

# Palama

A bridge to a different way of working



## **Case Study of the Palama Forum Theatre Project for Enterprise Culture Sri Lanka, 2005-2008**

Chris Seeley

Prepared for: ILO-Enter-Growth Sri Lanka  
October 2008

*This case study has been prepared with invaluable contributions from Sri Lankan villagers, entrepreneurs, theatre, development and business professionals working together with the support of development and theatre professionals from Austria, Denmark, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.*

*All contributors to this case study, except where their research has been published, remain individually anonymous and unnamed beyond the general nature of their involvement with Palama*

*The author led the team that designed the campaign following the initial socio-cultural research, but was not part of the campaign's implementation.*

## Palama at-a-glance

Basic scoping data	
<i>Start of preparing the campaign</i>	September 2005
<i>Expected completion of the campaign</i>	late 2008
<i>Number of theatre groups started</i>	4
<i>Total number of actors trained</i>	60
<i>Total number of Palama events to August 2008</i>	257 events
<i>Palama events in Anuradhapura District</i>	56
<i>Palama events in Kurunegala District</i>	37
<i>Palama events in Polonnaruwa District</i>	104
<i>Palama events in Puttalam District</i>	60
<i>Total audience reached to August 2008</i>	~119,000 rural villagers
<i>Average audience per performance event</i>	~465 people
<i>Total number of Forum Theatre participants</i>	~1250 spect-actors
<i>Estimated overall reach of Palama</i>	200,000 villagers
<i>Percentage of audience members who changed their beliefs about business as a result of seeing Palama</i>	41%
<i>Percentage of audience members who thought of a response to the business situation in the Forum Theatre, even if they did not go on stage and become a spect-actor themselves</i>	79%
<i>Percentage of audience members who went on to discuss the performance with others</i>	87%
<i>Total money spent on the whole project</i>	\$704k USD
<i>Estimated spend per person reached by the campaign</i>	\$3.50 USD

# 1. Context for this work

*What's important in Forum Theatre is who did this, when, and for what reason.  
The context is all.*

Augusto Boal, originator of Forum Theatre, 9 March 2004

## 1.2 ILO Enter-Growth – the overarching programme

The Enterprise for Pro-poor Growth (Enter-Growth) programme supported the implementation of the Government of Sri Lanka's strategy for poverty reduction and the generation of quality employment for women and men through an integrated micro- and small enterprise development programme that targets four districts with a high incidence of poverty, Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Puttalam. The programme's approach was to improve the market system in these districts, working with and through stakeholders in the private, public and NGO sectors. In the formulation stage consultations in the districts resulted in the lack of enterprise culture, i.e. a positive valuation of private sector enterprise, being identified as a major constraint on development. Enter-Growth therefore included a social marketing campaign – Palama<sup>1</sup> - to enhance enterprise culture. This campaign used interactive theatre to promote small business as a way out of poverty.

## 1.3 Palama – the campaign<sup>2</sup>

The following text was used during Palama to present the campaign to potential sponsors. It frames the project as a whole and provides a good basic introduction.

### **Palama**

**How you can help us build the bridge from poverty to enterprise?**

#### **Why enterprise is good for individuals and communities?**

We believe that small-scale enterprise is a powerful way for communities to become more prosperous and also for people to lead more fulfilling lives:

- *a well-run enterprise can offer security and comfort for people and their families*
- *it can offer a valuable local service which serves others and stimulates more business opportunities*
- *it gives people the chance to do what they want to do, to learn and grow and create, and become more fulfilled in their work*
- *it may be a way of using locally available resources.*

#### **So why do people in Sri Lanka not follow this path more often?**

There are many resources available to help small enterprises but they are not always used. *Why?* We have carried out a major piece of research and found many barriers to enterprise:

- *cultural beliefs derived from Buddhism or Hinduism*

<sup>1</sup> Palama denotes a particular type of rural bridge in Sinhala.

<sup>2</sup> Based on from the original campaign briefing documents, produced in March 2006.

- *culture of dependency*
- *business and manual work and valued lower than white collar, government jobs*
- *negative perceptions of entrepreneurs and business*
- *fear of appearing ambitious, the envy of others*
- *lack of appreciation for skills (such as planning) necessary for success in business*

Our goal in this campaign is to start to change these cultural barriers and help people see enterprise as a positive force that benefits individuals and communities, and not just in a material sense – consistent with the spiritual beliefs of Sri Lankans. And to encourage people to take action to start or develop their own small enterprises.

### **How do we plan to do this?**

We are going to work with people in poor rural areas of four districts. In order to begin to change deep-rooted cultural beliefs we need to engage with people in some depth, and change the kind of conversations they have about business throughout their communities. To do this we are going to use as the main part of this programme a combination of performance theatre and forum theatre. We know that Sri Lankans love theatre, especially in rural areas where there are not many opportunities to see live performances, and where other media are often not easily available.

Performance theatre will reach large numbers of people in a community. Entertaining plays with music and dance will dramatise the issues facing people when they want to start or grow a business. They will depict real stories and start talking points about how people might change their habits.

Once performance theatre has attracted wide attention and interest, the actors will move on to work using Forum Theatre. This technique was originated by Augusto Boal to work with rural, disadvantaged communities in his homeland of Brazil. It is now practised around the world and there are several expert exponents of this in Sri Lanka who will be involved in this project.

In Forum Theatre the boundary is broken down between audience and actors. Villagers become part of the performance and act out different possibilities for themselves. This has the potential to change people's attitudes at a deep level. In addition, we will extend the impact of the theatre in two ways:

- *there will information to be left behind which will show people where they can get all kinds of help and support for starting and improving their enterprises after the show has left the village;*
- *we will also use film and recording of the theatre experiences to carry the message to wider circles of people who may not see the show first hand, for example, Government officials, trainers and policy makers.*

## 1.4 What is Forum Theatre?

*Forum Theatre is an interactive theatre form invented (or discovered) in the early 1970s by Augusto Boal. An audience is shown a short-ish play in which a central character (protagonist) encounters an oppression or obstacle which s/he is unable to overcome; the subject-matter will usually be something of immediate importance to the audience, often based on a shared life experience.*

*After this first showing, there may be a brief discussion amongst the audience, mediated by a figure known as 'the Joker' (as in a pack of cards, belonging to no particular suit, on no-one's side). Then the play is restarted, usually from the beginning, and runs as before - but this time, whenever a 'spect-actor' (active audience member) feels the protagonist might usefully have tried a different strategy, s/he can stop the action, take the protagonist's place, and try her or his idea. The other characters in the piece will react as they feel their characters would react, i.e. they will make it realistically difficult for any new tactic to succeed; but if an idea works, the intervening spect-actor can win, the game is not rigged.*

*Through a session of Forum Theatre, many people will take the stage and show many different possibilities. In this way, the event becomes a kind of theatrical debate, in which experiences and ideas are rehearsed and shared, generating both solidarity and a sense of empowerment. It may be used to rehearse for an imminent occasion, or to uncover and analyse alternatives in any situation, past, present or future.<sup>3</sup>*

## 1.5 Why this case study?

This case study has been written partly as a learning tool to tell the story of Palama as it unfolded, and partly as an overall assessment and consolidation of the numerous evaluation processes which the Palama campaign has incorporated. The research informing this case study comprises:

1. *Cultural Assessment “baseline” study<sup>4</sup>;*
2. *Quasi-experimental research into the extent and nature of the impact of Forum Theatre in this context<sup>5</sup>;*
3. *Basic management data, progress reports, facts and figures<sup>6</sup>;*
4. *Impact Assessment report<sup>7</sup>;*
5. *Qualitative, interview-based research into the management and influence of the Palama project<sup>8</sup>.*

This case study will be of practical interest to a number of groups:

---

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk](http://www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Karin Reinprecht and Nireka Weeratunge, February 2006, Enterprise for Pro-Poor Growth: Design of a strategy to promote enterprise culture in Sri Lanka: Socio-Cultural Assessment results

<sup>5</sup> Frank Hakemulder, 2007, Forum Theatre Effects on Beliefs about Business, ILO Enter-Growth

<sup>6</sup> Supplied by Gemunu Wijesena & Roel Hakemulder, Enter-Growth programme, ILO, Colombo

<sup>7</sup> Nireka Weeratunge, June 2008, Impact Assessment on the Enterprise Culture Component of Enter-Growth, ILO Enter-Growth

<sup>8</sup> Research conducted by Chris Seeley, July 2008

- **If you a development professional in the International Labour Organisation or elsewhere,** you will be interested to see how this leading edge of ILO thinking is being put into practice. The case study will prompt you to ask questions such as:
  - *Was the design process and eventual implementation of the project appropriate, effective and efficient in the context of the project and Sri Lanka?*
  - *To what extent has the original strategic campaign design been used and why were changes made?*
  - *Why was private sector sponsorship not obtained and what was the effect of this?*
  - *How was the campaign integrated or not with other programme and ILO enterprise culture interventions and interventions in other areas, substantively and managerially?*
  - *What was the impact of the campaign in terms of changes in enterprise culture, and possibly a growth of entrepreneurial activity? Could other approaches have achieved more?*
  - *What is the scope for the long term sustainability of the campaign and the theatre groups that have been set up?*
  - *What is the scope for replication of such an approach in Sri Lanka and elsewhere?*
  - *What are the lessons learned for future interventions to promote enterprise culture, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere? What could the project still do better?*
- **If you are a Forum Theatre practitioner,** you will get to ask yourself what the role of Forum Theatre might be in such situations, whether it is in the spirit of Forum Theatre to work with such an explicit intent in this work, what locally relevant versions of Forum Theatre might look like, how might large scale Forum Theatre programmes be managed well and what are the pitfalls of this approach in these contexts.
- **If you are involved as a donor in funding such work in the world,** you will get to see how Forum Theatre-based approaches can be a way of investing your funds in ways that attracts very large numbers of rural, financially poor people, holds their attention for 2-3 hours at a time and opens up conversations in villages which otherwise would not have happened.

