Foreign Aid* eloquently articulates this when she writes, "By positive change I mean making the poorest people less poor and more empowered, making people who cannot express themselves free to do so, and making governments that would abuse the people to whom they are responsible unable to do so" (2008, p. 2).

The term *participation* denotes taking part in an endeavor and having a share in the outcome. Achieving authentic participation, though highly desirable, is difficult in practice. Applied theatre practitioner Sheila Preston writes that "to achieve genuine participation is in itself complex and difficult amidst the myriad of agendas, power relations and competing ideological interests rife in most projects and settings" (2008, p. 127). Participatory development emerged out of an acknowledgment of the failure of much of the top-down development. According to Robert Chambers, "outsiders," those who are concerned about rural poverty but are neither poor nor rural, "underperceive rural poverty" (1995, p. 2). He therefore advocated for a type of development that puts the people first in the development planning process over which they previously had little or no influence. Participatory development seeks to recognize local people's knowledge, perspectives, and priorities, hopefully rendering this development more sustainable, relevant, and empowering. Participation can happen at many levels, from information giving, to deciding or acting together. Though participatory development has been largely recognized as a necessity in sustainable development, methods for actualizing authentic participation—especially among women living in rural areas who are marginalized—are still urgently needed.

In the article "Popular Theatre, Development and Communication," Mrinalini Thyagarajan links the importance of dynamic communication forms to participation in sustainable development.

> Communication is the strongest tool by which participation occurs. Without effective communication, participation is compromised, and without an acceptable degree and level of participation, development becomes a process imposed upon a population rather than designed and implemented by the population. . . . If participation is essential to development, then communication is as essential to participation. (2002, p. 4)

Theatre can serve as a dynamic and inclusive form of communication and, thereby, substantially contribute to participation in development.

This book draws upon case studies from three continents to discover useful approaches, strategies, and tools for women to participate in their own sustainable development through applied theatre. Through an intimate exploration of each organization's work, the stories and rich details will put flesh on the idea of women using theatre for participation. The first case study is an exploration of the Guatemalan organization Starfish One by One that mentors and supports education for young Mayan women to help break the cycle of poverty and equip

young leaders with education, skills, and confidence. This organization is at the beginning phases of experimenting with applied theatre to realize their program objectives; it does not yet have a core staff trained or proficient in using theatre as a tool and has primarily relied on outside facilitators. The second case study, the Appropriate Rural Technology Institute in India, has used both outside facilitators and their own staff to apply theatrical methods to promote clean energy cooking solutions to rural women. Two staff members are experienced enthusiasts in the theatre, one of whom, interestingly, is also a scientist. The third case study, Population Media Center (PMC) in Ethiopia, bases nearly all of its programming on theatre-based methods and has had remarkable success in realizing its objectives through the use of entertainment-education. PMC staff guide these projects based on the Sabido methodology, training talent in whatever country in which they are working to serve as scriptwriters and actors. These three programs were chosen to provide insight into how various organizations use applied theatre. The goal is to demonstrate the range of ways in which it is used, from those who are interested but whose staff doesn't have the expertise within their organization, to those who have their own trained staff who in turn train local writers and actors using the organization's methodology.

Since this book is interdisciplinary—including the scholarship of applied theatre, women's studies, and sustainable development—the intended audience for this book is also diverse. For development professionals, NGOs, and governments, this book can provide an in-depth understanding of how theatre can be utilized as a tool to authentically support women's participation. Those coming from a women's studies or gender equity approach can more deeply understand this active and participatory method for realizing their objectives in the field of sustainable development. Those in theatre can understand the power of their art as a tool for making substantial contributions towards women's ability to participate in the formation of their own lives and communities. The objective of this book is to richly describe—and thus make more accessible—how theatre-based tools can help women who are living in poverty participate in their own sustainable development. Beyond that, the goal is to demonstrate why these tools are uniquely effective and culturally appropriate for the inclusion of women.

Current unsustainability

Applied theatre has the potential to help solve multiple societal problems. Naming these problems is necessary for comprehension of the argument and to illuminate obstacles to women's full participation. The first problem is that our current way of life is unsustainable. While attending the 2012 Earth Summit conference in Rio, I attended multiple panels on a wide array of issues, such as clean water access, clean energy access, reproductive rights for women, population growth, the rights of nature, food security, the state of our oceans, disaster relief, and protection for the environment. Each session examined the unsustainable practices that have resulted in inequity, hardship, environmental destruction, and scarcity of resources

for vulnerable populations. The declaration from the Peoples Sustainability Manifesto—released just days after the completion of the conference—eloquently describes the ideological position from which this book is being written.

> Humankind faces multiple and daunting crises that are more than likely to confront and impact billions of people in the decades to come. In addition, research is showing us that our actions are very likely to cause us to transgress multiple planetary thresholds and boundaries. Despite this, governments at Rio+20 are missing yet another opportunity to formulate an effective response to these crises. Indeed, since 1992, there has been a retrogression in the consensus that was reached at the Earth Summit—and reflected in such principles as burden sharing, articulation of rights, mobilization of support, and protection of the vulnerable. Repeated attempts to revive this consensus—at Johannesburg in 2002, Bali in 2007, Copenhagen in 2009, and now Rio de Janeiro in 2012—have come up empty handed, thus thwarting efforts to build upon it. Despite unprecedented growth in the global economy since 1992, governments are trapped in making insatiable demands for still more unsustainable growth and rising inequity to remedy problems that economic globalization itself has caused. (People's Sustainability Treaties 2012)

Though it seems an obvious point to make—that our current way of life is unsustainable—most of our societal structures persist in operating under the assumption that business as usual can and will continue in the decades to come with only small adjustments. We continue our economy based on constant growth, even though the ecosystems that sustain our economies are collapsing under the impact of rising consumerism (Jackson 2009). Though we receive continual warnings from the scientific community that irreversible climate change is upon us, most do little to authentically change their lives. The primary conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) state that "anthropogenic greenhouse gases have been responsible for most of the unequivocal warming of the Earth's average global temperature over the second half of the 20th century" (Anderegg et al. 2010, p. 12107) and that 97–98% of top climate scientists agree with this claim (Anderegg et al. 2010, p. 12107). The impacts of climate change pose the most risk for those living in poverty because people with the fewest assets are most vulnerable to adverse impacts (Smith 2006, p. xvi). From the book *Climate Change and Global Poverty*, authors Lael Brainard, Abigail Jones, Vinca LaFleur, and Nigel Purvis state that in our age we face two defining challenges: lifting the lives of the global poor and stabilizing the Earth's climate. They go on to state that "our success or failure in meeting these challenges will shape the future for our children and successive generations, and many choices we make today will drive consequences for years to come" (2009, p. 10). Global security and sustainability are linked with the solving of global poverty, given that "human suffering anywhere poses risks to stability everywhere" (Brainard, Jones, & Purvis 2009, p. 10).

Another pressing challenge is for our world to establish means for valuing and preserving environmental assets such as standing forests, unspoiled rivers, biodiversity, and ecosystems on which humankind's well-being depends (Brainard et al. 2009, p. 16). My suspicion is that many of us have become so inured to these types of facts and warnings that we become somewhat numb to the human dimension of many sustainability issues such as climate change, poverty, and environmental destruction. Perhaps we lack the imagination to visualize how our way of life could be other than how it is now. It is also often difficult to make the connections between an issue like climate change—which can seem distant and coldly scientific—and more human threats, such as population stabilization, or violence against women. Therefore, in the spirit of this book to explicitly value the inclusion of women's participation in sustainable development, I include a story told by Constance Okollet, Chairperson for the Osukuru United Women's Network from Uganda, to elucidate our current reality. At an event entitled Rio+20 and Women's Lives: A Cross-generational Dialogue that took place on June 20, 2012, Ms. Okollet conveyed the unsustainability of our current reality through a gender-sensitive medium appropriate to her culture—oral transmission in a community gathering—and brought to life the humanity of climate and poverty issues, both central to sustainable development. The inclusion of her story in this book furthers the goal to incorporate a gender perspective in all policies and initiatives working to solve the climate crisis and to include indigenous knowledge upon which our path to sustainability relies (Wildcat 2009).

