

Using forum theatre as a tool in the dialogue between scientists, people and policy makers in AMMA-2050

Date:	2019
Author(s):	Audia, Visman, Barnaud, Kniveton
Country / Region:	Senegal
Project or Programme:	AMMA 2050
Relevant Area of Change¹	Area of Change 6: Approaches to climate science research and climate-sensitive risks within medium-term decision making which enable active participation and address of the specific concerns of women and marginalised groups, as well as areas of change 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Type/purpose of case / story <i>(Please note that more than one box may be marked if relevant)</i>	Learning	V
	Illustrative	V
	Comparative	
	Representative	

Introduction (suggested 10%)

This case-study aims to show how forum theatre can be a powerful tool in the dialogue between scientists, people and policy makers as well as its ability to bring up cultural and socio-political issues which would otherwise stay on the sidelines.

The AMMA 2050 project is a multidisciplinary research effort aiming to address the challenges of understanding how the West African monsoon will change in future decades, and how this information can be most effectively used to support climate-compatible development in the region.

This case-study explores the value in taking a participatory and co-production focused approach to supporting climate adaptation in West Africa. We demonstrate the development and use of forum theatre to facilitate participation, dialogue and knowledge co-production between different stakeholders.

¹ FCFAs Areas of Change are:

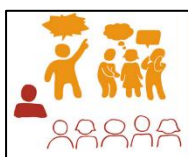
1. Enhancing scientific knowledge and prediction of African climate and new understanding of the resulting impact on the robustness of future climate change scenarios.
2. Strengthening scientists' capacities to develop decision-relevant climate information.
3. Increasing the capacities of users/decision making bodies/institutions to appropriately integrate climate information within medium-term decision-making.
4. Approaches that support co-production of decision-relevant climate information and enable channels for on-going dialogue between the providers and users of climate information.
5. Identifying social, political, behavioural and economic barriers to the use of climate information in long-term decision-making, working to elicit solutions which support effective integration of climate risks within decision making across scales, sectors and social groups.
6. Approaches to climate science research and climate-sensitive risks within medium-term decision making which enable active participation and address of the specific concerns of women and marginalised groups.

Climate information production is often presented as purely scientific and based on scientific knowledge systems. However, for it to be effectively used by a range of people, it needs to be understandable by users with diverse backgrounds and knowledge systems. Forum theatre is a type of theatre which turns audience into active “spect-actors”, becoming a tool to involve a large part of the climate information users in reflecting on climate change issues and adaptation options. In this context, it became a useful tool to address communication across knowledge systems as well as a methodology for understanding co-production of new knowledge.

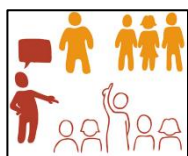
The change story (suggested 30%)

Forum theatre is a form of participatory theatre, resulting from the theatre of the oppressed (A. Boal 1931-2009), to discuss relationships of power, conscious or not, between different characters. Boal argued that “Theatre is a form of knowledge. It must also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future instead of just waiting for it.” (Boal, A., *Games for Actors and non-Actors*, 1992). As AMMA 2050 aimed to co-produce climate information to support climate-resilient agriculture in Senegal, Theatre Forum was employed to support dialogue amongst the different stakeholders whose engagement is vital to enabling climate adaptation. It is important to highlight that forum theatre is not a tool for education or awareness: rather it supports public analysis and collective experimentation.

Forum theatre is made of three different stages:



1. Actors play a story inspired by real facts and existing tensions between actors



2. A moderator (or *joker*) then invites debate to bring out feelings, interpretations and proposals for change in order to resolve the tensions observed. To drive the debate, Kaddu Yaraax performs ‘a trial’ where the behaviour of each character is reviewed by the spectators.



3. Spectators then come to replace one or more characters to test possible solutions and to discuss them collectively. In doing so, all participants experience a collective experimentation of new alternatives.