## 2. What is Palama for? - Intentions

This first part of the case study explores the *intentions and underlying purposes* of Palama. Here, you will find responses to the following kinds of questions:

- *What is Palama's purpose?*
- *How is Palama a manifestation of the ways in which the International Labour Organisation is evolving and developing?*
- *How does this development overlap with the intentions of Forum Theatre as an applied theatre practice?*
- *What are the implications of this blend of intentions?*

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is concerned with generating decent quality work, including through the development of a thriving local business community<sup>9</sup>. Growth and global capitalism might still be unquestionable to many of the élite of both the North and the global South<sup>10</sup>, yet worldwide there is a growing realisation that local grassroots economic development provides a more economically, socially and ecologically resilient base for society<sup>11</sup>.

By strengthening the base for local economic development in terms of the micro- and small enterprises (MSEs) themselves *and* the broader context for business (including the availability and quality of commercial business development services such as micro-finance and training), some in the ILO consider that the organisation aims to help financially poor people to learn how “*to use capitalism, the market, to resist being overwhelmed by the large market economies...it is a question of being overwhelmed or learning to play the game... local economic development, and Palama as part of that, is a matter of empowerment and emancipation*”<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> ILO has a role in “*strengthening the capacity of individuals and firms in lagging areas of the world to withstand competition and create meaningful employment opportunities*”, see: Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, 2001, The role of the ILO in implementing local economic development strategies in a globalized world, Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics; ILO’s own vision of Decent Work says that “*work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives*”, see [http://www.ilo.org/global/About\\_the\\_ILO/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Walden Bello, Will Capitalism Survive Climate Change?, Bangkok Post, 29 March 2008

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Cox, 2008, *nef Think Piece for the Commission for Rural Communities: Economic Well-being*, New Economics Foundation, [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org).

<sup>12</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Manager, July 2008.



Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was deeply concerned with how those who have the least in the world (power, access to services, money, financial services etc) might engage in processes of liberation<sup>13</sup>. Freire saw liberation as a mutual process, where people learn together. In turn, Freire's ideas influenced those of his friend, theatre activist Augusto Boal, who developed Forum Theatre as a means of emancipation and mutual liberation. We each have internalised oppressions. Oppression, whether from powerful figures and regimes outside of ourselves, or from within ourselves: *"occurs in those moments when we are not allowed to be what we want to be or do what we want to do"*<sup>14</sup>. The most insidious and subtle oppression comes when we do not even know what it is that we could be or do – when the behavioural choices open to us are limited in ways we do not even know. In this respect, we are all oppressed. Nobody is free from oppression of one sort or another.

There is a question here about whether entering into enterprise culture by starting a business is an act of liberation or one of further oppression, an adherence to a particular growth-oriented dogma. This debate around whether enterprise development is an emancipatory force was contested (sometimes in lively ways) during the Palama project amongst its management and subcontractors. The debate, experimentation and uncertainty indicates the extent to which projects like Palama are operating at the leading edges of where development agencies might be evolving in response to the people that they serve: *"the ILO weren't good at saying what they wanted from the Forum Theatre. They weren't very clear about this, but they were brave enough to say that they didn't really know what Forum Theatre entailed. It was quite easy to stay within the general remit of what the ILO thought they wanted"*<sup>15</sup>.

*"Forum Theatre does not often deliver such an overt agenda. Very obviously the ILO wanted to deliver an agenda. We had to come up with a new hybrid that answered the basic question: how do we use theatre to start a debate which got people out of poverty and the associated issues of poverty?"*<sup>16</sup>.

Using Forum Theatre for the development of enterprising culture, rather than it being concerned with more conventionally understood and direct forms of oppression (such as imprisonment, abuse, bullying etc) is unusual, and new. To do this with over 119,000 rural financially poor Sri Lankans is groundbreaking. Palama wanted villagers to consider different options and choices for their lives and to think about self-employment and developing their own enterprising initiatives as viable and attractive possibilities.

The multiple mirrors of other people's gaze are important here. Through Forum Theatre we get to inhabit each other's worlds: *"to create a safe, playful and uncertain space to try on a different life for size and see how it might fit."*<sup>17</sup>

To this extent, Palama intended to be emancipatory and to avoid poverty as *"an inexorable fate"*<sup>18</sup>. Palama promoted the idea that local, unmoneyed people can successfully trade with each other as well as on a wider geographical scale. The project sought to stimulate a critical consciousness and conversation about business and enterprise amongst large numbers of financially poor villagers.

---

<sup>13</sup> Paulo Freire, 1970, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>14</sup> Augusto Boal, March 2004, personal communication.

<sup>15</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Augusto Boal, March 2004, personal communication.

<sup>18</sup> Augusto Boal, 1974, *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

*“What we are doing with Palama is to offer rural villagers the space to question some of the assumptions that limit their possibilities to choose viable livelihoods and develop their own economies. To offer them greater freedom so that instead of victims of the system they become (more) active participants in their own right. That does not need to mean promoting consumerism, individualism, greed, the power of self-interest and all those other things that the West holds so dear.”*<sup>19</sup>

*“Enterprise has to be part of the panorama of possibilities.”*<sup>20</sup>

The implications for development agencies in engaging with practices like Forum Theatre are that the organisation is radically opening itself up to dialogue with thousands of people: *“the ILO wanted to tick lots of boxes and see lots of people. They were getting through to hundreds of thousands of people with no long term commitment. The plan didn’t invest in people. I had big questions about how the Palama theatre companies could engage with and stay with the visited communities”*<sup>21</sup>. This shift from monologue (as exemplified by conventional one-way mass media approaches) to the kind of mass dialogue offered by Forum Theatre creates *communicative space*<sup>22</sup> for villagers to consider enterprise and business: *“amazing things came out of the Palama campaign to stimulate debate.”*<sup>23</sup>

What do development agencies need to get good at in order to work in engaging ways directly with financially poor, rural people on a locally relevant basis? It seems necessary to cultivate being nimble and fleet of foot whilst upholding their own values (in the ILO’s case, in terms of decent work) for the people they employ to do the work and those they are seeking to influence. Coherence and consistency are needed at every level of this work. These kinds of projects, customised and localised for large numbers of financially poor people, take a lot of drive, will and organisation to bring about. They’re not formulaic mass advertising that can virtually be bought off the shelf, but deserve the same degree of care and detail as the most delicate high level negotiations that development agencies are accustomed to.

Development agencies like the ILO need systems and processes in place to be able to respond to villagers thoughts and concerns quickly, flexibly and respectfully – in enterprising ways. Campaigns like Palama demand this and offer organisational benefits in return: *“for ILO, Palama is good because it is innovative in different ways. ILO has a challenge with visibility. Using theatre at a local level, we’re seen as more dynamic, vibrant, visible. We welcome trying different components.”*<sup>24</sup>

*Trying different components* can not merely be a case of conveying messages through a previously untried medium in one direction only, as if from on high. The challenge isn’t just to be *seen* as more dynamic, it is to actually *be* more dynamic: *“ILO central is the high moral ground – the further this work goes into the countryside the rougher it gets”*<sup>25</sup>. If the Forum Theatre audience don’t like or want that you’re offering, you’re inviting them to tell you, right there and then: *“Forum Theatre is by definition subversive and unless you are prepared for subversion, don’t do it...”*<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Manager, July 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Kemmis, 2001, Educational Research and Evaluation: Opening Communicative Space, University of Sydney.