> We used to have all types of food in my community, but these days there is nothing. There is nothing on the ground, but there are floods. People lost many things due to floods: property, chickens, lives. We thought it was God trying to do family planning, until we were called to a meeting in my village by Oxfam. They told us it was climate change and that pollution brought the floods. It was man-made. I went back and told my village it is not God. We need to ask people to pollute less. We need to talk about how we can conserve our lives. Our group came up and said, "let us do conserving." We talk about this a lot; we talk for the voiceless. We approach governments through our local councils. In the past we used to have two growing seasons. No more. Now we gamble with agriculture every time we put our seed in the ground. Now with climate change we don't get the proper yields.
>
> Let me talk about the floods in 2007 and 2008 and 2009 . . . I don't know when they will end. The floodwater gets contaminated. It brings sickness like malaria, cholera. It brings disease and poverty and hunger. When there is no food and the body is weak with sickness, we get crime. A boy of 15 years violated and then murdered a girl of 12 years. They think that's the solution, but that is not. We need to change our lifestyles. What will you do to help the vulnerable? They want to plant trees and grow food. They want to make their lives better. I have much more to my story, but I think I should stop. Thank you for listening. I have stories. Come to me; I will tell you them. (Okollet 2012)

Women are not adequately participating

Another problem this book seeks to address is that women, especially women living in poverty, are not adequately participating in sustainable development due largely to gender inequity. An adequate level of participation would be a level of participation sufficient to meet women's basic needs in such areas as access to food, health, clean water, energy, and freedom from violence. An ideal level of participation would be equal to that of men of their same social/economic status. This would result in women having some agency and ownership over what they produce and the land they cultivate. It would allow women to have access to family planning and decide for themselves how many children they can adequately provide for.

Though not exhaustive, what follows is support for the claim that women are currently not adequately participating due to gender inequity:

- Women have a higher incidence of poverty than men, and women's poverty is more severe than that of men (Budlender & United Nations Development Fund for Women 2004). The United Nations report, *Rethinking Poverty*, states that, "Women are overrepresented among people living in poverty and suffer from exclusion from basic education, landownership and employment" (2010, p. 74).
- Women are disadvantaged in agricultural systems, producing up to 80% of food worldwide, but owning little land upon which this food is grown (University of Essex, Centre for Environment and Society 1999).
- Women tend to concentrate on economic activities with low earnings that are irregular and insecure, with little protection from labor laws (Winniefridah 2011, p. 319).
- In many countries, women face continuing legal discrimination. They are not treated as equal to men, whether regarding property rights, rights of inheritance, laws related to marriage and divorce, or the rights to acquire nationality, manage property, or seek employment (Latifee 2003, p. 4).
- The fact that young women spend much more time working at home and in unpaid work than do boys of the same age, keeps women—especially those living in poverty—from access to education (King & Hill 1998).

These inequities conspire to keep many women from being able to participate in the sustainable development occurring within their communities, their nations, and the world. Women's lack of access, education, time, empowerment, personal agency, rights, and mobility have effectively blocked their engagement in sustainable development.

The necessity of women's participation

Women's participation—beyond being more just—is actually a prerequisite for sustainability. In her opening remarks on June 19, 2012, for *The Future Women Want*, at Rio+20, Michelle Bachelet, head of UN Women, stated that the full and

equal participation of women strengthens democracy, peace, and sustainable development. Later at that same event, Gro Harlem Brundhand, former prime minister of Norway and now a special envoy on climate change for the United Nations, stated that women are essential to sustainable development and that gender equity is central to all sustainable development goals. A press release from UN Women on June 14, 2012, outlined policy actions needed to usher in gender equity, noting how at Rio's first Earth Summit in 1992, there was unanimous agreement that sustainable development cannot be realized without gender equity. The press release states that:

> Advancing equal rights and opportunities is critical for a sustainable future. Addressing climate change and other challenges requires women's full participation and the world's collective wisdom and intelligence available today. Women are key actors for sustainable development, and sustainable development solutions can greatly improve women's lives by reducing poverty, freeing up women's time and protecting them from violence and other adverse health and environmental impacts. (UN Women 2012)

The consideration of achieving sustainable development in relationship with women's participation and gender equity has certainly increased in prominence in recent decades. The marriage of gender with global initiatives—such as the Millennium Development Goals—highlight the importance of gender equity in achieving sustainable development and the reduction of poverty (United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2000). UNICEF's report, *The State of the World's Children 2007: Women and Children, The Double Dividend of Gender Equity*, states that "Gender equality will not only empower women to overcome poverty, but also their children, families, communities and countries. When seen in this light, gender equality is not only morally right, it is pivotal to human progress and sustainable development. Moreover, gender equality produces a double dividend: It benefits both women and children" (UNICEF & UNICEF 2006, p. viii). In establishing the necessity of participation by women from the global South, author Rashmi Luthra writes, "Because of their location at the intersection of multiple oppressions, their subsistence perspective, and their marginality, women of the South are strategically situated to offer radically alternative visions that hold out the possibility of creating more sustainable and equitable futures" (Luthra 2003, p. 54).

The popular book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, puts forth an argument that helping women to participate can be a successful poverty-fighting strategy and the key to economic progress. From a very commonsense economic perspective it states, "Consider the costs of allowing half a country's human resources to go untapped. Women and girls cloistered in huts, uneducated, unemployed, and unable to contribute significantly to the world represent a vast seam of human gold that is never mined" (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 239).

However, caution should be considered in making women the focus of extensive development attention from a merely economic perspective and not a more holistic perspective, as the result can be the piling of more work on an already

oppressed and impoverished population because "earning money may extend women's options, but may also intensify their workload and responsibilities without necessarily increasing their autonomy" (Pearson 2007, p. 207). In one study it was noted how most of the working women had little or no access to the income they generated (Abbi et al. 1991, p. 23). It is also possible that even a slightly increased income can result in decreased contributions from a husband who resents being displaced as the family provider, increasing domestic violence and other unintended negative consequences.

Ideally, plans to increase women's participation in the economy are best designed in a holistic manner with women's participation so that program decisions are based on the actual realities of women's lives—which often include substantial amounts of unpaid caregiving and numerous other household and community related duties upon which her family, community, and nation's economy all depend, and for which she is not compensated. Efforts to humanly vitalize women's presence in the economy can work to transform and improve upon currently used models for women's employment options. Women's employment often tends to be low-wage-earning, unskilled labor, which tends to be exploitative, include hazardous working conditions, no health benefits, long hours, little sick leave, and no childcare—all of which are not sustainable for women or society in general.

Obstacles to women's participation

There are numerous obstacles that constrain women, especially women living in poverty, from participating in their own sustainable development. Primary to these obstacles are the entrenched patriarchal values and norms in many communities throughout the world that restrict women's participation and diminish their worth (Rashid & Alim 2005, p. 30). These are often perpetuated through culture, religion, traditional practices, and economic systems. Related to this is the rampant amount of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. This violence keeps women from participating in changing mores, for fear their actions might cause a backlash of increased violence or other negative consequences. The violence women face during times of war (Integrated Regional Information Networks & United Nations. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2007) and the violence of being involved in sex trafficking (Farr 2005) are other significant obstacles. Another major obstacle is the amount of unpaid care work that is expected of women, especially women who are living in poverty (Budlender 2008) and the "time poverty" that results from the many jobs they perform in addition to this care work.

