

***Forum Theatre as a Tool for Peacebuilding:
Participatory Approaches to Conflict Resolution in Jos Metropolis***

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Abstract

This study explores the application of Forum Theatre as a participatory tool for peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis, a part of Nigeria deeply affected by religious and ethnic conflict. Drawing from Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the research employed Forum Theatre to engage Christian and Muslim communities in co-creating and performing an "anti-model" – a dramatized scenario of violence that reflects the tensions between these groups. Through interactive performances, community members assumed the roles of spect-actors, interrupting and re-enacting scenes to suggest non-violent alternatives to conflict escalation. The study found that Forum Theatre facilitated critical reflection, encouraged dialogue, and enabled participants to collectively explore solutions to their shared challenges. Furthermore, the research highlighted the potential of theatre as a medium for conscientization, empowering participants to critically evaluate the underlying causes of conflict and their roles in perpetuating or resolving it. The study concludes that Forum Theatre holds significant promise as a tool for community-driven peacebuilding, offering an inclusive space for dialogue, emotional release, and collaborative problem-solving in conflict-prone environments.

Keywords: Forum Theatre, Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Participatory Theatre, Jos Metropolis

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Introduction

Background and Context

Jos Metropolis, located in Nigeria's Plateau State, has experienced recurring violent conflicts since the early 2000s, primarily driven by ethnic and religious divisions. The tensions between Christian and Muslim communities have resulted in cycles of violence, property destruction, and loss of lives, making Jos one of the epicenters of Nigeria's inter-religious conflicts (Egwu, 2001). The historical roots of this conflict are multifaceted, involving struggles over land, indigeneity rights, and political control, often exacerbated by economic disparities and social exclusion (Best & Rakodi, 2011). Over the years, Jos has become a city divided by physical and socio-cultural boundaries, with neighborhoods segregated along religious lines, further entrenching the divisions between its Christian and Muslim residents.

The socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict are profound, affecting everyday interactions between people of different religious affiliations. There is a significant erosion of trust between the two communities, which has made peacebuilding efforts more challenging. Misinformation, rumor-mongering, and the spread of hate speech through social media often escalate tensions, sometimes triggering violent outbreaks (Krause, 2011). Amid these recurring conflicts, government-led interventions, including peace committees and security deployments, have achieved limited success in addressing the underlying causes of violence and fostering lasting reconciliation.

In response to these challenges, there has been increasing recognition of the need for grassroots-level, participatory approaches to peacebuilding that actively engage local communities. Such approaches are essential for addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict and for creating a sense of ownership among community members in the peace process. One such approach is Forum Theatre, which offers an innovative, participatory method of addressing conflict through performance and dialogue. This study seeks to explore how Forum Theatre, as a form of participatory theatre, can be employed as a tool for peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis.

Problem Statement

In conflict zones such as Jos Metropolis, peacebuilding efforts must go beyond top-down interventions to actively engage local communities in dialogue and conflict resolution. Traditional approaches, including government policies and external mediation, often fail to address the complex socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of conflict, leaving deep-seated grievances unaddressed. Moreover, they seldom provide avenues for ordinary community members to participate in shaping the peace process.

Participatory approaches, which include the voices and perspectives of those most affected by the conflict, are crucial for fostering sustainable peace. Forum Theatre, developed by Augusto Boal (1992) as part of his Theatre of the Oppressed framework, is one such participatory approach. It transforms spectators into active participants, or "spect-actors," allowing them to intervene in the performance and propose solutions to conflict situations. This method has proven effective in various conflict-affected contexts worldwide, yet its application in Jos, where socio-religious tensions dominate, has not been fully explored.

The need for innovative, community-driven approaches to peacebuilding is critical in Jos, where repeated cycles of violence have left a legacy of mistrust and division. By involving community members in the performance and resolution of conflict scenarios, Forum Theatre has the potential to foster dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim communities, thereby contributing to the peacebuilding process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of Forum Theatre as a tool for peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis, focusing on how this participatory method can engage Christian and Muslim communities in conflict resolution. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how Forum Theatre can:

- i. Raise awareness about the importance of peaceful coexistence.
- ii. Encourage dialogue and critical reflection among community members.
- iii. Provide an alternative platform for conflict resolution that involves the active participation of those directly affected by the conflict.

