

## **6 Conclusion—sustaining women’s participation through applied theatre**

### **Navajo women’s energy project on the Navajo Nation**

On the Navajo Nation, 12 women ranging in age from 11 to 86, one speaking only Navajo, others Navajo and English, met to lay the groundwork for a Navajo Women’s Energy Project. With my Navajo partner Adrian Manygoats, we had designed an all-day session to go deep in our consideration of the many issues surrounding energy. I have a long-term commitment to working on this project through the University of Colorado Outreach in collaboration with Eagle Energy (Eagle Energy 2013). Through various applied theatre activities, the women told the story of energy on the Navajo Nation that has already been told—the story of energy that includes coal mining, uranium extraction, high cancer rates, and contaminated water tables. This is the story that has been written largely without women’s participation. We imagined a new story of energy written by women: one in which women had influence in how tribal money is invested in clean energy for a more sustainable future. As a bridge from the old story to the new, we thought of specific actions that our group could do, and then we rehearsed those actions together so as to identify likely obstacles and work towards solutions together. By the end of the day, we had a plan for action and our next two meetings scheduled. Not only that, but applied theatre made this process highly engaging, unifying, and even aesthetically stirring.

For one activity, we used a simple muslin shadow screen behind which was a solar-powered light. When a woman stood between the screen and the light (see Photo 6.1), her profile was illuminated in shadow on the screen. Each woman was asked to step behind the screen and say what she thought the ancestors would want to tell us to guide us in this journey towards a sustainable energy future. People shared the following messages:

Remember how we used to live without modern conveniences.

Think about the consequences of your actions.

We are better than this.

Work with the earth, not against the earth.

We’ve forgotten how to live in harmony and reverence.



*Photo 6.1* A participant in the Navajo Women’s Energy Project speaks in shadow on behalf of her ancestors.

Don’t take more than you need.

We need to incorporate the spirit people in this journey.

We are the Earth.

Have you forgotten who you are? Where you come from? Who your creators are? (Manygoats & Osnes 2013)

The theatricality of the shadow play was remarkably beautiful and really seemed to bring the spirit of the ancestors into the room. Responses from the Navajo elders participating were particularly positive in regard to this exercise. One elder woman, a tribal leader, expressed gratitude that the ancestors had been included in the design of the day.

I share this example at the conclusion, because while writing this book I have concurrently been working on this new project, the Navajo Women’s Energy Project. I am moved by how the ideas I’ve encountered through writing this book have invigorated and deepened my work. I am renewed in my belief that applied theatre is not only a uniquely effective and appropriate tool for including women in their own sustainable development, it is an exciting, emotionally rich, often beautiful, nuanced and delicate tool for reaching into deep crevasses of history, feelings, connections, and possibilities. The day I spent with these women on the Navajo Nation was exceptional. Applied theatre allowed us to cover an incredible amount of ground with the participation of a diverse group—in terms of age, language,

and education levels. Because of the unique attributes of applied theatre, Caroline, an elder matriarch who only speaks Navajo and has attended very little school, was able to contribute her knowledge and experience since no formal education is necessary for participation. The younger Navajo women, who are university students, were also engaged and challenged by this process. With the use of applied theatre there is a complex language of action being employed at a sophisticated level. The process calls upon the intelligence that can be gained from many different ways of living. Using applied theatre in a diverse population helps to 'even the playing field' and dismantle societal hierarchies that often disadvantage women living in poverty.

## **Lessons learned**

As Alice Welbourn of Stepping Stones (see Chapter 1) advises, no one program or methodology should be relied upon to provide all the answers, but that communities should consider using a range of existing materials available (2002, p. 58). Likewise, applied theatre should be thought of as one of many tools or methods that can be drawn upon to address challenges that impede women's participation. As is seen the case study on PMC-Ethiopia, their holistic, wraparound services approach was instrumental to their success. Applied theatre is most effectively used as one aspect of a more comprehensively envisioned plan for women's participation.