<sup>23</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>24</sup> ILO Country-Level Manager in Sri Lanka, July 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

However team members were able to articulate and come to a common understanding of their evolving sense of what this work stands for within the context of ILO's overall development, it is clear that the literally thousands of villagers who came to see the shows and participated as active audience members were delighted and stimulated by Palama in ways which match the campaign's original intention to create a more positive context for enterprise culture (and not just the villagers: *"Palama came to a UN event and the UN agencies were "quite captivated"*<sup>27</sup>):

*"With 41% of the sample thinking more positive about business as a direct result of the performance, the effects of the project seem well within the criterion (a minimum of 20%) for success that was formulated previous to the study."*<sup>28</sup>

*"It seems likely that physically acting out the role of a character that ventures an idea for a business makes such a scenario relevant in a much more personal way. Rather than just considering it as an option for [others], people who went on stage saw it as a likely option for themselves."*<sup>29</sup>

*"People came into the Forum Theatre space without any fear – sometimes you couldn't stop them... People liked Palama very much, they enjoyed themselves. They couldn't believe it was something from our project. This was very different and attractive for people."*<sup>30</sup>

*"Altogether around 79% of respondents who saw Palama were positive about the idea of starting/running one's own business. Youth respondents who had seen Palama were the most positive about this idea, followed by women, who had seen Palama. Influencers and entrepreneurs at district level qualified their views on the idea of starting a business, by outlining the necessary conditions for success, while entrepreneurs who had seen Palama were more likely to express both advantages and disadvantages of doing business, in comparison to others"*<sup>31</sup>

*"As advised in the play, you can get some support from an institution and start a business. It is good to earn some profit. If you do it properly, you can earn good profit. You can get some relief from paying all the credit you owe."*<sup>32</sup>

*"It is good to do business. As shown in the play, there is no need to go to Middle East or Italy. If you can get some money, you can invest this on some business. There is no need to pay the agencies and get cheated by them. There is no need to get much help from others. You do not have to work under anybody. You are independent."*<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> ILO Country-Level Manager in Sri Lanka, July 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Hakemulder, November 2007, Forum Theatre Effects on Beliefs about Business, ILO Enter-Growth

<sup>29</sup> Frank Hakemulder, November 2007, Forum Theatre Effects on Beliefs about Business, ILO Enter-Growth

<sup>30</sup> Enter-Growth District Managers, July 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Nireka Weeratunge, June 2008, Impact Assessment on the Enterprise Culture Component of Enter-Growth, ILO Enter-Growth

<sup>32</sup> Sinhala Buddhist Non-Entrepreneur Woman

<sup>33</sup> Sinhala Catholic Young Man

### 3. What to do and how to do it... strategy and tactics

The second part of this case study looks at the extent to which Forum Theatre has been an appropriate *strategic choice* in order to meet the overall intentions of the Palama campaign and the *tactical realities* of making the project happen. Here, the following kinds of questions are addressed:

- *How does Forum Theatre work?*
- *How did the strategy of Palama adapt to the complexities of the project as it emerged?*
- *What actually happened as Palama emerged?*
- *What does quality mean in this kind of work?*

#### 3.1 Overall campaign design

The campaign was researched and designed using an intensive cross-cultural<sup>34</sup> team that brought together marketing, development, branding, design, theatre and cultural anthropology professionals. The process involved, in this order:

- **Qualitative research** - Socio-anthropological studies investigating attitudes towards enterprise in Sri Lanka, taking into account factors such as age, gender, religion and location.
- **Media research** – exploring what media were available and relevant in the lives of rural Sri Lankans.
- **Branding** – looking at the campaign’s name, images, the “big idea”. Branding work sought to hold everything together in this potentially disparate campaign. Brand endorsement, ownership and sustainability were also considered. Working in pairs, small groups and as a whole, the team worked on the brand’s desired personality (*an experienced and trusted friend who inspires you with courage*) and asked “what does the brand fight for?” (*we fight for a better life [diyunuwa] for you and your family and community through business*). The team then went to work on how these ideas might be expressed visually, working solo to start with and then commenting as a group before giving the development of visual ideas over to one of the Sri Lankan design teams:

---

<sup>34</sup>

The team included professionals from Sri Lanka, Austria, United Kingdom and the Netherlands.



## Branding Palama

A reflection on giving the campaign a personality<sup>35</sup>



ඔබේ ව්‍යාපාරය - අපේ අනාගතය

*This first appeared as a visual image, without a name. It was only later in discussing it and what we liked about it that the name “Palama” [Sinhala for bridge] emerged as a possible name for the project.*

*It grew out of a pyramid of stick people, which some of us liked but others didn’t. When we talked about it the main reason for dislike was that the figures seemed inhuman and static. It was in an attempt to create individuality and movement that that the chain of figures moving across a bridge appeared.*

*Originally the figures moved from right to left. When we saw variants going both ways we remarked that left to right was more dynamic and moving to the future, as it followed the direction of Sinhalese (like English) writing.*

*There was a lot of detailed discussion about the nature of the bridge. The original was a straight line, but experimenting with a slight curve to suggest a rural bridge gave more of a sense of movement. At some point the idea of making the word Palama part of the bridge came in as an option.*

*There were also details of the figures to be agreed: e.g. a woman should be leading; they should look like adults, not a family; they should be identifiable with any ethnic group. We had a group because we wanted to counter the idea of an individualistic exploitative entrepreneurs, and because the bridge can best be crossed together... you need support from your surroundings to get there. Some look younger than others, that was important too: youth needed to be able to identify with the figures. This particular shade of orange is called palama colour. In Tamil the word is nearly the same, though written in a different script of course.*

- **Sponsorship strategy** – the team sought to gain clarity on what the campaign wanted, and what it might offer to potential sponsors. The team asked:

*Who is in charge of, responsible for sponsorship presentations?*

*Why are they passionate about this?*

*Can they speak from the heart?*

*Who will be giving the pitch?*

*Who will be made responsible for making it happen?*

This process was a group discussion which aimed at identifying what (intuitively) felt (un)acceptable in terms of sponsorship / co-branding for the campaign. This session aimed to inform the negotiations with potential sponsors for the campaign and ranged from unrealistic expectations on the part of the ILO to unacceptably heavy levels of branding on the part of the sponsor. The following list guides those levels of realism and acceptability as a kind of scale, ranging from unrealistic to unacceptable.

<i>Unrealistic</i>	Sponsor offers funding and expects no visible endorsement.
	Project appears in sponsor's annual report / website etc.
	Project is case studied as part of sponsor's corporate social responsibility reporting.
	Sponsor's name discretely mentioned on our campaign materials.
	Sponsor's name on banners etc. at our Forum theatre events.
	Sponsor's name prominently displayed on our campaign materials (stickers, how-to sheets, calendars, posters etc.)
	The campaign brand endorses sponsor's materials / services
<i>Too heavy branding</i>	Sponsor "tops and tails" all the campaign's media
	Forum theatre actors performing in heavily sponsor-branded t-shirts.
<i>Unacceptable</i>	Sponsor's need for franchise deals, supplier deals, distributor deals, cheap labour, dominates and shapes the agenda of the campaign.
	Sponsor brands everything and calls to action are dedicated to the sponsor alone.
	ILO brands everything itself.

- **Calls to action** – were considered. For example, what would people do as a result of the campaign? What mechanisms for action would there be for participants? What stages of the process of considering starting a business does the campaign seek to take people through? What is the campaign asking for and offering? A range of possible calls to action were developed in response to the following guidelines. Each call to action was based on either investigating:

- 

*A local market need (what might your business do that is useful locally?)*

*Your own talents (what kind of business / work might suit you best?)*

*Available materials (what raw material resources are at hand locally for you to add value to?).*

Possible practical calls to action were:

*Look for information on training (and ILO sees to it that a CD-ROM / Directory of services is somehow made easily available – especially for expanders).*

*Go to your local Chamber of Commerce to discuss your ideas.*

*Go to your local bank to discuss your ideas.*

*Go and visit other (“model”) local businesses who are doing well.*

*Take part in regular village meetings (and ILO sees to it that local – county level – coordinators convene such meetings).*

*Look at yourself. What talents do you have? (Also – think about this as a participatory factor in the forum theatre).*

*Talk with other people about the opportunities for income generation.*

*Look at your surroundings. How can you earn something out of that? (Using waste materials etc.).*

*Appreciate other businesses (and ILO sees to it that there is an “Entrepreneurs’ Day”).*

*Recognise other people (officials, teachers) that help businesses.*

*Find a mentor (Lions, Rotary, Chambers of Commerce).*

*Get yourself trained (especially for expanding businesses).*

*Read “how to” brochures (which ILO has produced)*

*Read book / self-complete workbook on entrepreneurship (which ILO has produced).*

*Stay put! Look at home for business opportunities first.*

*Listen to people’s complaints about what they can’t get in villages.*

- **Designing the “battle plan”** – what would be the campaign’s channels for communication, (events, billboards, games, stickers etc.)? What would need to be done locally and nationally for press relations?



- **Target groups** – and subsector imagery. The team imagined who might be interested in and respond to the campaign.

#### *Primary Target Audiences*

**Sunil and Rani** they are young people who have done their A level exams they are not sure whether they would get into university.

**Abey**, he is a graduate without a job.

**Sunila**, she is unmarried and not received tertiary education but wishes to be independent.

**Manel** whose husband is employed in a state organization and doesn't have much of a chance to earn enough to provide a better quality of life for their family (children are bigger now).

**Kulasekara and Ruwan** are self employed as farmers and fishermen, they need to see their vocation as an enterprise.

**Piyal** who is already involved in a very small scale business. (He needs the courage to expand).

#### *Secondary Target Audiences*

**Key influencers and opinion leaders:** officials, teachers, nurses and doctors, village headman, boutique owners.

People who are already **self-employed**.

- **Structure, planning, scheduling** - The original strategic design that resulted for Palama from these processes placed the dialogic, improvisational, participatory form of Forum Theatre at the centre of its activities, surrounded by numerous pre-and post-Forum interventions, local “exemplars” of real-life stories to inform the Forum work, publicity and training.