By investigating the application of Forum Theatre in Jos, this study aims to demonstrate its potential as a transformative tool for peacebuilding, particularly in regions where traditional peacebuilding efforts have struggled to produce long-lasting results.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following key research questions:

- i. How can Forum Theatre be used to raise awareness about conflict resolution in Jos Metropolis?
- ii. What role does community participation play in the effectiveness of Forum Theatre for peacebuilding?
- iii. How does the use of Forum Theatre alter existing conflict narratives and contribute to dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities in Jos Metropolis?

These questions are designed to assess both the theoretical and practical aspects of using participatory theatre as a tool for conflict resolution and to gauge the impact of Forum Theatre on the communities involved.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on the use of applied theatre, particularly Forum Theatre, as a tool for social change and conflict resolution. While Forum Theatre has been successfully employed in other conflict contexts, such as post-apartheid South Africa and Colombia (Prentki & Preston, 2009), its potential in the context of religious and ethnic conflict in Nigeria has not been extensively explored. This research fills a critical gap by examining how Forum Theatre can foster peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis.

Second, the study highlights the importance of community participation in peacebuilding efforts. Traditional conflict resolution methods often exclude local voices, particularly those of marginalized groups. Forum Theatre, by contrast, empowers participants to engage directly with the issues affecting their communities and to propose alternative solutions. This

participatory approach is particularly relevant in the Jos context, where mutual distrust between Christian and Muslim communities has hindered open dialogue.

Finally, the research demonstrates the potential for Forum Theatre to serve as a bridge between divided communities, fostering empathy and understanding through performance. By allowing participants to re-enact conflict situations and explore non-violent alternatives, Forum Theatre can help challenge entrenched narratives and promote peaceful coexistence. The findings of this study may have broader implications for peacebuilding efforts in other conflict-prone regions, both within Nigeria and globally, where religious and ethnic tensions persist.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Forum Theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed

Forum Theatre is part of Augusto Boal's broader framework, Theatre of the Oppressed, which was first developed in the early 1970s as a tool for promoting social and political change. Boal (1992) envisioned theatre as a means of empowerment, where participants could actively engage in the resolution of conflicts by stepping into roles traditionally reserved for actors. Central to Boal's methodology is the idea of transforming passive spectators into "spect-actors," who not only witness the drama but intervene in it, thereby practicing real-world problem-solving in a simulated environment.

Boal's Forum Theatre specifically encourages this active participation by presenting an unresolved situation of oppression or conflict. The spectators are invited to suggest and act out alternative actions the protagonists might take to overcome the oppression. According to Boal, the goal of Forum Theatre is not to provide solutions but to provoke dialogue and foster critical thinking about possible resolutions (Boal, 1992). This approach aligns with Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, where marginalized or oppressed individuals become critically aware of their conditions and are empowered to take transformative action (Freire, 2005).

In the context of this study, Forum Theatre serves as a participatory platform where communities in Jos Metropolis can engage with real-life conflict scenarios. It allows participants to rehearse non-violent ways of addressing grievances and promoting coexistence, making it an ideal tool for addressing the deep-rooted socio-religious divisions that have plagued the city.

Forum Theatre and Conflict Resolution: Past Applications in Various Conflict Zones

Forum Theatre has been widely applied in diverse conflict zones worldwide, where it has demonstrated potential as a tool for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. For example, in Colombia, Forum Theatre has been used to address the deep-seated violence arising from decades of civil war. In such contexts, Forum Theatre has provided a platform for victims and ex-combatants to reimagine relationships and explore pathways to reconciliation (Aguar, 2019). By allowing participants to intervene and alter the course of conflict scenarios, Forum Theatre helps individuals process trauma, understand the perspectives of others, and test peaceful alternatives to violence.

In post-apartheid South Africa, Forum Theatre was used to engage communities affected by racial divisions and legacies of violence. As Kafewo (2010) notes, it allowed for a communal space where participants could collectively reflect on past injustices and explore avenues for

healing. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, Forum Theatre has been employed to engage communities affected by sectarian violence, creating dialogues between Protestant and Catholic communities to build trust and mutual understanding (Breed, 2009).