Applied theatre can be compared with other tools, such as a hammer; it is pretty simple to use and can do many things. It can pound things in, and when used like a lever, can pull things out or apart. Most people doing any kind of handy work seem to own a hammer and know how to use it. Granted, in the hands of a carpenter, it can do more with greater efficiency, ease, and beauty. Yet a hammer is a highly accessible tool even in the hands of a beginning woodworker. Like this, applied theatre can be used quite simply with positive results, and, when led by a trained and adept facilitator, can produce amazingly specific moments of transformation.

Each country's theatrical history and culture will influence the impact of the applied theatre conducted there, and will determine the amount of effort required to achieve an impact. History and culture are factors that influence how willing and adept participants are, and how they benefit from the experience. In India, for example, the staff of ARTI was already active and adept in theatrical expression. India has a rich theatrical climate that supports the theatrical expression of participants, with minimal investment or effort from an outside facilitator. In Guatemala, Starfish One by One is working in a country in which the theatrical history is sparser. Even the Starfish staff member, Vilma—who is the primary champion of using applied theatre for Starfish's Vocal Empowerment Program—describes herself as struggling to be expressive in many circumstances. She stated that she will benefit from coaching and training to be able to successfully facilitate applied theatre for her organization. By this I do not intend to suggest that applied theatre should not be done in countries with sparse theatre history and culture. It is simply to note that applied theatre programs in those countries will likely require larger investments of time, resources, and effort.

It is stated and intimated numerous times throughout this book that women living in poverty have important contributions to make towards solving our shared challenges associated with sustainable development, such as their gendered knowledge, resilience, perspective, and insights. However, sometimes an outside agent or intervention is necessary to help women living in poverty step out of their poverty trap, in order to be in a position to participate in their own sustainable development. As with any trap, a poverty trap is something from which one cannot escape, given one’s own position (Bowles et al. 2006). Often times, poverty is passed down from one generation to the next through a complex multitude of factors. The process by which parents living in poverty pass on their poverty and disadvantage occurs primarily during their children’s early years of life (Morán 2004). For this reason, many organizations that are successful in facilitating the participation of women often start with young women so as to address those factors that would otherwise impair a women’s ability to participate in her own community’s development.

### **Common characteristics**

By reviewing the applied theatre programs examined in this book, some common characteristics emerge among organizations that successfully utilize applied theatre for women’s participation. Primarily, there is most often a focus on gender and a commitment to gender equity from the core of the organization. At the root of many organizations that focus on women, there is a very strong personal story by the founder that connects them to a lifelong commitment to this work. Connie Ning, who is cofounder of Starfish One by One, told me of a time when she was visiting a hospital in Vietnam, early on in her humanitarian work. In a hallway, she passed a stretcher on which was laid a woman with open sores, as a result of advanced and untreated cancer. She remembers stopping to offer whatever comfort she could give this woman. When their eyes locked, in that moment of connection, the division between this woman and herself dissolved. She experienced this woman’s suffering as her own. She cites that moment as a galvanizing occurrence that feeds her continued commitment to gender equity. With the Appropriate Rural Technology Institute in India, Dr. A.D. Karve, and his daughter Dr. Priyadarshini Karve, were influenced by the work of their forefathers, who were progressive reformists for women’s rights. In this case it seems to be an immersion in a forward-thinking culture within Pune and the Karve family, their friends, and visitors, that influenced a commitment to gender equity. In an interview with William Ryerson, founder of the Population Media Center, he conveyed a story from his childhood that impacted his commitment to gender.

In my childhood, I remember thinking that keeping higher education just for men was a terrible waste of half the population’s ability. My own mother, who was valedictorian of her high school class, was not sent to college because she was a girl. Her family’s funds were limited so her brother got to go instead. She worked as a housewife all her life with only small interruptions. In my

own family, emphasis on good grades was very clearly focused on the males in the family. My father had a post college degree; my mother had no degree. I remember family discussions about giving girls equal access, and my father would say that the problem with investing in girls is they get pregnant and drop out of the work force to raise children. I understood how people reached that conclusion, but never could accept the concept that because of parent-hood girls were less deserving of education. (W. Ryerson 2012)

Here we find an individual commitment to gender equity emerging in part from the educational potential that went unrealized for a mother.