Forum Theatre is part of a suite of techniques from Brazilian Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* which has been developed over more than 30 years as a means of bottom-up social change. “*Forum theatre consists, in essence, of proposing to a group of spectators, after a first improvisation of a scene, that they replace the protagonist and try to improvise variations on his actions. The real protagonist should, ultimately, improvise the variation that motivated him the most*”.<sup>36</sup>

The Forum Theatre work would be carried out by four new Theatre Companies, one in each of the Districts targeted by the campaign. The Theatre Companies would be made up from non-professional local rural people trained and managed by a professional theatre group, which would be the main subcontractor for the whole Palama project. The project itself would be conceptually and administratively managed by a dedicated Campaign Director. The work would be supported indirectly through the ILO Enter-Growth team's District Managers, their offices and the Micro- and Small Enterprise (MSE) Forums<sup>37</sup> which each of the Enter-Growth District Offices had initiated.

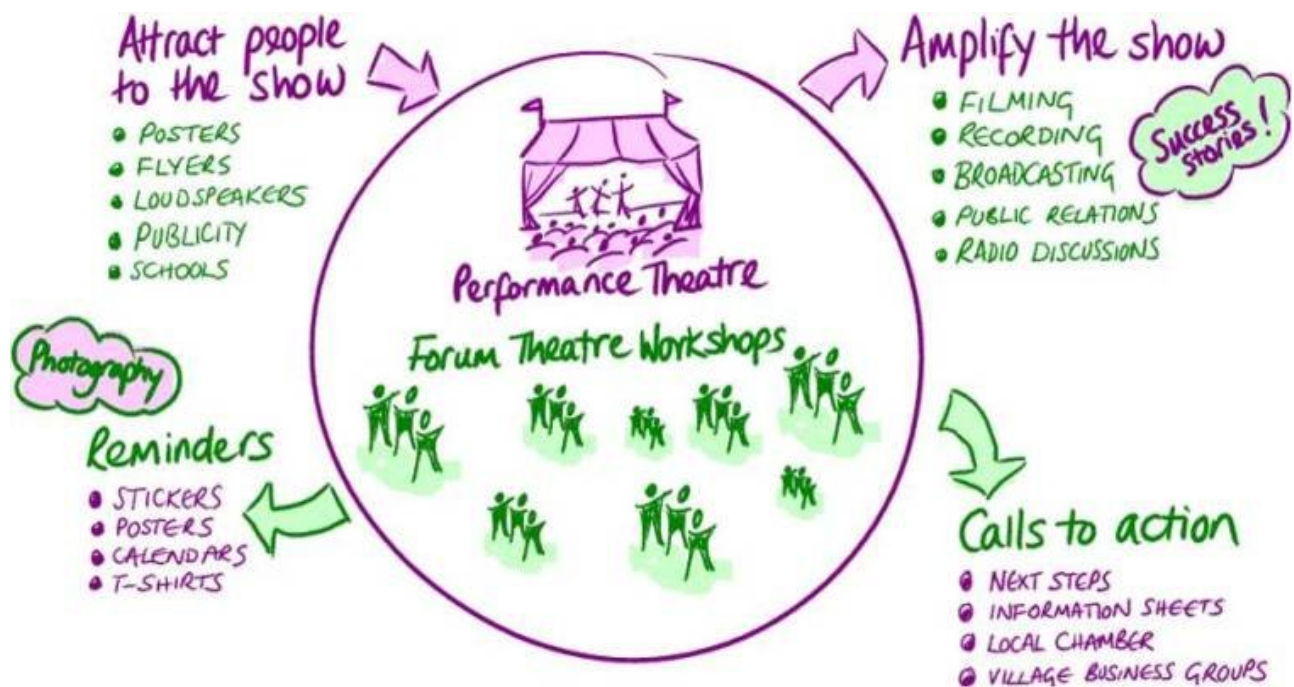
This original design rapidly evolved into a new version which also incorporated performance theatre as part of the process (diagram below, from early 2006). This was in response to a clear absence of, and appreciation for live performance in rural Sri Lanka. For many rural villagers in these particular Districts of Sri Lanka, “*Palama may have represented villagers' first*

<sup>36</sup> Augusto Boal, 1995, *The Rainbow of Desire*, pp184

<sup>37</sup> The MSE Forums coincidentally share part of the same name as the theatre approach taken by Palama. These Forums are groupings of local businesses, officials, chambers of commerce, micro-financiers, banks, non-governmental- and community-based-organisations who share a common concern with the development of local, small scale enterprise.

experience of live theatre so close to their homes, and therefore associating the experience of theatre with debate and dialogue. It was very different from the audience experience of and responses to the theatre elsewhere in the world”<sup>38</sup>.

“People are fed up with new technologies – the TV, multimedia, MP3 etc. Live drama has been experienced and enjoyed by people for hundreds of years. New technology cuts live drama out, but people still like it. So, this kind of drama system can be very useful in the current scenery.”<sup>39</sup>



<sup>38</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>39</sup> ILO Enter-Growth district MSE Forum Member, July 2008.

Notice that at this stage, the performance and Forum Theatre elements were separate from each other, with the initial idea that each theatre group would perform to crowds of 1000+ villagers in large local towns before splitting to run a series of Forum Theatre workshops in the surrounding villages. The original objectives were to have 8 performance theatre events of 4 sittings each, making 32 shows in all, with 1000 people in the audience at each show, totalling 32000 people. Then, each of the four theatre groups would have split into 5 teams of 4 people and conduct many smaller, more specific Forum Theatre events with a total of 60,000 spect-actors involved. In the end, these figures were exceeded, but with a higher proportion of audience members (about 119,000 villagers) and fewer active spect-actors (about 1,250 people, although some had doubted that many people at all would be willing to come up on stage in front of such large audiences). In addition, original plans set an objective of 20% of audience members feeling more positive about business as a direct result of attending a Palama Event. This target was more than doubled in practice, with a result of 41%<sup>40</sup> of people who came to see the show feeling more positive about business (*that is more than 48,000 people*).

*“The original idea was to mount one big performance in an area and follow it up with smaller forum pieces, very locally in villages. But when 500 or 600 people started to turn up at events, we didn’t separate the two. The crowds were larger than expected.”*<sup>41</sup>

Throughout, ILO planned to effectively subcontract the whole campaign, its logistics, management and artistic direction to an existing socially-aware theatre group with a strong reputation in Sri Lanka. In the light of this, Palama was administratively quite separate from other parts of the Enter-Growth programme. This drew debate and a diversity of understanding amongst the wider Enter-Growth management team<sup>42</sup>:

*“Palama operated as a separate mission, a project within a project”*

*“... it was a closed and separate project...”*

*“I thought that Palama was another project – there was another direction and that was a good thing”*

*“...the campaign just didn’t fit with the team”*

*“Palama was not properly integrated into the Enter-Growth organisational structure”*

*“Yes, this was a separate project – this is something entirely different in my mind. It was conceptualised as such”*

**In the light of this experience, development organisations are advised to learn from us and pay good attention from the start to how such campaigns link with other parts of their work.**

---

<sup>40</sup> Frank Hakemulder, November 2007, Forum Theatre Effects on Beliefs about Business, ILO Enter-Growth

<sup>41</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Managers, July 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Enter-Growth District Managers and overall management team, July 2008.

### 3.2 Unforeseeable changes

After a number of ideological and personality differences, the theatre group which had been originally contracted to run Palama chose to withdraw from the campaign in November 2006, while the first theatre group was being trained. This left the management team and newly appointed Campaign Director with an unexpected strategic decision point, no overall leadership from theatre professionals, a legacy of “separateness” from Enter-Growth as a whole, a necessary focus on the realities of infrastructure which left the relationship with the Enter-Growth District Offices somewhat neglected and no single contractual point of contact for managing the huge variety of purchases and contracts needed by the campaign:

*“I can’t think of a better option than Forum Theatre for this project. The concept itself was good, but our ILO system is suited to outsourcing.”<sup>43</sup>*

*“There are issues where the Campaign Director felt the ILO rules and regulations were a block and single contracts had to be signed... The real nightmare was that we were always making exceptions and running a risk with these contractual arrangements.”<sup>44</sup>*

*“The Campaign Director insisted she could manage the whole thing, and was committed to do so... We continued. We had planned and budgeted for 4 Districts and that’s what we did. We gave the Campaign Director more time, especially given that the first shows had gone so well. We decided to do less other stuff and said let’s forget about the TV work. I thought OK, this has potential, so lets do more of this and less of the other things.”<sup>45</sup>*

*“The contracted theatre group were supposed to do the training and the Campaign Director was supposed to manage.”<sup>46</sup>*

*“When the theatre company left I didn’t want to panic. The Enter-Growth Project Managers asked what are we going to do now. I said leave it to me, I’ll do it. I’d taken on a job and I wanted to see it though to the end very successfully. I’d had experience in some of these things, but I’m not a maestro.”<sup>47</sup>*

Palama now had no overall professional artistic direction. Instead, a variety of trainers were rapidly brought in to work with the theatre groups. This pragmatic and dynamic strategic choice was received with both positive and negative responses:

---

<sup>43</sup> ILO Enter-Growth District Manager, July 2008.