In the African context, Forum Theatre has been successfully utilized in countries such as Kenya and Rwanda to facilitate discussions on ethnic violence and post-genocide reconciliation, respectively (Burns et al., 2015). In Kenya, Forum Theatre interventions targeted youth groups to foster critical thinking about the dangers of ethnic violence, emphasizing the role of young people in preventing future conflicts. In Rwanda, Forum Theatre has helped survivors and perpetrators of genocide engage in difficult conversations, paving the way for restorative justice processes.

However, while these cases demonstrate the effectiveness of Forum Theatre in various conflict zones, its application in religious conflicts, particularly in West Africa, has been relatively limited. The present study contributes to filling this gap by applying Forum Theatre in Jos Metropolis, a region where religious identity plays a pivotal role in sustaining and aggravating conflicts.

Participatory Theatre in Peacebuilding: Fostering Dialogue, Empathy, and Social Cohesion

Participatory theatre, and specifically Forum Theatre, holds significant potential for fostering dialogue and social cohesion in conflict settings. Unlike traditional forms of conflict resolution, where external mediators or authorities are expected to provide solutions, participatory theatre empowers local communities to address their own conflicts. As Nicholson (2005) argues, theatre can humanize complex social issues, offering participants a space to reflect on their experiences and engage in dialogue without the immediate pressures of real-life consequences.

Empathy, a critical component of peacebuilding, is often fostered through theatre. By assuming the roles of others, participants in Forum Theatre are encouraged to understand the motivations, emotions, and challenges faced by opposing parties. This process of role reversal and experimentation in Forum Theatre enables participants to walk in the shoes of their adversaries, thereby reducing the psychological distance between conflicting groups (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009). It is this fostering of empathy that can help break cycles of revenge and retaliation, which are common in contexts like Jos.

Furthermore, as Haseman and Winston (2010) suggest, participatory theatre serves as a social laboratory where participants can safely experiment with alternative conflict resolution strategies. In doing so, it allows communities to rehearse for real-life change. When theatre is used as a peacebuilding tool, it not only provides a mirror for society to see itself but also a rehearsal for transformation, making it a powerful medium for communities seeking sustainable peace.

Conflict Dynamics in Jos Metropolis: Historical and Socio-Political Background

Jos Metropolis has a long history of ethnic and religious coexistence, but the eruption of violence in 2001 marked a turning point in its socio-political landscape. Historically, the indigenous ethnic groups, predominantly Christian, and Hausa-Fulani settlers, who are mostly Muslim, coexisted peacefully. However, as political competition and the question of indigeneity became more pronounced, these cleavages deepened, leading to tensions and

periodic outbreaks of violence (Egwu, 2011). Issues of land ownership, political representation, and economic disenfranchisement are intertwined with religious identities, making the conflict in Jos both a socio-political and religious one.

The Jos conflict is often framed as a Christian-Muslim confrontation, but it is crucial to recognize that it is also driven by broader economic and political forces. In many cases, violence has been sparked by political actors seeking to exploit religious divisions for electoral gain, particularly in contests for local government control (Ambe-Uva, 2010). As Krause (2011) notes, the manipulation of religious identities by political elites has further entrenched divisions, making reconciliation difficult.

Moreover, the spatial segregation of communities along religious lines has become more pronounced over the years, with entire neighborhoods being defined as Christian or Muslim. This physical segregation mirrors the deep social and psychological divide between the two communities. It is within this context that Forum Theatre seeks to intervene, providing a platform for both communities to come together and engage in critical dialogue about their shared challenges.

By presenting real-life conflict scenarios that resonate with the lived experiences of residents in Jos, Forum Theatre allows participants to reflect on the root causes of violence, examine their own roles in perpetuating conflict, and explore alternative ways of engaging with one another. Through this participatory approach, the study aims to contribute to ongoing peacebuilding efforts in the region by fostering understanding, empathy, and social cohesion.

Methodology

Research Design: Qualitative Research and Participatory Action Research

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically framed within the paradigm of participatory action research (PAR). Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to exploring the nuances of human experiences, social interactions, and the complexities of conflict, making it ideal for the Jos context. Participatory action research, on the other hand, goes beyond merely observing or recording data; it actively involves participants in the research process with the goal of effecting change (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, PAR was employed to engage community members directly in the creation and enactment of Forum Theatre performances. Participants were not only subjects of the research but co-creators of the content. This collaborative approach is essential in conflict zones, where the lived experiences of those directly impacted by the violence are critical in shaping relevant and meaningful interventions. The goal was not just to collect data but to empower participants to take ownership of peacebuilding processes in their communities. As Boal (1992) emphasized, Forum Theatre serves as a rehearsal for reality, allowing communities to explore non-violent conflict resolutions through active participation.