We notice that founders of organizations don't need to be women to have this strong personal connection to gender equity, nor did the formative story have to happen to them, such as it did for Alice Welbourn, who created *Stepping Stones*. In 1992 Welbourn discovered that she was HIV-positive and subsequently created a training package that would help protect others from acquiring HIV. We also see the familial commitment to gender equity that passes through generations, from Connie Ning to her son Travis Ning, who now is executive director of Starfish (see Chapter 3), and from Dr. Dhondo Keshav Karve all the way to his great-granddaughter, Priyadarshini Karve who is now project coordinator for the Appropriate Rural Technology Institute, specifically focused on energy technologies that improve women's lives (see Chapter 4). Here we see gender equity as a family value, getting passed on through the generations.

Dr. Ines Smyth, senior gender advisor of Oxfam (Oxfam 2013), identifies one of the characteristics of larger organizations that successfully integrate gender, as a commitment to gender equity at the high organizational levels of leadership. In contrast, many people working and focusing on gender in large organizations—where there is a separate arm for work with a gender equity focus—can feel that their efforts are not supported, valued, or fully understood by the core leadership of the larger organization. Because of this, they can feel limited in their ability to maintain the long-term focus required to effect lasting change. They can also lack sufficient support for gender-focused programming (Smyth 2012).

A characteristic that is common among organizations that effectively and efficiently increase women's participation is that they target as young a population of women as possible for their applied theatre programming. PMC-Ethiopia was able to achieve outstanding results by especially targeting young women of childbearing years, and secondly, their parents or other elders who will likely influence their attitude and behaviors. Starfish One by One reaches out to girls in Guatemala to break down age-old patterns of oppression for indigenous Mayan women. Even in the case study on the Appropriate Rural Technology Institute in India, the young girl in the workshop of the self-help group was more confident and willing to rehearse her concern than her mother, and many of the other older women. The lives of young women are often not yet locked into states from which it is difficult to withdraw or in conditions that are impossible to reverse. They are sometimes not as rigidly bound by the choices they have made or by the choices made for them. I am sensitive while writing this to the still worthy and valid needs of the millions of



Photo 6.2 A mother (far right) holds her daughter while participating in an applied theatre workshop as part of the *MOTHER* tour in Penang, Malaysia.

older women who are locked into lives of poverty and oppression who may wish for access to applied theatre to begin to imagine a better future. In response, I suggest including a multigenerational approach to applied theatre whenever possible, so that the applied theatre attention on the young may be enriched and informed by the participation, wisdom, and experience of older women.

One characteristic that did not emerge from the primary case studies for this book, but has consistently been a factor in other work I have done, is in regard to children. For mothers to participate, children’s presence needs to be accepted in the public places where participation would occur (see Photo 6.2). In this regard, what are often referred to as “developing nations” are usually ahead of “developed nations.” In these countries there is often minimal segregation by age in public gatherings and, even though children may not be expected to talk or contribute, their presence is considered acceptable. Public gatherings in developed countries are often less tolerant of the presence of children. This, in turn, lessens mothers’ ability to participate. Progressive efforts were made by Stepping Stones, which created a children’s peer group to allow women to participate in the program in the Pacific Islands (FSPIMedia 2011). In workshops I have facilitated for communities around the world, children have been welcome and are easily incorporated into the action and often entertained by it. Beyond that, mothers are modeling women’s participation for their children. When working with Mothers Acting Up, one of our value statements was that when children act up with their mothers, we simultaneously train the next generation of global citizens. As a mother myself, I often travel with my children when facilitating applied theatre in communities. My perception is that as an outsider, I have been more readily accepted by women



*Photo 6.3* A woman in Nicaragua participating in a “training of the trainers” Vocal Empowerment Workshop while also holding her sleeping daughter.

in communities *because* of our shared experience of mothering. It has also, quite frankly, been a necessity for my participation in applied theatre. In my experience, mothers are uniquely able to maintain concentration while also nurturing a child (see Photo 6.3), and tend to have a high tolerance for what others may perceive to be chaos.