For this project, a team of climate scientists, crop geneticists, social scientists and anthropologists worked together with a Senegalese theatre company based in the Dakar neighbourhood of Yarrax. The Kaddu Yaraax are experts in forum theatre, a way to start meaningful conversations between and across a range of actors, using fictional characters to address power relationships, cultural hierarchies and barriers. In addition to qualitative methods such as participant observation and semi structured interviews, forum theatre added a layer of complexity to our research into science, policymaking and public relationships, attempting to address the extractive nature of research and shift the focus back on the people who use the produced climate information.

The play was co-developed by researchers from AMMA-2050 working across different sectors and disciplines. All involved scientists followed several steps in creating the play, starting with collecting feedback from their

peers and from the involved stakeholders on the tool, topic and use of forum theatre in the project. Then, from these feedbacks, the frame of a piece was co-built and co-written by a researcher collective in order to identify and successively select the tensions observed, as well as to focus on relevant issues. Finally, the researchers worked with the Kaddu Yaraax company; at this stage, the scenes of the play were defined following identified tensions. For each scene, actors and researchers worked together to ensure that it was addressing the project's aims and goals while ensuring that language, representations, humour and theatrical timings were socially relevant and culturally appropriate for the Senegalese context.

Analysis (suggested 30%)

The play, titled “Je m’acclimate, donc je suis” (I acclimatize, therefore I am), is a story told in four acts. In 2050, a journalist goes to a village to investigate how the agricultural situation had been affected by changes in climate and temperature. A farmer, a local scientist and a local government representative recall that a climate scientist had come to the village to explain the potential effects of climate and weather changes as well as climate uncertainty. Alarmed and confused by the uncertain explanation, they had decided to make a plan by adapting local seeds to increasing temperatures and making compost out of cowpea and white acacia. This request was rejected by the donor, who instead suggested seeds developed in China, funding to adapt them to the Senegalese climate and chemical fertiliser, also produced in China. To protect his political interests, the local representative had agreed, discarding the original project that had been put together by the village members. Combined, these events had led to the situation where the fields were poor, the soil was inhospitable and farmers forcibly retired. After this part of the play, the facilitator (called joker), asks the audience to recall the characters and their actions, to discuss and ultimately to judge if their actions were good or bad. Finally, following a discussion around the motivations of the characters, the spectators are asked to replace the actors and play the characters to show what they would have done differently to address the situation.

This play was performed several times across the project, with different audiences including at a local high school; at the project's annual meeting attended by representatives of the Senegalese national assembly and AMMA-2050 climate scientists and researchers across disciplines; at the Senegalese Agricultural Research Institute (ISRA) ; with decision-makers in Fatick region and farmers and farmer networks in Kaffrine region; for IRD (Institut pour la Recherche et le Développement) 70th birthday with stakeholders, decision-makers and researchers in Dakar.

The play explored the complexity of climate change, climate information and adaptation strategies across researchers from across disciplines, donors, local government and farmers.

- 1) Researchers: “Le probleme c’est la stratégie des logiques des bailleurs avec l’argent” (The issue is the donor’s logic with their money) (Spectator, Dakar, 2019)

The play allowed the researchers to talk about the relationship with donors and implications of needing funding. Researchers from the global South also highlighted a misalignment of local priorities with global funding. They also identified issues of scientists not communicating well with farmers and, more importantly, the potential effects and consequences of the miscommunication. Many replacements suggested by the researchers were around the role of the climate scientist in the play, trying to address communication issues and avoid confusion. Other researchers suggested presenting a stronger study to the donor, to have more chance of convincing them.

- 2) Policy-makers: “ Sa faute qu’il a commise est de ne pas retourner avec les autres, avec qui il a monté le projet, pour leur en informer avant de prendre la décision ; donc ça c’est très important comme point. (His fault [the local representative’s fault] is that he never went back to the others who helped

write the project to get their opinion before deciding, and that's a very important point) (Spectator, Somone, 2019)

Similar to the researchers, policy makers picked up on faults of the local government representative's character, accusing him of focussing on his own political agenda, short-term vision (restricted to his 5 year mandate), personal gain (in giving jobs to people in his own village) and lack of participatory views (as he didn't consult the other proposal's authors before accepting the new and different type of funding. The policy makers also highlighted the researchers' issues, including communicating with people in a different language, not taking the time to explain the uncertainties of science and being extractive, especially in taking up an idea of a woman farmer in the village without giving her credit for it.