<sup>44</sup> ILO Country-Level Finance Manager, July 2008.

<sup>45</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Manager, July 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Enter-Growth District Manager, July 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Palama Campaign Director, July 2008.

*“I think the Campaign Director did a great job in replacing the original theatre group with music teachers, drama trainers, supportive and useful upgrading refresher training. Her arranging of the capacity building was very good.”<sup>48</sup>*

*“We were exposed to various styles of drama in the training programme. Each different trainer had their own style and it was good to have been exposed to these different variations, but I think I would have preferred to have had one clear style around which we could have specialised. I felt powerless to judge when exposed to all these different styles. Sometimes the teachers had conflicting ideas and even had arguments amongst themselves.”<sup>49</sup>*

*“We studied different subjects, different aspects. It wouldn’t have been possible to have only had one trainer. Mostly, there were no conflicts between trainers, they complemented each other, but with some aspects, like physical exercises, the time frame was very limiting and there were conflicts about what to do when.”<sup>50</sup>*

*“I had no confidence in the ILO’s artistic and socio-artistic standards or appreciation and no confidence that they would know what would work and what wouldn’t”<sup>51</sup>.*

*“Everything took much longer than we thought. We gave the Campaign Director more time, but it took more time than we’d given her. The problem was the 6 months to get a Theatre Company up and running – it took too long.”<sup>52</sup>*

After the original theatre group left, the final strategy for the campaign emerged as a hybrid model designed by one of the Forum Theatre trainers now involved in Palama. He commented *“this was a compromise, not a synthesis”*. This new strategic approach brought together the performance and Forum elements into one single event in response to the question *“how do we do Forum theatre for people who don’t have the information or answers you want them to have?”<sup>53</sup>*

*“The performance and the forum theatre came together as one larger show. The larger performance show and its script needed a larger team of actors.”<sup>54</sup>*

---

<sup>48</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Manager, July 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actors, July 2008

<sup>50</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actors, July 2008

<sup>51</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>52</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Manager, July 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>54</sup> ILO Enter-Growth Programme Managers, July 2008.

The new model was adopted by all four of the Palama Theatre Companies and had the following parts:

- **Palama events started with music and song about business – this was meant to create an understanding in the audience that the event was about enterprise, and so build a common frame of reference;**
- **Second, a performance-based theatre play showing an exemplary story of someone who succeeds in business against the odds, including representation of locally-relevant small business issues;**
- **Third, an interactive Forum Theatre piece presenting locally recognisable situations of poverty and injustice, in a plot with a tragic ending, to which enterprise could be a solution;**
- **Finally ending with another music and song piece;**
- **Followed by leaflets of locally available business development services being distributed – the immediate call to action.**

At this stage, fuelled by more energy, will and determination than self-reflective relationship building, the campaign moved ahead with over 250 performance events: *“Palama had a very strong Campaign Director who was independently minded. That had both a positive and negative effect – sometimes you need this kind of person. But relational issues need attention, too.”*<sup>55</sup>



<sup>55</sup>

ILO Country-Level Manager in Sri Lanka, July 2008.

## The Joker Forum Theatre's Facilitator

If there is one role in the whole Palama campaign where the ability to form relationships is paramount, it is that of the *Joker*, or facilitator of the Forum Theatre:

*"Perhaps the Joker is the most important person in the Forum Theatre. He's the bridge between the audience and the actors. He has to intuit what the audience want – he must be able to act according to the situation and respond to the audience."*<sup>56</sup>

*"The role of the Forum Theatre facilitator is one of the most challenging in Theatre for Development work and should never be underestimated. A facilitator in Forum Theatre needs to have all the skills of a good leader and peer group member... The Joker has to be a sort of everyman. By this, Boal meant the Joker in the pack, not the clown. It's tough to develop a Joker."*<sup>57</sup>

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Augusto Boal came to realise that for his type of theatre to work, there needed to be a permanent intermediary character to work the liminal space between the stage and the audience; one who would make sense of what was happening as it unfolded: *"the first problem to be solved consists in the presentation, in the same performance, both of the play and its analysis... The Joker is the contemporary and neighbour of the spectator... He is magical, omniscient, polymorphous, ubiquitous. On stage he functions as a master of ceremonies."*<sup>58</sup>

The Joker's work is very situation-specific – the culture, the location, the people present on that particular evening. The Joker ensures spect-actor participation and engagement, ensures that people come from the audience to take part – not through coercion, but through a kind of seduction: *"we have to seduce – in a good sense – we have to try and seduce and make ourselves loved by others. How can you seduce a person who does not trust you? They say 'I don't want to participate' and there is an implicit demand there: 'convince me that I can participate. Show me that you love me enough to attract me into the thing you are doing.' For them to accept you they have to visualise some good you can bring... How can you create a space of liberty where you are able to experiment with reality – a transcription of reality not a representation of reality... This work is a preparation, a rehearsal of liberation."*<sup>59</sup>

The Joker needs a level of life experience and maturity. In Palama, the quality and experience of the work of the Jokers varied from district to district. Sometimes the work was forced, and at others, it was more seductive as Boal indicated. One MSE Forum member said that he thought the quality of this work had gradually diminished: *"I have seen the quality coming down, not increasing. The quality of the training and the leadership and guidance for the groups was not so good. The people who are leading the group (the Jokers) weren't interacting with the people any more"*<sup>60</sup>.

---

<sup>56</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actor, July 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Augusto Boal, 1974, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, pp174-182.

<sup>59</sup> Augusto Boal, March 2004, personal communication.

<sup>60</sup> ILO Enter-Growth District MSE Forum Member, July 2008.

One of the trainers in the project commented that they thought the wrong person had been picked as Joker: *“I had got two very good Jokers going with the group by the time I left. One of the jokers really had got it right. But [the person who ended up in the role] is a bulldozer of a Joker. You have to be an inviter, not a bulldozer... They were all trying to make us laugh, and not trying to put the issues forward*<sup>61</sup>.

The Joker is not a clown, although the two archetypes share some characteristics. Her role is not to make people laugh, and in a sense the choice of “Joker” as a name is misleading: *“it conjures up meanings and personae that are just not relevant. The Joker is a bumpkin who can stop proceedings. I think it is good to find an existing local equivalent character. For example, in Forum Theatre work in India, there’s a character called Vidhushaka*<sup>62</sup> *in Sanskrit. That’s the name we use there. In Sri Lanka, I used the word Joker at the start of the training and within five minutes regretted it.”*<sup>63</sup>

### 3.3 Creating the Theatre Companies

That the Palama Theatre Companies were drawn from local people was a good thing; that this demanded the establishment of brand new theatre groups was something that the ILO Enter-Growth was well placed to support in theory, but in practice turned out to be an added complication the overall management team perhaps could have done without. Simultaneously experimenting with Forum Theatre with large numbers of people and building the infrastructural capacity for four theatre groups, where much attention to individual and team care is crucial, led to discrepancies between hopes, expectations and reality.

Issues relating to creating and maintaining the Theatre Companies as viable enterprises in their own right are partly specific to Palama and its context, partly specific to Forum Theatre and partly related to theatrical enterprise as a whole. The following list looks at the issues arising in this case study about both how the companies were formed and what their prospects look like for the future.

- **Sustaining small scale arts-based ventures** as a viable enterprise anywhere in the world is a challenge<sup>64</sup>. Generating four specialised theatre groups in rural Sri Lanka is ambitious by any standards of judgement.
- Palama was right to **work with local, rural people** in bringing the groups together (especially in terms of local knowledge, relevance, social class issues and speech patterns). An MSE Forum member commented that : *“the actors were not separate, they were of the people. The ideas for Palama must come from the ground up.”* The project may have had one less thing to do (the development of basic stage-craft skills) if it had chosen from the start to work with

<sup>61</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Vidhushaka is a buffoon or jester character, a commentator on passing events.

<sup>63</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>64</sup> For example, see: David Throsby & Virginia Hollister, 2003, “Don’t give up your day job: an economic study of professional artists in Australia”, Australian Arts Council



existing local theatre groups, to the extent they were available in these districts: *“if I was running the project, I’d outsource it to the infrastructure of an existing local youth or street drama group within the District. We could have given the Forum Theatre training to such people. I would have outsourced to local theatre groups”*<sup>65</sup>.