Organizations that successfully use applied theatre methods tend to have at least one person within the organization who champions applied theatre methods for reaching program objectives. Often this is a person who has some kind of affinity and aptitude for theatre, or is drawn to it. This is often the person who keeps bringing it up at organizational meetings when making decisions on how to achieve program objectives. It is ideal for that person to have access to training over a long period of time, such that methods can be attempted and then more training can improve upon those methods. It is also important for the leaders of the organization to support this person's efforts, so that it is not a constant struggle for her or him to champion applied theatre. This often assumes that organizational leaders have had exposure to applied theatre, and have some understanding of its process



and potential. In an organization like PMC that solely uses theatrical methods, the above considerations are less relevant.

A characteristic of organizations that use applied theatre either extensively or exclusively—such as PMC (see Chapter 5), and to a lesser extent CARE International (CARE 2013)—is that they invest a sizable portion of the program budget into monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate verifiable results to funders, partners, and institutional administration. CARE and PMC are both large multinational organizations. For smaller organizations, dedicating funds to monitoring and evaluation of applied theatre is more of a challenge, but, nonetheless, should be prioritized for the sustainability of such efforts. In addition, effort should be made to make this evaluation a process that involves women’s authentic participation and increases their feeling of empowerment (Narayan 1993).

Organizations that successfully use applied theatre tend to share similar qualities and values with applied theatre. Organizations may even share a similar theoretical foundation with applied theatre, such as Starfish One by One (see Chapter 3) with popular education and Paulo Freire. One of the primary qualities of applied theatre is improvisation, which assumes a willingness to take risks by straying from the dominant narrative. With the Appropriate Rural Technology Institute in India (see Chapter 4), we witness staff members who are willing to experience forms of applied theatre to involve women more fully in their program objectives. This is certainly both a risk and a new narrative for a research and development institute comprised primarily of scientists and engineers. Because applied theatre methods necessarily assume shared authorship, organizations that are open to its participatory methods are very likely to respect the people with whom they work, view of them as agents of change, and collaborate with them in authoring a better future. For such organizations, when working with women living in poverty, critical engagement is valued over mere instruction. Because of these qualities, organizations that successfully use applied theatre tend to be healthy, flexible, and able to improvise and adapt to various challenges. They tend to be creative and open to new perspectives and ideas.

## **Effective strategies**

We need a different paradigm for sustainable development based on being responsive in an improvisational manner, and informed by multiple knowledges. A general plan of action that makes efficient use of available resources to achieve the goal of women’s participation through applied theatre should include the following considerations:

- Every tactic or approach being taken in a project should be reimagined to discover how it could be adjusted to be more authentically participatory and contribute towards participants’ empowering themselves. Dr. Tom Barton is a prominent researcher, evaluator, author, social/community development specialist, medical anthropologist, and physician within the field of sustainable development. In his home office in Uganda, a quote that hangs on the wall



reads, “Does this process help users generate information to solve problems they have identified, using methods that increase their capacity to solve similar problems in the future?” (Narayan 1993). This type of a strategy is consistent with the theoretical work of Paulo Freire that stresses working *with* rather than *for* the people (Freire 2000).