- 3) People : "je ne vois pas qu'il est là pour l'intérêt de la population donc il faut l'amener sous le soleil." (I don't see him being there in the interest of his local population, so I have to judge his actions bad) (Woman, Niakhar, 2019)

The play was performed in two villages, with audience of farmers, local representatives of government, NGOs, farmers' associations. People seemed to be focussed a lot on the role of their elected representatives and the focus on personal gain that is represented in the play. The audience also put forward some interesting ideas around the role of journalists and their capacity to tell the right story and influence consequences. Some of the spectators also commented on the communication of research from scientists (including distance, complex terms, confusion). There were discussions around the role of women and cultural barriers in tackling adaptation strategies, as it was identified that the woman in the play did not stand her ground with the men and "became part of the background" (Man, Niakhar, 2019).

Using forum theatre as part of the project was an interesting and innovative way of building common ground between different kinds of actors. The technique focussed on changing the power relationships between the groups and shifting the object of the conversation towards what was being represented. This led to different dynamics and a space in which all actors felt safe to intervene, critique and judge – as the play was asking them to, bringing forward issues that otherwise would have remained tacit. In a context of knowledge co-production, building common ground is a fundamental step, necessary to open dialogue to change perspectives on actors and key themes such as climate information communication to tackle climate change.

The discussions that were happening off the back of forum theatre were filmed and captured, with also aimed to address the extractive nature of research; participants free to steer the conversation and to talk about topics that would have been hard to approach otherwise. Moreover, because they were put in front of fictional characters, they were able to question their own roles. This enabled lively debate focussed on fictional characters, avoiding pointing fingers at colleagues. To increase stakeholders' participation and use forum theatre as a tool for a wider variety of audiences, a short film has been created and used to start the debate at the African Climate Risks Conference in Addis Ababa in October 2019; this led to a debate with donors, researchers and climate scientists of different countries and institutions. The recordings of "I acclimatise, therefore I am" are also in the process of being edited for another short film; combined with interviews of participants, actors and decision-makers, this film reflects on the play, puts forward forum theatre as an approach for co-production and highlights its impacts within and beyond AMMA-2050. This second short film ultimately aims to start a discussion around power, agency and roles of different stakeholders faced with climate change in the context of a complex, multi-actors system.

Forum theatre is therefore a way of conveying complex concepts such as climatic uncertainty, causality and impacts of decisions at different time scales. In representing potential outcomes, the play aimed to start a discussion around roles, responsibilities, ability to act and capacity to understand consequences of adopting specific strategies.

Some longer terms implications of the forum may be seen in the organisations that are part of AMMA2050. The project used forum theatre as well as a range of other approaches to co-production, including participatory planning and plateau games, participatory impact pathways analysis and innovation platforms; as a result of

these efforts, some researchers have confirmed that they aim to commit to stakeholder engagement throughout their projects and attempt to make it official within their own institutions.

Learning (suggested 30%)

This case-study shows how using arts for research can be a powerful method to engage with different stakeholders and support a science-policy-society dialogue on key issues.

In an interdisciplinary and international project such as AMMA 2050, forum theatre proved to be a useful methodology to create common ground to communicate climate information in a meaningful way with a diverse range of actors, in a more equal setting. Moreover, it offered the opportunity to discuss decision-making impact and current or future policy options in counteracting climate change. In doing so, it was integral to the co-production approach overarching the project.

Forum theatre was particularly useful in changing dynamics of a conversation, as people were feeling free to address issues with actors rather than directly talking about institutions, organisations or colleagues. When policy makers were present, it enabled them and the scientists to have a leveled discussion. The trial part of the forum theatre, where the audience are asked to judge the characters' actions, is key to this process. It is a trial and people are encouraged to judge actions, but they also must motivate them and support them, refocusing the discussion constantly and promoting an open debate between and across stakeholders.

Forum theatre was also important in conveying complex messages, while linking the specific situation portrayed in the play to broader issues of communicating information, taking action based on research, aligning researchers' and donors' priorities and exploring new ways of dialoguing across the society-policy-science interface.