Women who are living in poverty and have had limited access to education sometimes lack fluency or even basic skills in the dominant, often colonial, language in which most development negotiations take place. They may also lack skills of reasoning, abstraction, and critical thinking, and the confidence necessary for participation. Accompanying this lack of skills and education is often a lack of awareness or consciousness of their own oppression. Due to the historic silencing of women in

public matters, many women lack the skills and confidence to participate in public discussions.

Internalized oppression is another obstacle to women's participation and is a complex force that often keeps women from even self-identifying as possible agents of change and development. Indeed, they may not consider that they *should* have a public voice. Women may have an idea of their role in society that does not include participation. In addition, many mothers of small children suffer the double bind of being the primary caretakers for the children and of being unable to participate in decision making due to the fact that children are not tolerated in some public forums in which participation would often take place.

Paramount among women's obstacles is the inability to control their own reproductive bodies. As long as women do not have the right or ability to choose how many children they have, they cannot live in a sustainable way. As long as women cannot live in a sustainable way, the world cannot be sustainable. In *Of Woman Born,* author Adrienne Rich wrote, "women are controlled by lashing us to our bodies" (1976, p. 13). Women's poverty is greatly impacted by the number of children their bodies have, the impact of those births on their health, the amount of unpaid care required for each child, and their ability to provide for those children. Author Matsa Winniefridah states that "Global poverty and dependency are socially constructed by those who benefit from such arrangements, so is women's poverty and dependency. . . . Both capitalism and patriarchy benefit from poverty of women just as they benefit from that of Third world countries" (2011, p. 314). Societal structures that are largely informed by capitalism and patriarchal values are forces that keep women from having rights and control over their own reproductive bodies. To ensure that women have sexual reproductive rights and health, societal structures need to be radically changed. This change is a critical precursor for our world to be sustainable.

Another obstacle for women is that any knowledge women have gained over the centuries from their connection to the earth, reproduction, and nurturing—that is, not the result of scholarly studies, scientific method, or intellectual pursuits—tends to be undervalued in our society. For women to be included in every stage and level of sustainable development, the gendered knowledge that women hold needs to be acknowledged, disseminated, and used. The book *Harvesting Feminist Knowledge for Public Policy* (Devaki & Elson 2012) explores the flaws in the current patterns of development, especially in regard to the use of gendered knowledge to inform policies, theories, and practice. The contributors in this collection call upon all involved in development to draw upon the experiences and knowledge of women. They argue that this could rejuvenate the very approach being taken to understand and measure progress and to plan for and evaluate development. On this subject, feminist researchers Gwendolyn Beetham and Justina Demetriades add that, "From a gender perspective, researchers have noted that traditional methodologies, epistemologies, and methods are not scientifically 'objective' but the opposite: they generally ignore women's knowledge by showing bias towards the male perspective" (2007, p. 199). Indeed, to meet the

challenges associated with sustainable development, our world needs all forms of knowledge to guide and inform efforts being made.

I do not intend to paint an overly simplistic picture of women living in poverty. Of course, some do overcome the obstacles they face and rise up to become community organizers, attend university, or transgress other societal norms within their communities. And many do this without the support of applied theatre. What I am asserting is that for a number of entrenched reasons, women are largely *not* participating in sustainable development, that they are *essential* to the success of any sustainable development efforts, and that applied theatre can be a tool to engage women in sustainable development. Applied theatre can serve as an invitation to those women who have not even conceived of imagining another way their lives could be, and it can contribute to a woman's process of empowering herself and overcoming internalized oppression.

Proposing a solution

Since our current way of life—which does not adequately allow for women's participation—is unsustainable, we need to imagine new societal structures and ways of being together in community that support women's participation. Applied theatre can serve as an effective and culturally appropriate method for supporting women's participation. First, it can be used to raise awareness among women of the fact that they are not adequately participating and that sustainable development goals are unreachable as a result. Also, applied theatre can be used to promote understanding of ideas, concepts, and issues that are important to understand for effective participation. Through applied theatre, participants can subvert the dominant narrative, make up a new story, recast the parts, and rehearse a new reality that is more equitable and just. Creating significant cultural change is likely to meet with resistance and possibly pose risks for those involved. Rehearsing these changes—which applied theatre allows for in a semipublic yet safe environment—allows likely benefits, costs, and risks to be identified, considered, and weighed by the participants themselves, according to their knowledge of their own communities. The fact that this all occurs *before* actual resources are invested into a given development project makes applied theatre cost-effective as well.

In practice, this process need not be limited to women, but, rather, can engage both men and women of various ages. In my own experience, I consistently have asked men to participate from within the community who understand the worth of and need for women's participation. For an entire community to accept new structures, gender roles, and behaviors, it is ideal that various stakeholders from a community be involved in authoring this new reality. This process is complex and benefits from creative ways of framing the change, so as to appeal to various parties impacted by the change. Through applied theatre, participants can devise ways to present new arrangements that highlight shared benefits and model unlikely partnering around shared values and objectives.

Awareness

"Scales off our eyes" is a phrase that was often repeated by women involved in a social drama project in Cameroon (Samba 2005, p. 190). This phrase demonstrates the transformation the women perceived in themselves as having been blind but now seeing, due to their increased awareness of their lives and their situation. Some women are not aware of the structures and causes that either allow or restrict their participation in making decisions regarding their reproductive bodies, their life trajectory, or their family's, community's, and nation's development. They may not even be aware of the need for change, or see that another way of life is possible, let alone that they could be an agent of change working towards a different—and better—way of life.

Some women's lack of basic awareness could be seen as a factor in their inability to participate. Indeed, one of the features that makes us human is an awareness of one's self within the larger structures of society. Author Mrinalini Thyagarajan wrote, "Dehumanization is the basis of oppression. It is the depravation of dignity, of respect, of equity and equality, of value, of choice, of freedom and, importantly of power" (2002, pp. 16–17). Participation in applied theatre can be humanizing for women who want to overcome oppression. Women can increase their feeling of value by being the subject of the theatrical process and the author of it. Women can gain a sense of dignity, exercise freedom in the act of creating and making choices, and experience power. To further this point, author Osa Egonwa writes that theatre, "when properly harnessed, can help to stimulate the consciousness of a people and mobilize them towards an understanding of their problems. The awareness created may become a tonic for positive actions that may replace an existing social order" (2011, p. 221).

On a larger community level, theatre can influence thought and opinions about issues related to women's participation by creating awareness that can stimulate thought and perception while transforming them into actual communicable forms that will help a community reimage its way of life (Egonwa 2011, p. 220). Since many of the issues influencing women's participation are taboo or at least highly sensitive—such as patriarchal values or sexual mores—applied theatre can be an appropriate way to explore these key issues in a community. Development scholar Robert Chambers wrote that theatre can "open up a wonderful scope across the whole range of learning, analysis and exploring realities and implications. In role-play and theatre there is special license: the unsayable can be said; the hidden can be revealed; power can be mocked and made to laugh at itself. By acting out situations, people can uncover and discover aspects otherwise overlooked and unknown" (2002, p. 138).

Before women can participate in changing our unsustainable way of life, they need to have at least some awareness from multiple perspectives. This presupposes at least a beginning understanding of the ideas, concepts, and influences that have brought about our current way of life. Applied theatre can communicate ideas, concepts, and influences in a direct and tangible manner that is easy to

identify with and understand. It conveys these ideas and concepts within social situations from participant's lives and can "subtly convey a sense of injustice, inequality and oppression that can be identified and mirrored into lived reality" (Thyagarajan 2002, p. 19). What is key is that no formal education—which many women living in poverty have not had access to—is necessary for participation in applied theatre. Skills in reading and writing are not necessary, since the means of communication is action, a medium in which women living in poverty are fluent. Through the applied theatre process, women can engage with these ideas, concepts, and influences so as to reflect on them, react to them, and begin to imagine how they could act on them in their own lives.