- Be responsive to women's preferences, needs, and opinions. To be capable of nimble responses, sustainable development plans should be free from constraints that demand adherence to a plan or approach that does not suit the preferences, needs, and opinions of the community itself. Clearly this would require a change in how funding and planning usually occurs for development projects. It also requires a fundamental shift from believing that experts in the field of development know what is best and should be the ones devising solutions to local challenges. It requires acknowledging the expertise of the people living in local communities to be the experts of their own lives. ARTI in India is a successful example of this approach. They work among the rural people, for whom they design technologies, testing them among the people to see if they truly get adopted and used.
- Embrace a paradigm shift in how we envision development occurring. We think of development as serious business, which it is. A lot is at stake. People have very real needs that require solutions. Funders and governments invest real money into development and expect a solid plan with known objectives and likely outcomes. When we envision what a serious development meeting would look like, we certainly do not imagine the inclusion of children who may cry or fuss. We do not envision laughter. We imagine a structure for this meeting that is set, not improvised or open to suggestion, and is based on knowledge published and disseminated among development professionals. At such meetings, people largely remain seated in their chairs throughout. The room is arranged with the experts at the head of the room addressing those who are politely receiving their words. We would expect it to be expert-led and not overly participatory. If there is feedback, it occurs in an orderly way at times decided by the experts. What history tells us is that the above model all too often fails because it is not sufficiently inclusive, responsive, or locally informed.

Imagine now a very serious meeting for development that tolerates the inclusion of children so that mothers can participate. Community members take part in determining the agenda and objectives for the meeting through participatory activities that include the entire person—intellect, body, emotions, and beliefs (see Photo 6.4). Chairs are arranged in a circle and often people are on their feet moving their bodies or acting out possible development scenarios that draw forth strong emotional responses. The meeting is informed by knowledge from multiple sources and from multiple perspectives. Hierarchies among people at this meeting are intentionally dismantled to create a more even playing field.

At times this meeting is noisy and could appear to be chaotic as people passionately discuss various approaches or solutions (see Photo 6.5). People have fun and often share laughter when recognizing social truths newly revealed through the action. This is a meeting specifically designed to draw forth the ingenuity, creativity,



*Photo 6.4* A development meeting that includes the use of applied theatre for the Appropriate Rural Technology Institute in India.



*Photo 6.5* A woman in India enjoying her involvement in an applied theatre meeting for sustainable development amid seeming chaos.

intelligence, and agency of community members, for whom the development is being planned. It is a model that is inclusive, responsive, and locally informed.

Inherent in the design of applied theatre are qualities that can help usher in a more successful form of sustainable development. Applied theatre as a strategy is like a plan without a plan. It is a mechanism for deep listening. It is a method without an agenda. It is a container to be filled with content by the participants. It is a mobilizer for this content. It can be used to interrogate, rehearse, and improve plans for action before precious resources are invested. It can build enthusiasm, strengthen resolve, and gather consensus. It leads participants in imagining a more just model for society and can portray how that new model could usher in a more equitable and just world. Key design elements of applied theatre include: being improvisational; nonhierarchical; facilitated—not led; working *with* a community not *for* a community; and finally, capable of incorporating a variety of knowledges. Women living in poverty are well adapted to carry some of these essential characteristics forward into development projects through applied theatre. They have the least to lose in terms of real or perceived power and privilege, so are likely willing to engage in an improvisational method that destabilizes current power structures that determine privilege. Applied theatre is particularly relevant to women's participation because women—especially women living in poverty—are the adult sector of the population least able to participate in the current model of development. If women are not able to participate, the world is robbed of their insight, input, and perspective. Women are the majority of people who are subsistence surviving due to multiple factors such as climate change and political instability. They have a learned resilience from that life experience, a skill set to cope with those challenges, and knowledge that is vastly different than the usual contributors to the development conversation. This is not to say that women's contribution is necessarily superior, just that currently our world doesn't sufficiently benefit from it. Given that we as a world community are up against pretty serious challenges, we need all the knowledge available and the widest variety of skills possible.