- During the **recruitment** stage, many, but not all of the actors had had some previous stage experience or ambition: *“I have always been interested in artistic things, in art and drama”*; *“I wasn’t already interested in drama, I wasn’t actively engaged in the drama field before Palama, but I knew I had talent”*; *“some of the group had been involved in drama before, and it was new to others. Some had experience with drama at school, and a few had professional experience”*<sup>66</sup>. One actor said that to be paid while receiving the training: *“seemed unbelievable, we were going to be trained and we were going to be paid.”*
- The typical **age** of the actors in the companies was between 19 and 36, with most being in the early 20s. That the group needed to lodge together, perhaps far from home, on a residential basis may have skewed those who were able to apply. This is an argument in favour of **smaller groups** working at divisional level: *“it would be helpful if such a Forum Theatre group could be formed at a divisional level (the District is too big, 100km across). If we formed a divisional Forum Theatre group here and assigned an MSE Forum member to host their events, we have all the facilities to do that. When selecting people for the theatre group, you need to get them at divisional level. You don’t need many people... fewer than ten people in each company”*<sup>67</sup>. This strategy of smaller, even more local groups, (Boal suggests this work is possible with Forum Theatre groups of 4-5 performers, one of the Palama Forum Theatre trainers indicated that: *“groups of 9 people is ideas. I wouldn’t go less than 7 people or more than 13. Of course, when you start these things, you don’t know what the drop-out rate is”*), could have eased the infrastructural demand on the ILO per theatre group. Palama Theatre Companies had up to 19 actors. On the other hand, it would have meant training and managing many more groups, given there are more than 50 divisions in these districts.
- **Basic matters of food, logistics, lodging, travel** were problematic given that ILO Enter-Growth did not have the infrastructure in place for this level of micro-management to be “normal” and ensure that the actors were employed with decent working conditions. One actress said: *“our worst problem has been that of transportation. Our van carries 12-13 people and there’s 19 in the group.”* It was also difficult to find large enough rehearsal and training spaces locally. A subcontractor to the project said: *“one of the venues was very bad – there was no ventilation, there were odd people around, only 2 fans only for 20-30 trainees, the hall was not wide enough. People weren’t attending as they were not feeling very well. There was minimal support for the performances in terms of venues, electricity etc. It was all about the trainers having to go and purchase things. One ILO Finance Manager said: “We had to issue between 37 and 40 contracts for all of the groups, one for each of the individual actors. The way to go is with a professional company. If it wasn’t for [the Campaign Director], we could never have done it, for good and for bad.”*

<sup>65</sup> ILO Enter-Growth District Manager, July 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actors, July 2008.

<sup>67</sup> ILO Enter-Growth District MSE Forum Member, July 2008.

- After the subcontracted Theatre Group withdrew from Palama, their planned **training schedule** gave way to a more piecemeal replacement which, whilst it focussed more specifically on Forum theatre techniques, was patchy and extended over time depending on the availability of individual trainers, who then needed to get their work done quickly: *“the periods allotted for training were ludicrously short, I’d allow three months solid training in Forum Theatre before going in front of an audience, but we were stuck with this crazy short term arrangement”*<sup>68</sup>. In addition, some of the trainers were better versed in work for teledramas than live theatre. Nonetheless, the Palama Theatre Companies worked hard and with commitment. One Forum theatre trainer said: *“I was astonished all the way through the training at the way in which just how many of the actors had an enormous ability to throw themselves into it. People in there had been raped and abused and they got in there and found ways of supporting their experience”*<sup>69</sup>. An Enter-Growth District Manager commented: *“the performance skills were excellent as a team.”*
- For the longer term, three of the four Theatre Companies have each registered formally as businesses in their own right and all of them are (separately from each other as yet, and not before time) receiving **business support and advice** from the ILO Enter-Growth District Offices on their business planning, on thinking strategically, marketing and market research. In short, the groups are being invited to “practice what they’re preaching” and make good use of business development services themselves. Most of the actors are keen on this: *“I’m very interested in us starting a company together, but I think we need some more experience first”*. Whether the market for this work in Sri Lanka can extend to four viable groups is doubtful, and work is underway to ensure that all of the actors now get together to learn from each other and perhaps form new alliances together. Again, this is not before time, and opportunities for the actors and Jokers to learn from each other were missed during the main part of Palama. One of the Enter-Growth Project Managers said: *“I had a dream for a long time to allow these groups to learn from each other, to get the teams together in one big crowd and have some fun. The Campaign Director was totally against this idea, saying ‘it would spoil the group’. Finally, I let them go as they wanted. Three of the four groups have formed into companies, and it’ll be a major challenge for them to find a market. I think they need to make links with other projects and markets, and then after that get together to help evolve the best one groups. The ILO should not do this for them, the theatre companies need to be entrepreneurial at this stage.”*

### 3.4 The quest for sponsorship

Almost from the moment the strategy for Palama was conceived, the quest for sponsorship began with a series of meetings with senior managers in large Sri Lankan-owned companies. An information pack and presentation materials were designed and a DVD made to show business people what the campaign stood for. The meetings, which continued throughout the duration of the campaign, discussed how Palama might provide opportunities for businesses to build their brand values through association with the project. These negotiations aimed to raise money locally for the financial sustainability of Palama in the longer term.

To date, these sponsorship negotiations have not come to fruition. Initially, the project being “sold” was no more than an idea. As it gained momentum, the timing became more difficult in the light of Sri

<sup>68</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Palama Forum Theatre Trainer, July 2008.

Lanka's political situation. Detailed discussions around attempts to secure sponsorship for Palama<sup>70</sup> revealed the following points:

- Palama's considerable sponsorship efforts were "*driven by a mixture of available networks as much as anything*", *although an assessment of potential sponsors and their sponsorship and corporate social responsibility policies did provide guidance*<sup>71</sup>.
- During the early stages, it was not possible to follow up rapidly from meetings with evidence of the success of the project and some strong sponsorship leads "went cold".
- Goodwill gestures of support from local business development service suppliers (such as the use of space) were not considered to be part of the sponsorship negotiations. Palama could have been a more direct vehicle through which local business service suppliers could have communicated with their target markets. There was more scope to negotiate smaller scale sponsorship locally, rather than on a national scale.
- The strategic decision to only approach Sri Lankan owned companies for sponsorship reduced the breadth of possible sponsors.
- Negotiations revealed that it was difficult to find sufficient overlap in terms of intention and purpose between the business concerned and the aims of Palama. Either Palama needed to be more closely aligned with the business aims, or be much more obviously philanthropic in its intent (e.g. a schools or medical projects).
- Similarly, the degree to which Palama and the potential sponsors were aiming at the same target market of rural Sri Lankans was questionable.

### 3.5 Getting the narratives and scripts right

In terms of how relevant the issues highlighted in Palama were to the particular audience, Forum Theatre thrives on very specific examples rooted in the particular community, which nonetheless speak to a more comprehensive reality or universal truth. The performance as well as the forum theatre scripts were largely developed by the actors, who were from local communities and had often experienced the situations presented themselves or seen them in their communities. They were then reviewed by Enter-Growth, including the cultural anthropologist who had been responsible for the original enterprise culture assessment. This aimed at getting the message right and ensuring cultural appropriateness without compromising on values such as gender equality.

The extent to which Palama's performance theatre plays and forum theatre issues were sufficiently locally relevant was nevertheless contested during the campaign, with some people being pleased with the detail and level of relevance, whilst others were concerned that more could have been done<sup>72</sup>.

---

<sup>70</sup> Held in July 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Discussion with Palama sponsorship negotiator, July 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Perhaps more could always be done. The most extreme response here came from one of the Forum Theatre trainers (in discussion, July 2008): "*The ignorant hand of authority was imposed on the groups.*"

## Scripts and themes

Several stories emerged as possible enterprise plots:

**Starting a lake fishing business**  
**Using coconut/coir products**  
**Starting a fruit selling business**  
**Growing mushrooms for sale**  
**Tile making from river clay**

Problems to be overcome were identified as:

**Scepticism from family and community about business**  
**Failure to register business**  
**Failure to meet health and safety regulations**  
**Difficulties getting loans**  
**The power of bigger businesses**  
**Bureaucratic inertia**  
**Failure to obtain insurance**

Ways of overcoming such problems, or preparing for them, were discussed and built into the devised stories.<sup>73</sup>

Scripting, stories, localness, cultural specificity and quality formed into a bundle of interrelated issues throughout Palama. Traditionally, travelling theatre troupes with an eye to sharp social commentary (such as the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition) comprised small groups of actors who would come into a town or village and spend informal time with local people before largely improvising a performance the next day. This is a kind of responsiveness (which is embodied in the figure of the Joker) can not be planned, but only prepared for. Such localisation comes with experience, trust and maturity of practice. There's also something to be said for the flexibility that comes with smaller theatre groups.