Study Participants

The study involved a diverse group of participants, reflecting the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of Jos Metropolis. Participants included community members from various religious backgrounds (Christian and Muslim), traditional leaders, religious leaders, and youth representatives. The inclusion of these different groups ensured a holistic

understanding of the conflict dynamics in the city. The involvement of youth, in particular, was crucial, as they are often the most affected by violence and are also key actors in perpetuating or resolving conflicts.

Community members were selected from neighborhoods that had experienced significant violence in the past, including Dadin Kowa, Anguwan Rogo, and Congo Russia. Religious leaders were invited based on their roles in mediating disputes within their congregations and communities. Youth representatives were selected to reflect the diversity of the population, with participants from both Christian and Muslim communities. This inclusion was vital, as the youth are often central to the cycles of violence but also hold the potential to lead reconciliation efforts.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection process was multi-faceted, utilizing the interactive and participatory nature of Forum Theatre to gather insights from the participants. The main methods of data collection included:

1. Forum Theatre Workshops and Performances

A series of Forum Theatre workshops were conducted over a period of four weeks in different parts of Jos Metropolis. These workshops provided participants with an opportunity to engage directly with the methodology of Forum Theatre. They worked collaboratively to create and perform short scenes that depicted common conflict scenarios in Jos, such as rumors of violence, religious confrontations, and misunderstandings in community interactions.

During the performances, which were attended by community members and leaders, the audience was invited to intervene at any point to change the course of the action. This method allowed participants to propose and act out alternative strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully. By stepping into the roles of actors, participants became spect-actors, actively engaging in the creative problem-solving process. This dynamic interaction provided rich data about the different perspectives within the community, as well as the preferred pathways to peace.

2. Audience Feedback and Interaction

The Forum Theatre methodology relies heavily on audience interaction and feedback. After each performance, audience members were encouraged to discuss what they had witnessed, suggest improvements, and share their reflections on the conflict scenarios presented. This feedback process was integral to understanding how different groups within the community perceived the causes and consequences of conflict, as well as their ideas for resolution.

Audience members were also invited to physically intervene in the scenes by taking on the roles of characters. This form of role reversal allowed participants to test alternative solutions and provided insights into how individuals from different religious or social backgrounds might respond to similar situations. These interactions were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3. Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Following the Forum Theatre performances, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected participants. These groups included a mix of community members, religious leaders, and youths. The FGDs allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the issues raised during the performances and provided a platform for participants to reflect on the experience of participating in Forum Theatre.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders, such as religious leaders and community elders, to gain further insights into the socio-cultural and religious dimensions of the conflict in Jos. These interviews focused on understanding how these leaders perceived the role of theatre in conflict resolution and what additional efforts were needed to promote peace in the region.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data collected through Forum Theatre performances, audience interactions, FGDs, and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method is appropriate for qualitative research that seeks to identify patterns and themes within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves coding the data and organizing it into key themes that emerge from the participants' responses and interactions during the research process.

The performances and discussions were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to identify recurring themes related to conflict causes, proposed resolutions, and the emotional or psychological responses of participants to the scenarios presented. Themes such as "miscommunication between religious groups," "economic competition," and "rumor-mongering" were central to understanding the conflict dynamics in Jos. Similarly, themes of "collaborative problem-solving" and "empathy building" were crucial to identifying how Forum Theatre could contribute to peacebuilding.

Thematic analysis was also used to evaluate how different groups—youths, religious leaders, and community elders—responded to the interventions. This comparative analysis allowed for a nuanced understanding of how different demographics engage with conflict and peace processes.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the conflict in Jos Metropolis, ethical considerations were paramount in the design and implementation of this study. The following measures were taken to ensure the ethical integrity of the research:

Informed Consent: All participants were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the research before consenting to participate.

Confidentiality: To protect the identities of participants, especially in a highly polarized and volatile environment, all personal information was anonymized.