When creating theatre with women—either in a form that will be recorded or is live—one approach is to have the people who are the intended recipients of the work see themselves and their lives represented on the stage. This contributes to audiences feeling as though the content of the performance is relevant to their lives. Another approach introduced by Priyadarshini Karve with ARTI in India was to have the drama feature the lifestyles to which the intended audience *aspires*. This approach was in response to the increased access to television and Internet by those living in poverty in rural areas. Rural populations aspire to the urban lifestyles they see represented in the programming. Thus, Karve wanted to create films next that show ARTI's clean-burning cookstoves being used in well-to-do urban homes. Though this will likely create a desire for the cookstoves, it will also likely create the desire to emulate many aspects of this life—some of which run contrary to sustainable development aims, desires that result in higher energy and resource consumption. However, Karve's idea is in many ways the antidote to this problem in that she wants to portray urban people using fuel-efficient ways of cooking.

When involving women in applied theatre, their time should be respected, especially when working with women living in poverty who often experience

time-poverty. Participation in applied theatre can be a welcome respite from the drudgery of labor and should be offered to women when feasible. Sometimes, as with Jana Sanskriti, women encounter negative consequences as a result of participating in applied theatre (see Chapter 1). Women, nonetheless, should be able to weigh the costs and benefits of participation themselves and should not be overlooked out of a protective impulse. That said, make all attempts to mitigate and lessen likely negative consequences by making the project as culturally appropriate as possible, and listening to the women themselves to determine what that is. Since time for everyone is a precious commodity, respect participant’s time and use it well. Prepare extensively and give them some valuable benefits in exchange for the investment of their time. Provide the chance for fun, but make it fun with substance. Account for women’s likely need to bring children with them and plan accordingly. Beyond that, consider ways children can be involved such that they too are trained to see women and themselves as potential agents of change.

Another strategy that is useful when using applied theatre for women’s participation is to address the need for mutual support and encouragement among women, in order to sustain their participation. Women’s more empowered behavior is not always congratulated by their societies, families, or mates. Support from a community of women all sharing in this process of transformation can strengthen women’s resolve to continue stepping into their new roles as agents of change in their communities. Applied theatre exercises that help to build community and increase trust can be used to support and encourage new behavior. For a “training of the trainers” workshop I led in Nicaragua, I used the following trust exercise. I asked groups of five to all stand close together with one person in the middle of the circle with her arms crossed against her chest and her eyes closed. I asked the center person to let herself continually fall off balance, relying on the rest of the group to keep her from falling.

The outcome of the trust exercise, in which one person in the support group was literally supported by the others as she continually fell off balance, was that participants identified how important it was to be responsible as part of a support group in helping each other. Many of the women said that they were happy to have experienced both roles—the supporter and the person being supported. Another participant added that the person being supported had a responsibility too: to not put too much of her weight on the group and cause undue stress on the group. Another woman noted that when someone is missing in the group that it is harder on the others and makes the others feel more vulnerable. (Osnes 2012, p. 54)

This example demonstrates that even a simple trust exercise can yield a nuanced understanding of the importance of support and trust among women working together. Another example of building support among women can be found in Chapter 3, in which the Starfish One by One students learned methods to overcome giggling that stood as an obstacle to others trying out new empowered behaviors.

## Useful approaches and tactics

The tactics for executing the strategy described above can be achieved through a seemingly endless number of applied theatre approaches and tactics. Besides those mentioned throughout this book, others can be found in these sources listed below. This list is in no way exhaustive, but does provide an idea of the types of resources available. Also note that that existing exercises described in these works can be adjusted and evolved to suit different situations and needs.