In two way communication like Palama, such localisation is messier, more intensive, less controllable, less top-down. This needs and deserves proper resourcing which to some extent can be planned for, but not at the rigid expense of the kind of locally specific responsiveness that emerges in the moment, during the event. Such responsiveness is relational and comes of holding a mature, wide awareness of what is happening in the performance. These are the kinds of qualities development agencies needs to seek and cultivate more widely if as organisations they are to develop responsive, reciprocal dialogue with MSE communities on a mass market scale. Commissioning development agencies can not

<sup>73</sup>

Forum Theatre Trainers' report, March 2007

“control” this without killing its spirit, and yet such responsiveness is the lifeblood of the Forum Theatre performance. Palama Jokers understood this when they commented:

*“Perhaps the Joker is the most important person in the Forum theatre. He’s the bridge between the audience and the actors. He has to intuit what the audience want – he must be able to act according to the situation and respond to the audience.”*

*“The Joker is the most important, responsible person in the performance. He has to be 100% attentive the whole time to know what’s going on and what will happen next. The Joker must be a person who can handle any situation as it comes, he must have the talent to work out these situations. The Joker has to deal with the people and so he must be close to the people. At the same time, he has to know if these people are expressing their genuine thoughts. He must use his common sense.”*

One of the theatre trainers said: *“this is a very demanding role which needs to be engaging, motivating and capable of quick decisions on stage... It would be fair to say that there were no “natural” facilitators in [this particular] group or at least in those who volunteered to attempt the role. Some were misled by the word “joker”, which refers to the playing pack card rather than “one who tells jokes” (or indeed the character in the Batman films). Others tended to talk too much at the audience rather than engage them in debate.”*

The theatre group’s trainers also saw that age was an issue with the groups and expressed some concern: *“the age range included members over thirty, who were parents and had experience of the workplace. Rather too many, for this kind of theatre work, were relatively young and, although eager, lacked the necessary life experience to really discuss with village people the intricacies of their problems.”*<sup>74</sup>

The audience members themselves were less concerned about all of this debate, and showed appreciation for the relevance and responsiveness of the performances:

*“It was a good performance. I have seen some plays that have no meaning and not worth watching. Palama was not like that. It is a meaningful drama - you can get some examples and lessons for your life.”*<sup>75</sup>

*“The whole drama was good. It is a meaningful, exemplary drama for both parents and children to make their lives. And it tells you how to start a business with the money available in your hand.”*<sup>76</sup>

*“I thought and I felt that it was certainly my story... My husband also drank and I had a hard life. It is important to make husbands aware not to drink. I particularly remember the scene where the husband harassed his wife, drank a lot and tried to get what she earned out of her. I liked that because I also had the same experience. I actually did not go there to watch the play I went there to sell peanuts but I stopped selling and watched the play instead.”*<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Forum Theatre Trainers’ report, March 2007

<sup>75</sup> Sinhala Buddhist Non-Entrepreneur Woman

<sup>76</sup> Sinhala Buddhist Non-Entrepreneur Man

<sup>77</sup> Sinhala Buddhist Entrepreneur Woman

*“I liked both plays – both are related to what happens in society. Katherine’s character was acted very well. She took money from the money lender. She did her best to take care of her children. The man takes even that money from her. There are people like that here. In fact a man like that just died a few days ago here.”<sup>78</sup>*

*“It was very good and meaningful. They acted really well. They had chosen characters that you normally meet in society.”<sup>79</sup>*

Some MSE Forum members<sup>80</sup> were less convinced that the actors were experienced enough when they noted:

*“This in-born [responsive] quality – it is a very very difficult task to do well. You need to take people and keep them, watch them for a month, to analyse their qualities, to see who are the leaders, who does the reading, who knows about drama.”*

*“There was a bit of a mismatch between real life characters and the stereotyped drama characters. For example, some features of adult motherhood were missing, in terms of language, and of costume, body shape and physical appearance. The girls in the group are younger, but they can do the characters it’s because of these issues that the characters weren’t portrayed very well.”*

*“We wanted the theatre group to have a workshop with us first, to look at what kind of script according to the needs of the people in the particular area. For example, one of the performances I saw was of a mother with young boys going to work in the Middle East. We’ve been seeing that story for three decades now, it’s not a new thing. There’s different issues now....”*

*“This Palama group can be considered as trained robots, as mechanised people. They don’t have all the skills or knowledge to be able to adjust to the situation. For example, I saw a performance with many people from the Catholic community in the audience, who said to the group that they didn’t want the Lord Buddha greetings they were offering. With such a scenario, the whole drama collapsed.”*

Clearly, Palama threw up a range of responses to the appropriateness and precision of its messages. Subtle issues between maintaining artistic integrity, an ability to provoke and a sense of ownership over the production by the theatre groups were at play. How can Palama develop and maintain a realistic risky edginess whilst paying attention to issues of (for example) gender stereotyping? How to balance valuable input from MSE Forum members and District Offices against the threat of scripts being designed, made bland and possibly even spoiled, by committee?

---

<sup>78</sup> Sinhala Buddhist Non-Entrepreneur Man

<sup>79</sup> Sinhala Catholic Entrepreneur Man

<sup>80</sup> In discussion, July 2008

## An extra note on gender

Gender (relating to masculine and feminine archetypes) and sex (relating to women and men as human beings) issues manifested in many ways throughout Palama. Sometimes what happened on stage was mirrored off stage, sometimes the groups challenged prevailing gender stereotype, and it others they reflected them back to their audiences. However conscious or unconscious of the issue the performers and characters are on stage, they are “doing gender” all the time.

Women on stage were sometimes shown as strong and sensible, at others whining and weak. Some male characters were shown as useless drunks, and others as thoughtful decision-makers. Where Forum Theatre requires archetypal characteristics to be seen on stage (working with issues that can have gender dimensions such as power-over, victimisation, ambition, care, thoughtfulness, greed), sometimes the Theatre Companies slipped into stereotypes instead (working with issues that can have sex dimensions such as the man who spends the family money on drink, the woman who is a exploited and so on). The line between the two is a fine one. What seems to be important is the freeing up of conversation at all levels of Palama in order for these distinctions to be openly discussable.

The women in one of the Theatre Companies said: *“Women’s issues are absolutely represented enough – the women have got the best characters to play, and most of the people who come forward to participate are women”*; whilst those working in another district said: *“to a certain extent, it is true that there are gender issues in the group. When it comes to the characters in the plays, it is true to some extent that there is some unfairness around women and gender”*. The men responded: *“Yes, there may be some truth here, but when it comes to selecting characters it depends on the person and the level of their participation in the acting... The gender issues also depend on the script, for example, one of our performances is about the fishing industry, which mainly employs men”*<sup>81</sup>.

The majority of ILO Enter-Growth decision makers were men, most of the theatre group members were men. On the other hand, the background research was done by women, the campaign was designed under the leadership of a woman, a woman was involved as the main adviser on scripts, and the campaign director was a woman. In the exchange between these different individuals there was therefore a lot of potential for gender issues to be uncovered and reflected in the campaign.

One reason this was especially important was that in many sectors in the districts businesses were nearly all women owned, led and staffed: *“enterprise development is the objective of our organisation, and we mainly work with women. We have around 3800 shareholders, especially women making eco-baskets for tea and spice packaging... we have been running for 25 years and in addition, we have another 250+ enterprises, mostly owned by women, with various levels of ownership”*<sup>82</sup>.

Others involved in the project<sup>83</sup> also commented on gender issues in various ways:

*“I don’t think they’re done enough to understand and reach sufficient women.”*

*“There were lots of issues about gender in the Theatre Companies. To a degree they were starting to face up to these issues. If you’d had ‘real’ development people working on this project they’d have spotted this dynamic earlier.”*

<sup>81</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actors, July 2008.

<sup>82</sup> ILO Enter-Growth district MSE Forum Member, July 2008.

<sup>83</sup> These quotations are from various ILO, Palama and Enter-Growth team members and subcontractors, July 2008.

Boal advises that: *“actors and actresses, without regard to sex, will be able to perform masculine or feminine roles, with the exception, of course, of the scenes in which sex determines the dramatic action.”*<sup>84</sup>

### 3.6 Beyond theatre

As we have seen before, the campaign design included “reminders” of campaign messages, in the form of for instance posters and stickers, “amplification” of the theatre messages, mostly through mass media, and a variety of possible “calls to action”. In practice, the difficulties of managing the campaign's core theatre component detracted from these other activities. Most importantly perhaps, Enter-Growth's management decided against going ahead with radio and TV work, for two reasons. Firstly, due to delays resulting from having to manage the campaign directly, the investment in developing the theatre groups had been greater than expected, and some of the districts had been only partly covered. Secondly, developing a mass media component would have required another major investment in effort and funds. As research showed that the forum theatre was having an impact, funds were therefore reallocated to continuing the work of the theatre groups beyond what had been budgeted originally.

Promotion of the theatre events did take place as had been foreseen in the original design, and the project also did significant work on the “reminders” and other activities to reinforce the Palama message. These included:

- A photo exhibition showcasing local entrepreneurs. The photos were exhibited at District business service fairs, which Enter-Growth organised in collaboration with the MSE Forums. The fairs attracted some 250,000 visitors over two years. Visitors considered the Palama stall to be one of the most interesting (see the photographs below).
- A poster competition at schools, on the theme of enterprise and the community, generating thousands of entries. Winning posters were exhibited with the photographs.
- Production of a calendar, using the photos of local businesses. Some 6,000 were distributed.

Currently 40 schools are making wall paintings on enterprise themes and Palama stickers are being produced for busses and three wheelers.

The “call to action” came mostly through the contents of the plays and forum theatre itself, transferring some of the ideas developed by the design team. In addition, after each show the Palama groups distributed a simple leaflet with contact information on business service providers and private sector organisations in the districts. Although audiences as well as service providers were very positive about the leaflet, the impact assessments show that only few people actually took the step of contacting an organisation. For those who started or expanded a business after a Palama event, the leaflet does not seem to have been critical.

---

<sup>84</sup> Augusto Boal, 1974, *Theatre of the Oppressed*.