Imagining change

Before a new future can be created, it has to be imagined. With some base level of awareness, women can begin to participate in using applied theatre to imagine changes to the dominant story that could usher in a more sustainable future. Theatre not only supplies the opportunity for a community to come together and reflect on itself, it also "helps to shape the perception of that culture through the power of its imagining" (Wilkerson 1991, p. 239). In applied theatre this imagining is often spurred on through various methods that involve improvisation. A facilitator can guide participants in setting up a scene that represents an aspect of their lives that they would like to change, guide them in assigning roles, help identify an objective, and set the scene in action with participants improvising the action.

For example, when facilitating a "Training of the Trainers" for my Vocal Empowerment Workshop in Nicaragua, the women participating wanted to explore ways of prosecuting domestic violence. They explained that many women in their community were afraid to speak up for themselves—or try to work towards a better life—because their husband's abuse kept them in a subservient position in the marriage. Through an extended improvisation—including many attempts of various ideas to be able to make a husband accountable for his abuse—participants finally came up with the idea of using a cell phone to photograph bruises and wounds from the abuse as proof in court. It was the engagement in improvisation that led them to the idea to utilize a technology that most women in their community possess—a cell phone—for their own protection. As theatre educator Amy Seham wrote, "Social justice activists use improv as a way to enable spectators to imagine alternatives and even rehearse resistance to oppression" (2007, p. 135).

There is a liberation that occurs from participating in simply *imagining* change. It assumes a certain amount of freedom from internalized oppressive forces that restrict a woman's participation in even imagining an alternative. It can be a step towards undoing internalized oppression that may restrict a woman's ability to participate. Done in a public and supportive setting, it can improve a group of women's opinion of their gender in terms of creative ability, agency, worth, and intelligence. Done in a community that includes all genders, it can assist an entire community in questioning and reassessing any gender biases and prejudices that

exist. Imagining is an indispensible first step for the telling of any new story. It allows established roles, such as the role of mother or husband, to be reimagined. It allows new goals, values, and perspectives to be introduced and considered.

Improvisation is a dynamic tool for undermining the power and authority of oppressive forces because participants in improvisation are, by definition, departing from a predetermined script and are making up a new story that might just give power to people not currently in positions of power. As Carolyn Heilbrun writes in her book *Writing a Woman's Life*, "Power consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told" (2008, p. 43). Improvisation is a tool for exploring and thereby exposing hypocrisy within society and even within development methods. Improvisation often provokes laughter, not of the scatological or low physical type, but laughter in response to recognition of a social truth newly revealed. This laughter is often the result of a delight in liberation from some sort of tyranny, even if just a release within that theatrical moment. Something has been broken through with that laughter—some triumph of the human spirit, some freedom from oppressive forces. In that moment while laughing, the oppressed person stands outside her or his situation, sees it for what it is, and ridicules it as ludicrous. When shared, this laughter can increase the connectedness of a community and increase their joy.

Conversely, imagining a different reality can also be highly unsettling, as it can bring into question foundational belief systems that may be rooted in religion or culture. It can feel dangerous, isolating, unpatriotic, or even blasphemous to imagine change. Doing this imagining in a group setting that allows for these feelings to be a part of the process can help women to identify the costs and risks of imagining change and new behavior, *within* traditional roles and structures. Not only are these costs and risks identified, but they can be explored through improvisation to allow for a highly nuanced, embodied experience within participants' own cultural context. Through dialogue that ensues from dramatic representation, women can negotiate these potential changes in all their complexity, referring to lived experiences of these issues brought forth through the improvisation. Ultimately costs and risks can be weighed against benefits, so that the women—individually and in a group—can begin the process of deciding for themselves what kind of change is an improvement for their lives and the generations to follow. Women can understand the price they will likely pay for change.

Part of the process is imagining new ways in which power and resources could be shared for greater equity and the sustainability of life on this planet. Even those who would lose power or access to excessive resources in an old model could imagine ways in which their lives could be better in a new social model based on greater equity. Relinquishing or sharing a dominant position can sometimes create better relationships, relieve stress, or allow the weight of responsibility to be shared. At a conference on mothering at York University in Toronto, I heard a woman relate her husband saying that the greatest gift of the women's movement is that it gave men back their parenting. She went on to explain that what he meant by this was that men, who before the women's movement were supposedly above the menial task of direct care of children, now got to take on the role of nurturer,

which many of them found profoundly gratifying. It resulted in closer relationships with their children and transformed their perspective to that of a nurturer.

Using theatre to actively imagine how gender equity could be realized can be extremely effective for relieving the apprehension some men may feel. Theatre for development scholar Emelda Ngufor Samba writes that women becoming empowered and assertive "would not entail transforming the society into matriarchy as is often misconstrued, but working complementarily with men towards the total eradication of gender inequity" (2005, p. 17). When dismantling hierarchies that are centuries old, using theatrical methods can put men and women on an even playing ground from which to negotiate these changes. Samba also writes that her theatre for development workshops with rural women in Cameroon proved to be "a medium through which men and women came to understand each other better and sought ways of living together more as partners then subordinates and superiors" (2005, p. 215).

Rehearsing change

In her book *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives,* Marianna Torgovnick wrote that "in any remaking of social orders and power relations, there must be two stages: first, the telling of the stories (the creation of myths) that make it possible to think new things, and then the painstaking transferal of the thoughts into actions" (1991, p. 69). This progression from new thoughts (or imagining) to action (or change) can be rendered less tumultuous by rehearing these changes in an applied theatre context. Applied theatre is an active way of *interrogating* change to test how viable it is by putting it into the living context of the specific community. Community members can witness an enactment of this change in real time and space to critique it, make improvements, replay it and, thus, continue to improve its design. When referring to change, this consideration is not limited to structural change of systems, roles, or allocation of resources. The focus of change can also be in attitudes and values that equally either restrict or allow for women's participation.

The attitudes and values associated with women can be linked to women's empowerment. Though it has certainly been the focus of much scholarly debate and attention, the term 'empowerment' is often not used clearly or consistently in the development discourse. A form of the term is used in the third of the Millennium Development Goals, which intend to promote gender equity and empower women (United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2000). In their article "Empowerment and Communication: Lessons Learned From Organizing for Social Change," authors Everett Rogers and Arvind Singhal write that "empowerment is the process through which individuals perceive that they control situations" (2003, p. 68). Feminist scholar Jo Rowlands describes empowerment as "processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions" (1997, p. 14) and as "developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression" (1997, p. 15). What emerges from all of these definitions is the prominent notion of

empowerment as being a *process.* The popular belief of the development community is currently that one person cannot empower another person; individuals can only empower themselves. However, an outside agent can provide tools, encouragement, an invitation, practice, and instruction for how to further the process of empowerment. Applied theatre, with its focus on process, is a highly appropriate agent for cultivating empowerment among its participants.

It can be a profound experience for a woman who has been denied a public voice, rights, or freedom to first imagine an idea, and second, declare it with her own voice, and then to have actual people rehearse that idea in an applied theatre setting while being witnessed by others. This allows her to take various steps within the empowerment process. It allows her voice to be amplified within a supportive community. It gives her an experience of exercising her rights in a situation that acknowledges her dignity and worth. She can experience the joy and confidence that freedom brings, especially in relation to creative expression on something of great concern to her. In most cases, her mental capacity has been challenged to critically engage with the multiple factors at play. She has been challenged to analyze various components of her life and consider possible actions based on that analysis. But most importantly, it is a very different thing to *tell* a woman that she has a voice and is capable of authoring her own life, than it is for a woman to *experience* using her voice and to prove to herself that she is capable of authoring very real solutions to her own self-identified concerns. The proof of her ability is in the actual enactment and is witnessed by her supporting community.