- *Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002) is a classic text that sets out the principles and practice of Boal's revolutionary method for engaging both actors and nonactors.
- Viola Spolin's book *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques* (1999), though not written with applied theatre in mind, includes more than 200 improvisational exercises that can be used with all levels and ages of performers.
- *Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual* (1998) by Michael Rohd is a manual that provides a clear look at the process and specifics involved in the Hope Is Vital interactive theatre techniques, beginning with warm-up exercises and bridging activities, to improvisational scene work, during which students can replace characters in the stories.
- *Theatre for Conflict Resolution: In the Classroom and Beyond* (2003) by Patricia Sternberg outlines a variety of playmaking activities and theatre games designed to teach students alternative solutions to conflict resolution.
- *Geese Theatre Handbook: Drama with Offenders and People at Risk* (2002) by Clarke Baim and Sally Brookes explains how drama can be used with offenders and similar target groups in therapy groups.
- *Interactive and Improvisational Drama: Varieties of Applied Theatre and Performance* (2007) by Adam Blatner provides useful information about psychodramatic methods for approaching applied theatre.
- *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (2005) by Jan Cohen-Cruz tracks the development of community-based performance as a mix of art, theatre, dance, politics, experimentation, and ritual, community-based performance that is often a collaborative effort of professional artists and local residents. It can be used for community organizing, cultural self-representation, and education.
- More general in its approach, Mat Schwarzman's *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts* (2005) is a guidebook demonstrating the enormous power of art in grass-roots social change.

## Recommendations for further research

One area that is touched upon by this book that deserves further research is participatory methods of monitoring and evaluation of applied theatre. The field of applied theatre in general has need of more verifiable methods for participatory



*Photo 6.6* Participants of the Navajo Women’s Energy Project marking their responses to baseline questions on a circular grid marked on the floor.

monitoring and evaluation. Beyond that, methods specifically designed to facilitate women’s participation in monitoring and evaluation are needed. Women can share in the power and agency of the development work being done by participation in monitoring and evaluating their own progress towards their own decided goals. In this manner women can be the ones to author views and statements over their own development. At the Navajo Women’s Energy Project referenced at the beginning of this chapter, I tried a new method for women to communally establish a baseline for the day’s objectives. I marked three concentric circles using blue masking tape on the floor in the space in which we were meeting (see Photo 6.6). Based on their response to each of the six questions I asked, I invited participants to place themselves somewhere in the space based on their response, with the center being “very much so” and the outside circle being “not at all.” The questions were derived from the goals expressed by the Navajo organizers. The questions were:

- How well do you feel you know the people in this room?
- How comfortable do you feel using your voice to share your personal concerns?
- How comfortable do you feel using your voice to share your community concerns?
- How well do you understand the project we will begin today?
- How interested are you in changing the current story of energy?
- How involved do you want to be in this project?



I had assigned a numeric value to each position on the pattern and took photos of the women after each question so as to record their responses for the common record.

At the end of the day, we repeated this entire process with the same questions, to evaluate the extent to which our objectives were achieved. Besides generating quantitative data, this participatory method had the added benefit of letting the women themselves come to know immediately how the rest of the community felt in regard to the objectives for the event—both at the beginning of day and at its completion. I preferred concentric circles over linear markings on the floor that may have set up some sort of hierarchy among the women, given that one of our objectives was to engender a sense of community. This process also got participants on their feet and into the space we would be using for the day. Deepa Narayan states that “in the end, the only way to become both knowledgeable in, and comfortable with, participatory evaluation is by actually doing it. There is no formula, nor can there be a blueprint or manual. By definition, participatory evaluation is a dynamic field” (Narayan 1993, p. xi). Our experience was that by just trying it, we not only were able to gather some data with which to evaluate the effectiveness of our methods, but we started to understand how we could create even more ways to monitor our efforts in a participatory manner.

For example, I began to realize how applied theatre exercises themselves could be used to monitor and evaluate progress made towards objectives. One of the objectives for the applied theatre workshop for girls in the Starfish One by One program is to increase the range of physical expression. To evaluate if this has been achieved by the workshop over time, a facilitator could lead an exercise in the beginning of a session to measure the range and then again at the end to measure any increase. A simple relaxation exercise could be used in which the arms swing up with an inhalation of breath, and swing down with an exhalation of breath. Someone in the group could take a photograph of the full extension or the apex of the swing up at the beginning of the workshop, and again near its completion. Any increase in range of motion could be assessed and noted.