Sensitivity to Conflict Context: The research team was aware of the potential risks involved in discussing sensitive topics related to religion and conflict. Facilitators were trained to

navigate these discussions carefully, ensuring that participants felt safe and respected throughout the process.

Avoiding Harm: Adequate care was taken to ensure that the scenarios presented in the anti-model did not reinforce stereotypes or incite hostility between religious or ethnic groups.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented based on the data collected through the Forum Theatre workshops, performances, audience feedback, focus group discussions (FGDs), and interviews. The thematic analysis of this data revealed several key insights into the nature of the conflict in Jos Metropolis, the perceptions of participants regarding peacebuilding, and the efficacy of Forum Theatre as a participatory tool for conflict resolution. The findings are organized into the following themes:

Root Causes of Conflict in Jos

One of the primary goals of the Forum Theatre process was to explore the participants' understanding of the root causes of conflict in Jos. Through the interactive performances and audience discussions, several recurring themes emerged as the underlying drivers of tension and violence in the metropolis. These included:

Religious Tensions

Participants highlighted religious differences as a major source of conflict in Jos. The Christian-Muslim divide was often seen as exacerbating existing tensions, with both sides perceiving the other as a threat. During the Forum Theatre performances, scenarios depicting misunderstandings between individuals of different faiths often triggered strong reactions from the audience, demonstrating how deeply religious identities are entrenched in the conflict.

Miscommunication and Rumor-Mongering

Another key theme was the role of miscommunication and the spread of rumors in fueling violence. Participants frequently referred to situations where false information had been spread, leading to escalations in violence. One of the Forum Theatre scenes, for example, portrayed a young man inciting violence based on a false rumor about attacks on his community. Audience members intervened to highlight the importance of verifying information before acting on it, emphasizing the destructive power of unchecked rumors.

Economic Competition

Economic hardship and competition for resources were also identified as significant contributors to the conflict. Both Christian and Muslim participants pointed out that economic inequality and the lack of employment opportunities for youth created fertile ground for violence. The Forum Theatre process allowed participants to reflect on how economic marginalization heightened tensions between different groups, particularly among young people, who felt disenfranchised.

Residential Segregation

Another factor contributing to the conflict is the residential segregation between religious and ethnic groups. Participants noted that certain neighborhoods in Jos are predominantly Christian or Muslim, which has led to increased isolation and mistrust. Forum Theatre scenes that depicted characters crossing into neighborhoods of different faiths or ethnicities often sparked heated debates among the audience, with many reflecting on the fear and mistrust that these physical and social divisions have created.

The Role of Youth in Conflict and Peacebuilding

The study found that youth played a dual role in the conflict dynamics of Jos. On the one hand, young people were often seen as both perpetrators and victims of violence. On the other hand, they were also identified as having the potential to lead peacebuilding efforts.

Youth as Perpetrators and Victims

The Forum Theatre scenes frequently portrayed youth characters as those who were easily swayed into participating in violence. Participants highlighted factors such as peer pressure, unemployment, and a lack of positive role models as reasons why young people were drawn into violent behavior. However, the audience interventions revealed a strong awareness among participants that youth could also be manipulated by political and religious leaders to carry out violent acts, pointing to a broader systemic issue.

Youth as Agents of Change

Conversely, the youth who participated in the Forum Theatre process demonstrated a desire to be part of the solution to the conflict. In one particularly poignant scene, a young man who had initially been portrayed as inciting violence was replaced by an audience member, who re-enacted the scene to show how the character could have used his influence to promote dialogue instead of violence. This intervention revealed a strong belief among the participants that young people, if properly supported and guided, could become key actors in promoting peace and reconciliation in Jos.

Efficacy of Forum Theatre in Peacebuilding

A key objective of this study was to assess how Forum Theatre could be used as an effective tool for peacebuilding in Jos. The findings suggest that the interactive, participatory nature of Forum Theatre made it a powerful medium for fostering dialogue and encouraging reflection on conflict resolution.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking

One of the most significant impacts of Forum Theatre was its ability to foster empathy among participants. By stepping into the roles of characters from different religious or social backgrounds, participants were able to experience conflicts from multiple perspectives. This was particularly evident in scenes where Christian participants played Muslim characters and vice versa. Audience members often commented on how this role reversal allowed them to see the humanity in the "other," breaking down stereotypes and reducing animosity.

