



# When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre

By Zakes Mda

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There is a growing sense that existing media have failed to serve the purposes of development, and in particular have not reflected either the concerns or the needs of the rural majority in Third World countries. Theatre, however, is now being used as a way of increasing popular participation in the development process. This book examines these experiences of training extension workers in the use of theatre-for-development, and explores the author's own attempts - notable with the Marotholi Travelling Theatre in Lesotho - to develop a new model of theatrical communication. The structures of communication, Mda argues, should be democratized. They ought to increase participation, promote equity and self-reliance, and close the gap between people and government. Theatre in Africa has potential as a democratic medium for it can enable audience participation, integrate indigenous and popular systems of communication and use whatever local resources are to hand. But he stresses it is important not to romanticise the democratic dimension of theatre-for-development. Intervention is also required as a technique. And not for all its forms - agitprop, forum theatre - have been successful. If theatre is to play a role in the expression of the development problems faced by people who are marginalized, then a more carefully thought out methodology combining intervention and participation is needed - to mobilize, provide a genuine two-way communication, and revitalize people's own forms of cultural expression. A realistic awareness of the financial and political constraints that can undermine even the best-conceived projects is also vital.

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