



Local Economic Development in Sri Lanka



International
Labour
Organization

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The Forum Theatre experience

Outside the main urban centers and Western Province, in Sri Lanka the growth and employment potential of small businesses is often not fully exploited. Also, the start-up rate is low. The enterprise culture is one of the underlying causes. This story tells how theatre can support changes in the way people value business and entrepreneurship.

Project facts

Project title:
Enterprise for Pro-Poor Growth
(Enter-Growth)

Duration
June 2005 – May 2008

Donor:
Swedish International Development
Agency

ILO Units:
InFocus Programme on Boosting Em-
ployment Through Small Enterprise
Development (SEED)

National Partners:
Ministry of Enterprise Development
and Investment Promotion

Location:
Districts of Kurunegala and Puttalam
(North Central Province), districts of
Anuradhapura and Pollonaruwa
(North-West Province)

Objectives:
To contribute to pro-poor economic
growth and quality employment for
women and men, through an inte-
grated programme for development of
micro and small enterprises

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Enterprise culture at the local level may seem the most intractable aspect of the business environment. Yet, culture, traditions and perceptions change continuously through internal as well as external processes and pressures, contributing to constant social and economic innovation. In places where such processes are already happening, technical development projects, like the ILO-Enter-Growth, may support and boost them.

With the slogan: “your business, our future” a social marketing campaign invites people to reconsider their negative biases (i.e. “business is too risky”, “failure exposes one to ridicule”, “business exploits” or “business success exposes to envy”) by promoting entrepreneurship taking into account deeply

rooted local values. The campaign called “Palama” proposes that enterprises:

- Offer a better life, security, independence and comfort to people and their families;
- Give people the chance to do work they like, to learn, grow, create, and find fulfillment in what they do;

Box 1

What is a social marketing campaign?

A social marketing campaign, or *social change campaign*, is an organized effort conducted by one group (the change agent) which attempts to persuade others (the target adopters) to accept, modify, or abandon certain ideas, attitudes, practices or behavior”.
(Source: Wikipedia)



- Provide valuable services and products to the community, as well as contributing to its cultural and social life;

The drivers of “Palama” are so-called change agents, namely the *campaigners* (i.e. the theatre group) and the *influencers* (i.e. parents, teachers, community leaders, government officials).

Both campaigners and influencers have a key role in building and changing the mind set of other community members by exposing the audience to success stories and by encouraging the active participation of the theatre spectators to find alternative values regarding entrepreneurship.

Box 2

What is “Palama”?

“Palama” means bridge in Sinhale (Palam in Tamil). The campaign presents an enterprise as a bridge between poverty to prosperity, which can be crossed together rather than by the individual (since individual wealth-seeking is not appreciated).



A particularly successful initiative within the Palama social marketing campaign are the Forum Theatres, attract-

ing some 200 to 300 spectators per show.

Box 3

The Origins of Forum Theatre

The Forum theatre methodology was initially created in Brazil and is now being used all over the world, in developed as well as less developed countries. While it is generally used for social and political purposes, Enter-Growth was among the first technical cooperation projects to use the Forum Theatre for economic purposes.

To start with, the Forum Theatres are being promoted in each community through posters, flyers and announcements in schools and other public places.

Motivated by a campaign director, who runs all aspects of the campaign, local actors are usually highly committed to take on board the new form of theatre and develop the plays on the basis of their individual and community’s experience.

After an initial performance of a short tragic play, the audience is invited to intervene in the story, and to take over the lead and perhaps other roles in order to change the story’s tragic ending. This enables the audience to examine and explore their own motivations and environment. At the end of the Forum Theatre, brochures are made available that contain information on business and financial service providers and

member-based organizations that can advise people on whether and how to start a business.

The Campaign involves the target audience also through other interactive ways. Performances may be filmed or recorded to allow for subsequent radio broadcasting and discussions. In some cases they include poster competitions in schools.

Other means of campaign publicity are photo galleries, posters, T-shirts and additional gadgets.

Lessons learned

Do your homework first

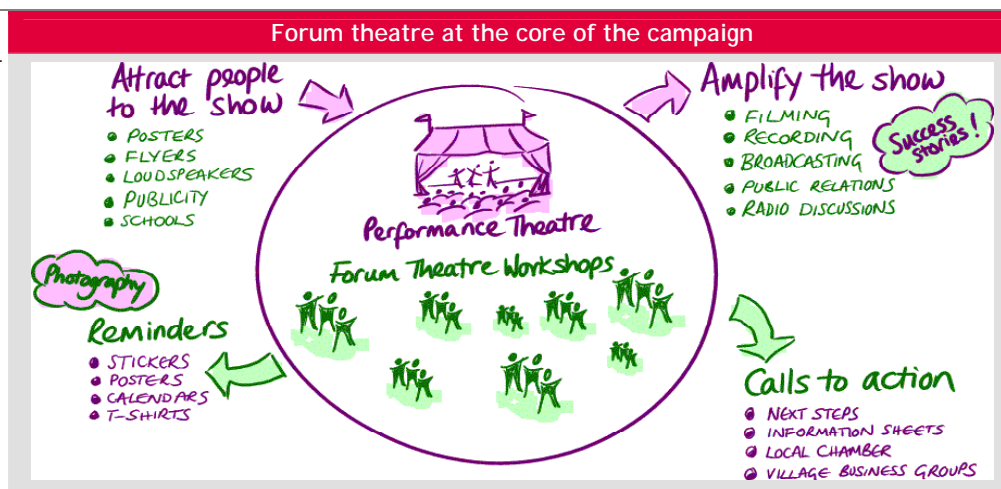
The project decided not to take the assertion that people were anti-business for granted. Instead, it tried to find out whether this was actually the case, and what values were at the root of this. This led to the development of a strategy and a “message” that builds on Sri

Lankan values rather than going against them. E.g. not “business makes you rich” but “business contributes to the community”. This enhances the chances of success as well as being a culturally and politically more responsible approach.

Choose the communication technique to suit the message and the audience

A simple message for a relatively homogeneous audience, such as for instance for safe sex in an HIV/AIDS campaign, can relatively effectively be transmitted using mass media. However, for a multi-faceted message which may call for different actions from different groups of people (e.g. for some to develop a business, for others not to advise their children against it), and which may need to be adapted to local environments, an interactive and flexible form of communication such as Forum Theatre is likely to be best.

Graph 1





Intensifying versus spreading messages

In order to increase the impact of the shows, it is more effective to carry out supplementary repeat performances in the same villages rather than covering a broader geographical area.

Empowerment and role models

For the sake of sustainability, it is advisable to transfer management responsibilities from the project to a local

(theatre) company. When - as in the Sri Lankan case- a competent company is not available, one can opt for assisting campaign partners in the creation of an association or company. Being for a longer period together will enhance the capacities of the actors and subsequently increase the impact of the show. Eventually, the group of actors is more empowered and even role modelling entrepreneurship.

THE AUTHOR

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