Collaborative Problem-Solving

Forum Theatre also encouraged collaborative problem-solving. During the audience interventions, participants frequently offered alternative solutions to the conflicts presented in the scenes. This collective brainstorming process allowed for a wide range of perspectives to be heard and incorporated into the discussion. It also provided a safe space for participants to experiment with non-violent solutions to the conflicts they faced in their daily lives. For example, in one scene, participants suggested that a character should report a potential conflict to community leaders instead of resorting to violence, demonstrating the community's desire for more structured mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Engagement With Religious Leaders

The involvement of religious leaders in the Forum Theatre process was another key factor in its success. By participating in the workshops and discussions, religious leaders were able to engage directly with their congregants and offer guidance on how to navigate conflicts. Their presence lent legitimacy to the process and helped to bridge the gap between religious teachings and practical peacebuilding efforts. Several participants noted that seeing their religious leaders participate in the Forum Theatre workshops encouraged them to take the peacebuilding process more seriously.

Sparking Community Dialogue

Finally, the Forum Theatre performances helped to spark broader community dialogue about the ongoing conflict in Jos. The interactive nature of the performances allowed participants to express their frustrations, fears, and hopes in a constructive manner. The performances also attracted attention from other community members, who were not directly involved in the workshops but were curious about the process. This broader engagement highlighted the potential for Forum Theatre to serve as a catalyst for wider discussions about peacebuilding and conflict resolution within the community.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the positive outcomes, the study also identified several challenges in implementing Forum Theatre as a peacebuilding tool in Jos.

Logistical Challenges

Organizing and conducting the Forum Theatre workshops required significant logistical coordination, particularly in a conflict-prone environment. Issues such as ensuring the safety of participants, securing venues, and managing transportation for participants from different neighborhoods were persistent challenges. The presence of security concerns also limited the participation of some community members, particularly those who lived in areas where violence was more frequent.

Cultural Sensitivities

While Forum Theatre provided a platform for open discussion, it also brought to light deeply entrenched cultural and religious sensitivities. Some participants were hesitant to engage in discussions that they felt might be interpreted as criticizing their religious or ethnic group. This

tension was especially pronounced when dealing with sensitive topics such as land ownership or accusations of religious intolerance. The facilitation team had to navigate these issues carefully to ensure that the discussions remained respectful and productive.

Sustaining Engagement

A final challenge was sustaining the momentum generated by the Forum Theatre performances. While participants expressed enthusiasm and commitment during the workshops, there were concerns about how to maintain this level of engagement once the workshops concluded. Participants and facilitators alike acknowledged that while Forum Theatre was a powerful tool for initiating dialogue, sustained peacebuilding efforts would require ongoing support from community leaders, NGOs, and government agencies.

Discussion

This section evaluates the outcomes of the Forum Theatre initiative in Jos Metropolis, examining its effectiveness as a tool for peacebuilding and its capacity as a conflict resolution tool, comparing it with other peacebuilding strategies, and considers the limitations encountered during the study.

Effectiveness of Forum Theatre in Peacebuilding

The findings from this study suggest that Forum Theatre was highly effective in engaging participants and fostering dialogue around peacebuilding in Jos Metropolis. The interactive nature of the theatre performances encouraged active participation, enabling community members to reflect on the causes of the conflict and consider alternative solutions to violence. One of the most significant outcomes was the platform Forum Theatre provided for dialogue, allowing participants from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives.

Forum Theatre facilitated open discussion in a non-threatening environment where sensitive issues like religious tensions and miscommunication could be explored without fear of retaliation. The ability of participants to "step into the shoes" of characters from opposing sides allowed them to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of how violence and conflict are perpetuated by misunderstanding and misinformation. This experiential form of learning, in which participants are not passive spectators but active "spect-actors," deepened the peacebuilding process beyond mere discussion.

Additionally, the immediacy of the feedback and the ability to interrupt and modify the anti-model (the conflict-driven narrative) empowered participants to propose their own non-violent solutions. For example, audience members frequently intervened to de-escalate tense scenarios, suggesting peaceful alternatives to the violent reactions presented in the original scenes. This dynamic allowed participants to practice conflict resolution in real-time, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical action.

Overall, Forum Theatre proved to be an effective peacebuilding tool by:

- Engaging participants emotionally and intellectually.
- Fostering a sense of ownership over the conflict resolution process.
- Providing a platform for marginalized voices to contribute to dialogue.
- Promoting empathy and perspective-taking.