It is also a remarkable experience for her to see and hear her concerns and her perspective represented through applied theatre. Whether it be a radio drama, a community performance, or a play produced by a professional theatre company such as Sistren Song, it all contributes towards an improved belief in her inherent worth and her ability to participate in the development of her own life, community, and nation. The theatrical event itself is proof of the worth of her perspective and experiences.

In practical terms, applied theatre is a cost-effective development tool. It allows an idea for change to be rehearsed so that obstacles or design problems can be encountered and identified before resources such as money, time, physical space, trust, and effort are invested. When facilitating applied theatre for a Women's Clean Energy Project in the Navajo Nation, we were exploring ways women could sell small-scale solar-powered lights to increase access to clean energy and improve the income of the women themselves. The group was most excited about the idea of selling these lights outside of the Walmart in a nearby border town where most people went to shop. When I asked what would need to be done first to rehearse this idea, one woman said that they would probably need to get permission from a manager of Walmart to set up a sales table. Before we even had the chance to attempt this scene, another woman said that the manager would never permit this since the top-selling items at this particular Walmart were kerosene for lamps and batteries for flashlights, which were in direct competition with the solar-powered lights. Everyone in attendance agreed that this was true. Thus, after a brief discussion, the women decided not to take on a giant like Walmart, but rather to explore

options with less powerful obstacles. It was useful that the women decided against this idea before any resources were invested and to use our time focusing on what they considered to be more viable solutions.

Applied theatre as a development tool can also help make change safer for women. Any change can have unintended negative consequences. Disrupting the dominant narrative can trigger negative backlashes, such as increased domestic violence or loss of preexisting access to resource, freedom, or power for women who, when living in poverty, can be especially vulnerable. Once a possible new social arrangement is being witnessed in action, participants can often identify potential harm that women could incur through participation. At the same Women's Clean Energy Project gathering in the Navajo Nation, participants thought of selling lights door-to-door as a possible sales model. We set up a scene with two Navajo women acting out this scenario. One woman knocked on the door of the other, was invited in, and proceeded to introduce and demonstrate the lights. Everything seemed to be progressing very well, and the woman selling the lights actually got the other woman to agree to buy one of the lights. Then a Navajo man, shaking his head as he witnessed this scene, interjected that he thought it would look bad for a Navajo woman to be walking up to strangers' homes and knocking on their doors, noting that, "the hills have eyes." He said that he thought this would actually harm the reputation of this woman acting as the salesperson and therefore wasn't an appropriate option. Upon reflection, the other Navajo participants agreed that what he said was largely true. This doesn't mean that the women at the workshop dismissed the idea of door-to-door sales because of this new insight; it means that through the process of applied theatre they were able to identify the social cost of doing so, and could collectively and knowingly weigh the social costs of this door-to-door model for sales, along with the benefits.

One might think that these kinds of obstacles would be readily evident or would emerge from the discussion of an idea that most often precedes its enactment and, therefore, would not require that enactment to be identified. In my experience, participants are often only able to discover hidden obstacles once they are witnessing them embedded in a dynamic format such as applied theatre. This process seems to uniquely engender a process of reflection that allows participants to critically engage with an idea to imagine how it would play out in the long run. This could be due, in part, to the fact that the impact of applied theatre is direct, nuanced, and more immediate than other forms of expression.

Making change

There are many examples of successful efforts that are making change by using theatre for women's participation in sustainable development. Highlighted here are a few of the "super stars"—some of which have been doing work for decades—that have been proven effective, have been widely studied, and readily come to mind for those in the applied theatre field. Their work spans the globe, from South Africa and Uganda to India and Jamaica.

Soul city

A compelling example of making change for women's participation through applied theatre comes from South Africa's *Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication*, an organization working to improve people's health and quality of life by harnessing the power of the mass media and by developing educational materials**.** Although they categorize what they do as edutainment—the weaving of social issues into entertainment (Usdin 2009, p. 578)—their work falls under the umbrella phrase of applied theatre. Previously in this chapter, domestic abuse was established as an obstacle to women's participation in sustainable development. The popular 1999 *Soul City* television series used performance to confront the prevailing social custom in South Africa to ignore domestic abuse, even if one heard it from a neighboring home, because it was perceived as a private matter. In this television drama the characters enacted how "neighbors collectively decided to break the ongoing cycle of spousal abuse in a neighborhood home. When the next wife beating occurred, they gathered around the abuser's residence, collectively banging pots and pans, censuring the abuser's actions" (Rogers & Singhal 2003, p. 68).

Evaluation research conducted by Soul City found that exposure to the program was associated with actual neighbors being willing to bang pots and pans outside an abuser's home. Patrons at a pub in a township of South Africa made a slight variation on this practice when they collectively banged bottles when a man in the establishment was abusing his girlfriend (Soul City 2001). After being exposed to this television program, both men and women throughout South Africa felt more empowered to act collectively, intervening as neighbors in situations involving domestic violence (Rogers & Singhal 2003, p. 68).

Stepping stones

Originating from Uganda, *Stepping Stones* is a training packet focused on gender, HIV communication, and relationship skills that uses critical reflection, drama, and other participatory learning approaches to equip participants to build better, safer, more gender-equitable relationships (Welbourn 1995). It is a participatory tool that has been developed for working on HIV/AIDS issues from a gender perspective (Bhattacharjee 2000, p. 691). It is focused on process, not product. In its use of role-play—a form of applied theatre—no actual public performance ever results. Having been adapted for use in more than 40 countries and translated into 13 languages, Stepping Stones is possibly the most widely used HIV prevention program of its kind in the world (Jewkes, Wood, & Duvvury 2010, p. 1075). The author, Alice Welbourn, wrote *Stepping Stones* because she discovered in 1992 that she was HIV-positive and wanted to create a training package that would help protect others from acquiring HIV. Professor Rose Mbowa was the workshop coordinator in Entebbe, Uganda, where Stepping Stones was first introduced (Welbourn 1997). Welbourn has since gone on to develop *Stepping Stones-PLUS* (Welbourn 2008), a supplemental training packet designed to help individuals

with HIV feel a sense of self-worth and to help communities recognize the importance of continual acceptance, support, and love for those among them with HIV.

A typical Stepping Stones program consists of 18 sessions over 9 weeks. Participants meet in peer groups of the same gender, that are led by a trained facilitator from their community. They explore sexual identity, facts about HIV, sexual behavior that increases vulnerability to HIV, and ways participants can change their behavior for health and overall well-being. An environment of acceptance and respect is established by the facilitator and encouraged among participants, so that different experiences and perspectives within the peer group are all honored and considered. Participants analyze their own experiences through creative exercises in order to consider alternative outcomes and develop strategies. Role-play is used to rehearse these strategies so that they can be critiqued by the group before trying them out in their actual lives. Welbourn emphasizes that "it is essential to recognize that Stepping Stones depends entirely for its success on its grounding in local knowledge and experience, explored and analyzed by participants themselves during the workshop" (Welbourn 2002, p. 54).

Instead of providing passive instruction of messages around HIV prevention from outside experts, Stepping Stones "views all the people involved as actors central to their own lives" (Welbourn 2002, p. 57). It leads participants to conduct research on themselves by providing active exercises for exploring behaviors and ways of relating to each other, while understanding how current behavior is rooted in their own particular culture and history. Key to this process is having participants rehearse and reflect on new ways of behaving and relating with others within their peer group. To keep it engaging, warm-up games and fun exercises are used in between the main exercises.

