

## WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

### Theatre and Development

The use of a play to open the workshop and Kabwe Kasoma's paper on Theatre and Development sparked the liveliest discussions of the workshop.

The idea of using theatre clearly gripped everyone's imagination but some of the group were worried by the practical implications of Kabwe's concept of audience participation. Kabwe argued that the early twentieth century Western tradition of a clear distinction between stage and audience and the lack of direct audience involvement was an entirely inappropriate mode of theatre for developing countries in Africa. He argued that a "theatre of involvement" was needed. When dancing began in a village there was no clear distinction between dancers and audience. Unself-consciously members of the audience grabbed a cloth, tied it round their waists, and joined in the dancing. So it should be with the theatre.

One participant said that it was all very well for Kabwe to want the audience to come up on the stage and join in the action, but the playwright has written a play and the actor has learned his lines; how is the actor to react to audience intervention and how will the play develop after the interruptions? Kabwe explained that the actors would be chosen for their ability to improvise and that the play would be structured in such a way that the thread could easily be picked up again after the interruptions. He stressed that they weren't really interruptions, but an integral part of the play. In his experience with taking plays into the rural areas of Zambia, he had never found any difficulty. The audience may have forgotten for a moment that the play was a play, but after they had had their say they were quite content to sit down again and let the play unfold.

Another participant asked if Kabwe would subordinate the play completely to the needs of the development project, if the discussion that it provoked was so important that it was better to give up the play and follow the discussion to its logical conclusion? Kabwe replied that that would depend how closely the play was meant to be in support of a particular project, and that perhaps the answer was open-ended plays that were meant just to provoke discussions and argument. In response to those who were unclear or unsure about his proposed audience involvement, Kabwe promised to experiment at another performance of the play (put on again on Wednesday, May 8th, in the second week of the workshop).\* John Balcomb pointed out the great flexibility of the theatre and its ability to adapt quickly to audience reaction.

Kabwe made a plea for the development of National theatres in developing countries. An active National Theatre is the key to the development of ideas, scripts, actors and directors for other media. Theatre is a nursery for talent and the mother of other media. In conclusion, he quoted the words of Bertholt Brecht:

"If you want to build a nation, you must build a good theatre to create a national soul."

\* At the repeat performance of the play "Distortion", Kabwe 'planted' two actors in the audience who interrupted the play and began arguing about the Council and its work in the squatter areas.



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**Summarizes the workshop's discussion of the use of theatre in communication for development.**

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