Forum Theatre as a Conflict Resolution Tool

When compared to other peacebuilding strategies, Forum Theatre offers unique contributions to conflict resolution in Jos Metropolis. Traditional approaches to peacebuilding, such as top-down interventions by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions, often focus on policy-making, security interventions, and structured dialogue sessions. While these methods are important, they sometimes lack the grassroots engagement necessary to foster lasting change at the community level.

Forum Theatre, in contrast, prioritizes community-driven solutions. It engages directly with the individuals affected by conflict, allowing them to reflect on their lived experiences and experiment with different approaches to peace. This method aligns with participatory action research principles, which emphasize the importance of involving the community in the research process as active participants rather than passive subjects. As a result, Forum Theatre can uncover local solutions to conflict that might not emerge in more formal, structured settings.

Another advantage of Forum Theatre is its flexibility and adaptability. The performative nature of the intervention allows it to address a wide range of conflict dynamics, from economic competition to religious tensions. It can be adapted to suit different cultural contexts and is accessible to diverse audiences, regardless of literacy levels or prior experience with peacebuilding efforts.

However, while Forum Theatre is effective in promoting dialogue and empathy, it is not a panacea for all forms of conflict resolution. Its impact is largely dependent on the willingness of the community to engage in the process and on the sustained involvement of local leaders and institutions. Additionally, Forum Theatre's focus on short-term interventions may not always lead to long-term peace unless supplemented with ongoing efforts, such as policy reforms, economic development programs, and community policing initiatives.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the promising findings, this study faced several limitations that should be acknowledged:

Challenges in Data Collection

Conducting research in a conflict-prone environment like Jos Metropolis presented logistical and security challenges. Ensuring the safety of participants and facilitators required careful planning and coordination. Some participants were reluctant to engage fully in discussions out of fear of retaliation or due to lingering mistrust between different religious or ethnic groups. This limitation may have affected the depth of data collected during the workshops and focus group discussions.

Participant Bias

Another limitation was the potential for participant bias. Since Forum Theatre requires participants to take an active role in conflict resolution scenarios, some participants may have presented idealized versions of their responses to conflict in order to align with socially desirable behaviors. For instance, participants may have advocated for peaceful solutions

during the performances, even if their real-life reactions to conflict situations might differ. This form of social desirability bias can limit the accuracy of the data collected regarding actual conflict behaviors.

Short-Term Nature of the Project

Finally, the short-term nature of the project limited the study's ability to assess the long-term impact of Forum Theatre on peacebuilding in Jos. While the immediate effects of the performances were encouraging, it remains to be seen whether the insights and behaviors developed during the workshops will translate into sustained peacebuilding efforts within the community. Future research should include longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of Forum Theatre interventions on community dynamics and conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for future implementations of Forum Theatre in Jos or similar conflict-prone environments:

Engagement With Local Authorities and NGOs: Future Forum Theatre initiatives should seek closer collaboration with local authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders to provide ongoing support for peacebuilding efforts and to help sustain the momentum created by the workshops.

Follow-Up Workshops: Regular follow-up workshops should be organized to ensure that participants have continued opportunities to engage in peacebuilding activities. These workshops could focus on specific issues raised during the initial sessions, such as economic challenges or youth unemployment.

Increased Youth Involvement: Given the central role of youth in both the perpetuation and resolution of conflict, future initiatives should prioritize youth participation and leadership in peacebuilding activities. Training programs for youth leaders in conflict resolution and non-violent communication could help amplify the impact of these initiatives.

Long-Term Monitoring and Evaluation: To assess the long-term impact of Forum Theatre on peacebuilding, future studies should incorporate mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This could include tracking changes in community dynamics, levels of violence, and perceptions of peace over time.

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the significant potential of Forum Theatre as a participatory tool for peacebuilding in conflict zones such as Jos Metropolis. By fostering empathy, encouraging collaborative problem-solving, and sparking community dialogue, Forum Theatre provides a platform for affected communities to explore alternative solutions to conflict. While challenges remain, particularly in terms of logistics, cultural sensitivities, and sustaining engagement, the overall impact of the project demonstrates the value of using creative, participatory approaches to address complex social issues.

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