An example of an exercise used in *Stepping Stones-PLUS* is called *In the Spotlight*, the aim of which is to "illustrate how we have all felt left out or stigmatized at times about many things, how quick we can be to judge others without understanding things from their point of view, and how miserable this can make us feel if we are the ones being judged" (Welbourn et al. 2008, p. 17). Standing in a circle holding hands, the facilitator asks participants if any of them have ever felt left out or stigmatized because of a personal attribute, such as being too tall or because of a physical impairment. After being given time to reflect on this, individuals are asked to step inside the circle alone if they can think of such a time and to walk around the inside of the circle making eye contact with each person in the outer circle before rejoining the group. After each participant has identified a couple of examples and has physically walked inside the circle while being stared at, the group discusses how it felt to be stigmatized and singled out. To conclude the exercise, the group again stands in a circle holding hands and, in turn, singles out each participant by staring at them; then people are invited to say positive things about this person that distinguish them from the others, thereby giving an experience of being stared at for positive reasons that celebrate a community's diversity.

Though Stepping Stones was not shown to inspire participants to entirely dismantle the patriarchal structures within their communities—which may keep many, especially women, from participating—it did make improvements. Rachel Jewkes, Katharine Wood, and Nata Duvvury write that in South Africa, "there was

no evidence of wholesale rejection of their patriarchal power, rather of notable steps towards molding a more benign patriarchy" (2010, p. 1083). On the island of Kiribati in the Pacific, spousal communication and relations improved after Stepping Stones. Before involvement in the program the accepted custom for men as head of the family was to order women around. After the training, men reportedly began to help the women more and were more willing to negotiate with the women about sex (FSPIMedia 2011a, b).

Of utmost importance within the Stepping Stones agenda is to improve negotiating skills. Applied theatre is used as a way for participants to work towards an agreement or compromise on issues such as condom use or alcohol use that can lead to physical abuse. The opportunity and invitation to critically reflect on issues of sexual behavior and HIV provided a base from which participants could begin to rehearse negotiating behavior. Placing this discussion in the semipublic setting of a peer workshop went a long way toward overcoming cultural barriers that classified these discussions as taboo. It proved to be especially helpful when faith communities were one of the supporting partners of the program; then participants understood that it was not against their religious faith to partake in such discussions and negotiate with their sexual partners and families about sexual issues.

In 2006 Stepping Stones was introduced into several South Pacific islands through a pilot program. In Fiji there was greater success with the programs in urban areas, due to participants' mobility in comparison with more rural areas where transportation to sessions was sometimes more of an issue. The amount of time the entire program takes, with its multiple meetings, is a major challenge. In the Solomon Islands many women had a difficult time attending because of traditional roles as mothers and homemakers. But the community took on this challenge and made it a success by creating a special peer group for the community's children. In other Pacific Island programs there is no children's peer group; the Solomon Islands are unique in seeing the need for a children's peer group within the Stepping Stones framework (FSPIMedia 2011). This considerably impacted the mothers' ability to participate in the program as well, since their children were occupied with the program and did not require supervision from the mothers during that time. Also the Solomon Island's pilot program gained strength due to the fact that support was coming from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, and government agencies. This helped provide a wide base of support and resources necessary for the program to continue. The programs are most successful when they involve many organizations that can address the issues brought up and seek to supply services for all the needs related to healthy sexual behavior.

Despite the challenges, communities are showing that they can identify and address their problems and find solutions. Given the participatory focus of the program, it stands to reason that evaluation of impact and effectiveness should also be participatory, as noted in the lessons learned from Stepping Stones programming in Uganda:

> The discrepancies between the survey findings and the messages conveyed by people in open-ended focus group discussions, and the inconsistencies

> between some of the answers given by survey respondents highlights the unreliability of the survey data and the critical importance of supplementing survey-based quantitative data with qualitative data collected using participatory methods. Where possible, this data should also be supplemented by additional data . . . It is only by triangulating all the data that one can begin to understand the complex dynamics affecting individual and community attitudes and behavior. (Hadjipateras 2006, p. 28)

For a behavior change program like Stepping Stones, a long-term approach is crucial for its success.

Sistren Theatre Collective

Sistren is a grassroots theatre project, originating in Kingston, Jamaica (Green 2004, pp. 481–482). It was born in 1977 when a group of 13 working-class women, assisted by Honor Ford-Smith of the Kingston Drama school, gathered to plan a play to present during the government-sponsored Worker's Week activities (Allison 1986, p. 4). Afterwards, the women continued the work by forming Sistren Theatre Collective, with, among others, Ford-Smith as the artistic director, Pauline Crawford as workshops director, and Rebecca Knowles as workshop leader (Allison 1986, p. 5). Run by and for Jamaican working-class women, Sistren's goal was, and is, to actively transform the status of women in society. Sistren seeks to examine the oppression of women and by "breaking down their isolation" help working-class women empower themselves to achieve a solution to their problems through collective action (Allison 1986, p. 5). Utilizing entertainment, collaboration, and humor, Sistren suggests sustainable methods through which the women can continue to confront future problems (Allison 1986, p. 4).

Sistren utilizes a number of applied theatre methods to explore the experiences of the members of the group. The participants start by sharing experiences from their own lives and identifying with each other's experiences and problems. Through improvisation, storytelling, and traditional cultural rituals, they then workshop the performance until they have created a solution to a problem, or until they have created a performance to share the issue with a wider audience. For Sistren, the *process* of creating the show is often more important than the end product (Allison 1986, p. 15). Frequently the participants in the workshop are empowered by the similarities they share with other participants—realizing they are not alone in their experiences and sufferings—and by the sheer fact that there is something they can do about their situation.

An example of Sistren's work is the creation of the show *The Case of Iris Armstrong*. In 1982 members of Sistren traveled to the sugarcane fields to interview the women working there to gather material for a new show (Green 2004, p. 479). While there, Sistren held a series of workshops in the evenings, attended by working women after their shifts. These workshops utilized Sistren's techniques of storytelling and improvisation to help the women come together to find a solution to a pressing problem in their neighborhood. This was the first time that anyone had

paid particular attention to the tribulations of these women, and it was the first time they were really given agency to find a solution themselves (Allison 1986, p. 15). Through improvisation, the women were able to put together, rehearse, and finesse an argument to put before the local official. The women successfully convinced the official to fix the water pump, and went on to create a women's council in the community to continue working for women's concerns (Allison 1986, pp. 16–17). In this instance, not only did Sistren help the field workers figure out a solution to their current problem, but it gave them tools to find solutions to future problems.

In the 1980s Sistren members ended up traveling and performing globally more than they were at home (Green 2004, pp. 474–475). However, in 2009, Sistren returned to Jamaica to put together a show to present before Parliament with regards to the reproductive health bill soon to be deliberated. Parliament's Joint Select Committee on Abortion held a session to hear submissions from interest groups regarding the issue, and utilizing their techniques of personal experience, workshop and improvisation, Sistren put together a performance using local culture and personal experiences to highlight the importance of women's reproductive rights (Heron, Toppin, & Finikin 2009, pp. 45–46). Performed solely by women, the performance allowed for a female voice to be heard in the otherwise overwhelmingly male space of The Houses of Parliament. Sistren's involvement brought a practical and experiential element to the issues of the bill—otherwise overlooked in debates and rhetoric—reminding the politicians that the law, as it stands on paper, impacts large numbers of Jamaican women and their bodies (Heron et al. 2009, pp. 52–54). As of October 2012, the parliamentary committee still had not been able to come to an agreement about amending the existing legislation (Wilson 2012).