Another area that could benefit from further research is the increased intersection between applied theatre and education entertainment (EE). In this book I position EE as a form of applied theatre, but what emerged from the case study on PMC is that because the theoretical foundation of EE is *not* based on the theoretical values of Paulo Freire, EE tended to result in lower levels of participation for women living in poverty. Chapter 5 of this book notes that leaders in the field of EE, Arvind Singhal and Everett Rogers, anticipate that future EE interventions will likely see more integration with participatory communication approaches, specifically mentioning the work of both Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire (Singhal & Rogers 2004, p. 18). Indeed, PMC has already begun using more participatory evaluation methods. What is ripe for research and experimentation is the combining of applied theatre methods with EE programming—in all aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The verifiable success of EE in bringing about large-scale behavior change could be combined with applied theatre to incorporate more authentic participation by women, such that both EE and applied theatre



would benefit from the merger of approaches. It would be useful to determine if the strength of each can be maintained in this merger or if the combining of the two diminishes those strengths, and if so, in what ways.

Further research into a consideration between the value of live applied theatre and the expansive reach of mediatized forms specific to applied theatre could be useful. Understanding the economic and social costs and benefits of live versus recorded or mediatized forms of theatre and drama could help organizations choose how to approach using applied theatre to achieve their objectives. When interviewing PMC founder William Ryerson, he stated that the difference between the two really gets down to the cost per behavior change (Ryerson 2012). This line of thought could be one point of departure for comparing the two. Also—as is the case with ARTI in India—methods for combining the showing of films in conjunction with some local live performance could be further explored as a method for making mediatized forms of applied theatre more relevant for the group of people viewing it. Looking at trends for drama being consumed at home through devices newly accessible—even to those living in poverty—could be studied to determine the likely impact of this trend on live forms of theatre and reception of applied theatre. Though this cultural shift is often perceived as a threat to live theatre, perhaps there are ways to work with this trend to maximize reach and depth of applied theatre through creative means. Through examples such as Soul City, PMC, and The Whitehouse Project, we see television programming expanding society’s collective imagination of what is possible and acceptable for women’s participation, at a scale that can make a substantial impact. Balancing these explorations should also be research into the value of live connection between humans and what uniquely can result in those conditions. Human copresence may be the most arresting thing able to impact lasting behavior change. Furthermore, there may be qualities to live performance that render it difficult for oppressive forces to co-opt.

## **In closing**

My belief is that applied theatre can help bring about a revolution, a forcible overthrow of the existing social order that will usher in a more equitable system that welcomes the participation of both men and women. Not a violent force, but, rather, a creative one, that is patient, inclusive, fun, messy, improvisational, caring, alive, and—once unleashed to the majority—unstoppable. One result will be a fundamental change in our way of thinking about women and the value of their participation in meeting the collective challenges we face as one human family on Earth.

The obstacles to sustainable development can seem too mighty to ever topple when one considers challenges such as rising population on earth, climate change, the ever-widening gap between the very rich and the very poor, desertification of once fertile land, and continual violence and unrest. The best strategy I can think of in the face of the seemingly impossible odds is to persistently and positively keep telling another story of how it *could be*: how it *could be* more equitable, how it *could* include everyone—men and women whether rich or poor—and how

responsibility and privilege *could be* more equitably shared for the improvement of everyone's lives. That story is not self-evident. It is not a story being told by most governments, advertisers, corporations, or by manufacturers benefitting from society's unbridled consumption. This new story needn't demonize industry or some "other" as the source of all inequity and societal woes. This story could acknowledge our complicity and participation in much of this, and could figure out how we could transition to a new story.

I believe applied theatre is an accessible, dynamic, and adaptable tool for telling these new stories and involving a multitude of people in the telling—especially women living in poverty. It also provides an active forum for negotiating various aspects and details of these imagined realities, complete with their inevitable conflicts and challenges. It gives us practice for resolving differences and a creative process for exploring as-of-yet unimagined solutions. By welcoming the participation of women as storytellers of these sustainable futures, new perspectives can enrich our collective imagining and bring about a vibrant and glorious revolution that will benefit us all.