Grassroots theatre movements like Sistren can be successful among shifting political/economic climates, but it is imperative that they adjust and morph with the shifting political tides and continue to serve those whom they set out to serve, and who need them most (Green 2004, p. 488). Despite the challenges it faced in the 1980s, Sistren managed to survive by adapting to the changes in politics and economics and is still alive and well today. Now headed by Lana Finikin, a founding member of Sistren, some of its current projects include a Kingston Urban Renewal project, a Youth Leadership Training program, and educational projects regarding AIDS/HIV, Sexual Reproductive Health, Conflict Resolution, and Cultural and Historical Preservation. Sistren is currently funded by multiple organizations worldwide, and continues to travel around the world, spreading its techniques and expertise. However, by and large, Sistren's current work takes place at home in Jamaica with the working-class people whose lives it strives to better through theatre.

Jana Sanskriti

Jana Sanskriti (People's Culture) Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, based in West Bengal, India, is considered to be one of the largest and longest lasting Forum Theatre operations in the world. It was created in the early 1980s by

Sanjoy Ganguly. He and his fellow political workers traveled and worked in the village of Dahakanda intending to help mobilize oppressed people, but struggled to make themselves acceptable to the village people. Observing that music and performance was an important part of village life, Ganguly experimented with creating theatre in the villages. Although Ganguly had the greatest of intentions, he struggled to truly create a Theatre *of* the Oppressed, rather than Theatre *for* the Oppressed (Ganguly 2010, p. 17). Early on the movement leaders fought to overcome the tendency to give "advice and direction" to the audiences, because this was, as Ganguly explained, "casting shadows on our work" (Ganguly 2010, p. 66). Ganguly sought collaboration with villagers who could enrich the plays with their own experiences. In 1991, Jana Sanskriti's leaders met with Augusto Boal, which helped the movement continue to build and sustain true Theatre *of* the Oppressed in West Bengal. Jana Sanskriti was considered by Augusto Boal to be the chief exponent of his methodology outside of its native Brazil.

Jana Sanskriti has more than 30 theatre teams from 30 different rural villages throughout West Bengal. Although these teams are part of Jana Sanskriti, there are no monetary linkages, and it is truly considered Theatre of the Oppressed done by oppressed sections of society. The makeup of Jana Sanskriti theatre teams includes both men and women, who are typically agricultural workers. The experiences of the theatre team members directly influence the scripts that are created and performed, and although there is not monetary gain for the performers, many participate because Jana Sanskriti provides a space where they can express themselves, and where they have found the courage to point out the causes of oppression in their lives (Jana Sanskriti 2013a).

Each theatre team typically presents two performances a month in their village. The theatre team members develop campaigns, where they collect feedback from the people on various initiatives. Jana Sanskriti also has a core team that supports ad hoc satellite teams based in various villages. When Jana Sanskriti teams do Boal's style of Forum Theatre, a theatre team selects, constructs, and narrates a social problem from their daily life. Sanjoy Ganguly believes that "actors do not play the script, they script the play," and in this process, they "discover themselves" (Ganguly 2010, p. 120). After some fine-tuning by the artistic director, the theatre team presents the play to an audience, but a solution to the conflict is not present in the first performance. The second time it is performed the audience is given the task of finding a solution to the problem presented within the play. Audience members become spect-actors by entering the dramatic space to enact their solution (Jana Sanskriti 2013a). The trained theatre team members assist these audience spect-actors by asking questions about the solutions offered. A mediator, called the Joker, assists in this process, and attempts to lead the performers and spect-actors to a point of consensus. Jana Sanskriti believes that this consensus plays an important role resulting in social initiatives and community action (Jana Sanskriti 2013a).

Female roles were once portrayed by men in Jana Sanskriti, because women were not members of the movement, but women eventually came to play a strong

role in the work of Jana Sanskriti, and this active involvement continues today (Ganguly 2010, p. 24). The first all-women teams were created in 2002, and these teams regularly conduct workshops and performances for their communities. Although the majority of these women have large families and intense domestic responsibilities, Jana Sanskriti has developed these teams from rural working-class families and has involved them in the theatre movement. Because men often have to leave the villages for work, women often take on all the responsibilities of the household. Female theatre team members must also overcome traditional values that do not condone women being seen interacting with outsiders. Many of these women must face violence when they return home from performances and rehearsals (Ganguly 2010, p. 33).

There are several performance pieces that specifically focus on gender issues that are frequently presented by Jana Sanskriti. *Sonar Meye* (*The Golden Girl*) presents a picture of the life of an average woman in rural India and the powerlessness women often feel because of the patriarchal system (Da Costa 2008, p. 299). Specifically, the audience is shown the disrespect a young woman must endure on a daily basis, specifically in regards to her educational pursuits as they collide with her role in the home. This performance is intended to encourage discussions of gender inequality and relations within their communities. Male spect-actors are encouraged to enter the scene and intervene, thus creating a situation in which gender inequality evolves from "women's problems" to an issue in which each party must claim responsibility (Da Costa 2008, p. 303).

Sarama is a play about the rape of a young woman who lives in a slum, and the ways in which her previously content life was devastated by the crime against her (Jana Sanskriti 2013b). While she is shunned in her own society as a ruined woman, political officials in their own quest for power use her case. The play follows how various forces in her society use the incident to serve their own interests. In the end she emerges from this demoralizing scenario, and, with the help of a sympathetic women's group, gets the support she needs to birth the child resulting from the rape. The performance of *Sarama* is done in a minimalist fashion with the actors' bodies used as the props. Teamwork and the agility of the performers, along with the sensitive use of music, bring this powerful drama alive.

Because Jana Sanskriti has such a strong presence in villages, the women of Jana Sanskriti have formed women's organizations in which they work to activate health systems, stop the illegal manufacturing and selling of liquor, and support education (Jana Sanskriti 2013a). Ganguly believes that when it comes to acting outside of the arena, women surely play the most important role in terms of number and leadership (Ganguly 2010, pp. 125–126). Jana Sanskriti's theatre has offered a significant opportunity for people to script power relations onstage and live new commitments offstage. Through this process, both women and men learn from, make sense of, and live the consequences of immediate, onstage interactions and experiences in their offstage lives (Mohan 2004, p. 203). This involves people in the process of reimagining and transforming the communities in which they live; working towards a more just and equitable future for all.

Climate Wise Women

Climate Wise Women (CWW) represents an expanded idea of applied theatre, used for women's participation in sustainable development. CWW is a global platform for the promotion of women's leadership on climate change through the art of oral transmission. When CWW's rotating group of distinguished international community activists perform their stories publicly, they give a human face and voice to an issue that sits squarely at the nexus of the conversation on gender equality, environmental justice, food security, the eradication of extreme poverty, and public health (Climate Wise Women 2013). CWW presents these events—featuring women community leaders from around the globe—at colleges and universities, for community and business groups, and at major world events on climate, climate justice, and gender equality, engaging both panelists and audience members alike.

Pacific Gender Climate Coalition (PGCC) is one of the groups that partners with CWW to disseminate gendered knowledge about climate change for use in public policy. The coordinator of PGCC, Ulamila Kurai Wragg, shared her story at the event Rio+20 and Women's Lives: A Cross-generational Dialogue. I share a portion of her performed story to give an example of how CWW uses a form of applied theatre—oral transmission—to promote the inclusion of gendered knowledge in sustainable development.

> As people from a small island state, we are vulnerable to sea levels, and women always come out as the most vulnerable. We women plant, fish, raise children, and keep house. Because of what we do, we have a lot of gender-based knowledge. That's why gendered language is so important. I make sure my leaders stay committed to hearing the women. Climate Wise Women has given a platform for women to speak up, the opportunity and space for women to speak up and be heard. I'm here today for the many unheard voices back in the villages—women who have lived on the coast all their lives. They have traditional gendered knowledge that is priceless. We people from the Cook Islands are coastal managers. My brother has different gendered knowledge than I do because of his gender and the work he does as a man. When he is deep sea diving, if he feels cold water against his skin, he knows that is a warning. When I am fishing on the coast if I see certain urchins along the coast, I know a certain type of weather is coming. That is gender-based knowledge. Governments must be gender responsive to this kind of knowledge. (Wragg 2012)

Additionally, PGCC is training women on Participatory Video, a powerful and creative means of expression in which women document their own experience and disseminate their traditional gendered knowledge on climate change through the Internet (Lunch & Lunch 2006). Participatory Video provides a method for women to act on their own problems by communicating their needs, views, insights, ideas, and knowledge with decision makers and/or other groups and communities. Because

the women themselves are the authors of their own videos, they are created in a manner that the women consider culturally appropriate to their communities.

Applied theatre in society and culture

One of applied theatre's strengths is disrupting hierarchical systems and the societal structures that perpetuate inequity and limit women's participation. It serves as an ideal tool for imagining new ways men and women can live together in community and plan together for their collective future. Women, especially those living in poverty, are most likely to be willing to engage in applied theatre techniques as a problem-solving or idea-generating tool because they have the least to lose in terms of actual or perceived power. Men with wealth or power—and even women with some privilege associated with wealth or power—may avoid applied theatre because of social risk. They want to maintain their dignity and avoid the many unknown variables within the process that may cast them as less powerful or as guilty for maintaining wealth while others suffer. Men living in poverty may be reluctant to give up what dignity they feel they have, due to what they perceive as the superiority of their gender. Even development practitioners could be reluctant to participate as the agenda of a given project could be questioned or destabilized, which could put funding earmarked for a specific purpose in jeopardy.

Not only may women be the most willing to partake in applied theatre, they may also be uniquely adept at the kind of improvisation inherent in applied theatre. In Hartmut Bossel's article "Indicators for Sustainable Development," he writes, "Sustainable development implies constant evolutionary self-organizing and adaptive change. For this the widest possible spectrum of adaptive responses to new challenges should be available for potential adoption. But this means that diversity of processes and functions is one of the important prerequisites for sustainability" (Bossel & Balaton Group1999, p. 6). Women living in poverty, having already met the challenges from such forces as climate change, economic downturns, and changes in government, may just be the most adept and practiced sector of our world population in terms of diverse and adaptive response to new challenges. Often these women have little ability to use these skills to do much more than survive, such that the world has largely not taken notice of these skills and thus has not benefitted from women's ingenuity, perspectives, and approaches. Applied theatre could be a conduit through which women can communicate what they can offer to solutions for the collective challenges we face.

Applied theatre is a good match for this skill set based on life experience—the stuff theatre is made of—and therefore has incredible potential for being able to translate that hard-earned aptitude into an effective contribution towards sustainable development design.

When women do well, they tend to invest what they gain back into their families and their communities. Given this, to improve a woman's well-being is to improve the well-being of her community and, ultimately, our world. Author Rashmi Luthra writes, "Women at the margins of society—those bypassed or

trampled by globalization and a knowledge-based economy—are strategically placed to imagine a just, equitable, and environmentally sustainable future that would benefit everyone in the long-term" (2003, p. 47). Drawing upon the eco-feminist approaches of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993), Luthra goes on to assert that, "Women of the South, who are disproportionately victimized by development and globalization by definition, are in a position to envision a liberating, sustainable future for all, rather than a future benefiting and privileging a select few" (2003, p. 47). Feminist scholar bell hooks describes this place in the margins as a "Site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators" (hooks 2008, p. 85). In my experience, the space created when women work together through applied theatre feels like the space described by hooks.

Women living in oppression can gain a point of access to share this liberating vision through applied theatre. In *Popular Theater, Development and Communication*, Mrinalini Thyagarajan writes that "theater does not require any level of education or literacy, as it works with feelings and sensations and translates thoughts and concepts into identifiable experiences" (2002, pp. 13–14). Action is the primary ingredient in theatre, so it is useful for getting sustainable development objectives and deliberations off the page and onto the stage—of applied theatre (literally) and of life (metaphorically). Since the action from applied theatre arises from the community, it is more likely to accurately reflect the community. Therefore, it stands to reason that the sustainable development that uses applied theatre as a tool will more likely accurately address the lived needs of the community in an acceptable way.

My position is that an appropriate use of applied theatre should *not* simply adjust or educate women to accommodate themselves within the current world systems—that is, to improve their well-being without altering traditional gender roles. Rather, it should involve women in a restructuring of our world away from systems that perpetuate the gender inequity, poverty, and environmental destruction that make sustainable development a necessary endeavor. The theoretical foundations for applied theatre that will be more deeply explored in the next chapter support this view. This represents a shift from viewing women as *beneficiaries* whose lives can be improved by sustainable development, to authentic participants and authors of a system which is considerate of local knowledges embedded in community practices and institutions (Beetham & Demetriades 2007, p. 202).

Using applied theatre to engage women's participation in sustainable development is a way of recognizing and utilizing a woman's culture as a method for her inclusion. However, the benefits of recognizing and utilizing each woman's culture extend beyond her inclusion; it works towards the foundational change that needs to occur for authentic gender equity and for our world to be authentically sustainable. Development efforts that disregard people's culture most often also

disregard local communication processes (Mlama 1991, p. 5), and therefore, are often not inclusive or successful.

If development efforts seek to change structures without working to change culture, that culture will likely reproduce the same conditions over and again. Or as David Diamond, author of *Theatre for Living*, writes, "Working politically to alter the structures in which we live without changing the behavior that creates those structures is futile" (2007, p. 38). Culture is "a way of perceiving and doing things that identifies one people as distinct from another. A culture derives its qualities from the conditions—economic, political and social—existing in a society. But at the same time a culture determines the regeneration of these conditions" (Mlama 1991, p. 10). Therefore, culture not only reflects a given society's structures, it determines those structures as well.

Therefore, the goal is to interrupt culture, to break cultural cycles that lead to conditions in which women are restricted from participation in sustainable development. This book proposes applied theatre as one appropriate and effective tool for shaping a new version of a given community's culture so that women can participate in shaping their own lives. A United Nations publication, *Rethinking Poverty*, states that "creating the conditions that allow women to demand change and influence priorities of State institutions is vital if gender equality and the empowerment of women are to be advanced" (2010, p. 74). Mlama writes that "to effect change in the basic structure of a society, therefore, means changing a people's way of life, a people's way of perceiving and doing things to support the intended changes. Indeed, history has seen many societies evolving different cultures to support successive but different modes of production" (1991, p. 11). What this suggests is that change is possible, and that recognition of the importance of culture in relationship to that change is essential.

In the article "Drama and Theatre in Education," Gordon Vallins writes that "not merely can drama reflect and re-inforce our attitude in values, it can also attempt to change them, to shape the culture in which it exists: it can be used to suggest alternatives to the present systems, it can give warning, it can explore the relationship of people subjected to the complexities of the system and thus expose its prejudices and injustices" (1971, pp. 167–168). Applied theatre not only can unleash a wave of creative freedom, but also freedom from oppression and from restrictions to participation for women. Inequity always results in strife. Strife is a waste of any community's energy and resources and diminishes its people's basic enjoyment of life. Since applied theatre is an effective tool for eradicating inequity, then adopting applied theatre and becoming proficient in using this powerful tool is healthy for any community.

Conclusion

Humans have been capable of substantial and noble change in the past. The seemingly impossible has become possible as cultures change to recognize the ability, worthiness, and dignity of more or all of its members. Not only are humans capable

of this type of change, we seem to delight in it, more than resist it. There is a joy experienced in evolving and growing in understanding or capacity. Given that societal structures are based on commonly held cultural values and are strengthened by historical precedence, gender equity requires deliberate questioning of these values and an interruption of historical precedence. Theatre has an established role for doing just that. The many examples in the pages of this book demonstrate that even in communities without a strong tradition of theatre, theatre-based methods can be an effective tool for imagining, reimaging, and making authentic change.