## 4. What happened? - Feedback

The final section of this case study brings together feedback and research results on the outcomes of the project. Here, the following kinds of questions are explored:

- *What can we learn from Palama about the management and structure of such an activity in the context of a “development” programme?*
- *What are the facts and figures about the project?*
- *What was the shape and nature of Palama’s influence?*
- *How did the rural villagers themselves respond to Palama?*
- *How did other people who were involved in the Palama respond?*
- *To what extent did Palama trigger the increased use of business development services?*

### 4.1 Some thoughts on management and structure

Throughout the processes of compiling this case study, a pattern of ambiguity in response to Palama has been evident. Both qualitative and quantitative evaluations of Palama as a large scale intervention clearly indicate positive, generative results set against the more ambiguous context of managing and practically putting such an ambitious project into practice.

On the one hand, the project has clearly been a success, with huge audiences and statistically proven, relevant impacts. The volume, intensity and duration of engagement with rural villagers would be hard to beat for any amount of money using conventional mass media. On the other hand, it has been a project which behind the scenes has been beset with relational and communications challenges. In the face of the major subcontractor for the project withdrawing a few months into the campaign, these difficulties were hardly surprising.

Clearly, the ILO is not a theatrical management business and its structures, processes and capacities rightly lay elsewhere - for the time being, at least. Theatre is intense physical and creative work and people need taking care of in different ways from office and project workers.

Looking back to the earlier section on *intentions* for this project, there is a growing need for the ILO and similar organisations to continue to learn how to engage directly and reciprocally in “mass dialogue” if it is to address decent work issues for informal, household, micro- and small enterprises: *“Forum Theatre is a very fine method of getting to know the reactions and opinions of the people about the social problems and issues of our time. We get feedback from them.”*<sup>85</sup>

One contributor to this case study suggested that *“Palama was not a failure, but a mistake”*<sup>86</sup>. Thinking about the development of the ILO, it might be fairer and bolder to suggest that Palama was neither failure nor mistake so much as a glimpse into the possibilities of how the organisation will need to evolve, and the kinds of structures and skills it will need to develop in the future. Projects like

---

<sup>85</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actor, July 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Enter-Growth District Managers, July 2008.

Palama call on the ILO to become entrepreneurial, radically open to dialogue and, ironically, rather like the Joker in the Forum Theatre. This is likely to be true for other organisations that enter societies with the aim to bring “development” as well, especially when they are large and bureaucracy-based like the ILO.

MSE Forum members, business development services suppliers and officials made many comments which questioned both the performance events and the ways in which Palama had been structured and managed. For example, some questioned the content of the performances, as we have seen earlier. Others offered critiques of the way the project had been managed and in particular the trade off between the energy, commitment and sheer will of the Campaign Director to get the job done, and the relative lack of relational practice to hold the campaign together as a cohesive whole.

South African social practitioner Allan Kaplan has formulated a number of key areas for concern in the management of “development” projects like Palama<sup>87</sup>. He asks the following questions:

- *Is there an open and problem-solving climate? Are people accepting of criticism and constructive feedback?*
- *Are there clear decision-making procedures? And do they include the people most directly affected?*
- *Is there a climate of trust among individuals and groups?*
- *Are roles and responsibilities clearly understood and accepted by all?*
- *Does the organisation attempt to distinguish between different kinds of work without minimising certain kinds?*
- *Are there developed procedures which recognise both the achievement of the aim and the growth of people?*
- *Does the organisation promote self-discipline, self-direction, and self-reliance amongst its members?*
- *What are the current leadership patterns and styles? Are they appropriate to the type of organisation which is attempting to evolve?*
- *Do people feel heard, do they participate, are they involved?*
- *Are meetings effective and are they evaluated?*
- *Is the structure satisfactory and are the goals sufficiently challenging?*
- *Are communication lines clear and is information effectively disseminated and utilised?*
- *Are problems and conflicts dealt with openly and constructively?*

The experience of the Palama campaign has brought several of these questions into relief. The overall process of bringing this case study together has shown that issues of transparency, trust, the clear

---

<sup>87</sup> Allan Kaplan, 1989, Evaluation for development, Community Development Resource Association  
<http://www.cdra.org.za/articles/Evaluation%20for%20development%20-%20by%20Allan%20Kaplan.htm>

delineation of roles and responsibilities, relational leadership and communication skills were most commonly cited by those involved in the project as being problematic, for example<sup>88</sup>:

*“They didn’t see their role to facilitate the organisation, but to police its activities.”*

*“I didn’t trust anyone other than my manager.”*

*“...there was not enough communication.”*

*“Initially, [they] mixed up their roles. [One of them] started playing the role that should have been done by the [other]. Mistrust grew between them.”*

Many contributors to this case study weighed up these issues with the overall drive and determination that was used to complete the campaign and achieve such high audience numbers:

*“Even with all these challenges, we actually managed to achieve our objectives. I didn’t care about who did what... what I wanted was to achieve results.”*

*“This happens to every project, they keep thinking about quantity rather than quality. Quality issues are only discussed when the project is wrapped up.”*

*“You have to think about the number of performances, and increase them.”*

*“[Their] management style was very tight and tough. [They] put big pressures on people, leading them to do things through fear rather than the willingness of enthusiasm.”*

This case study recommends that team members and subcontractors for these kinds of projects pay more attention to, and cultivate higher expectations of, and capacities for open, transparent, rigorous (and therefore often difficult) communication in order to raise the overall quality of projects like Palama – even if that to some extent sacrifices some of the figures and numbers achieved. Although the Enter-Growth programme did provide space for reflection and discussion within the entire team, through regular team meetings, retreats and discussions with the theatre group, in practice mistrust soon led to the symptoms of relational problems being discussed rather than the cause, which was the mistrust itself.

## 4.2 How Forum Theatre affected rural villagers’ beliefs about business

In late 2007, a quasi-experimental field experiment was conducted with 248 rural villagers to examine how Palama’s Forum Theatre performance events were affecting beliefs about business amongst audience members and spect-actors<sup>89</sup>. The results show a clear and direct link between Palama and perceptions about business:

### **Summary from the quasi-experimental field experiment**

*The results indicate that the high degree to which this particular form of theatre involves its audiences, shapes their beliefs about the possibilities and benefits of starting a business. This involvement stimulates spectators to experiment, as it were, with roles and to imagine themselves in the shoes of someone who attempts to start a business. Thus they come to discover the possibilities of business and the ways in which potential obstacles can be overcome. The performances are clearly very effective in this. 41% of the sample felt strongly involved in the Forum Theatre performances.*

<sup>88</sup> These quotations are from various MSE Forum members, as well as Palama and Enter-Growth team members and subcontractors.

<sup>89</sup> Frank Hakemulder, 2007, Forum Theatre Effects on Beliefs about Business, ILO Enter-Growth

*The results suggest that these respondents were significantly affected in terms of their beliefs about business. The result doubles the criteria set for project's success (20%). Considering the methodological problems of registering effects in field settings, it is particularly striking that statistically significant belief changes were found, not only among the people who were invited to the stage, but also for the audience as a whole. The project's Forum Theatre actors apparently found an effective way to stimulate creative thinking.*

*The results of the study suggest that active participation strongly affected people's beliefs about business: the more the audience was involved, the stronger the effects on their beliefs. Especially hopeful is the finding that Forum Theatre significantly affected the audience's beliefs about business as a realistic option for their children. Furthermore, situations that meet the necessary conditions of starting a business (i.e. bank support) were considered more plausible as a result of the Forum Theatre scenarios*

*Also, as a result of the play, the audience believed more strongly in the possibility that businesses are beneficial for their local community. The majority of the people who saw the performance (79% in the present sample) thought of ideas for a business themselves during the performance.*

*Finally, the Forum Theatre events clearly create a buzz around town. The next day 87% of the participants indicated they talked to others about the performance.*

### 4.3 Palama's influence on Enterprise Culture

Later, in 2008, a substantial piece of in-depth qualitative research was carried out with 87 villagers by a social anthropology team to assess the nature of Palama's influence on the development of enterprise culture in financially poor rural Sri Lanka<sup>90</sup>. Like the previous quasi-experimental survey, this impact assessment drew positive conclusions about the nature and scope of Palama's influence:

- **Changes in attitudes**

*Around 79% of respondents who saw Palama were positive about the idea of starting and running their own business, in their views towards business people and their role within their communities, as well as about women engaging in business. Women and young people were most positive.*

*Existing entrepreneurs who had seen Palama were more likely to express both the advantages and disadvantages of doing business, in comparison to others.*

*Negative attitudes towards business people as exploitative have historically been widespread in all four project districts – among 73% of people in the North Western Province (to which Puttalam belongs) and 51% in the North Central Province (to which Polonnaruwa belongs),*

---

<sup>90</sup> Nireka Weeratunge, June 2008, Impact Assessment on the Enterprise Culture Component of Enter-Growth, ILO Enter-Growth

*according to one 2005 National Survey. In contrast, this impact assessment revealed a clear majority (74%) in both districts holding positive attitudes business people in their communities.*

*Gender disparities in enterprise are widespread in Sri Lanka, including the project districts, with women facing more obstacles than men in engaging in business. The openness to women engaging in business appears to have increased overall and in one of the districts where Palama performance events were held, the proportion of respondents who thought men were better at business had declined considerably whilst those who thought both genders were equally skilled at business increased. The majority of influencers and entrepreneurs at the district level perceived that both genders were equally skilled.*

*Openness to business as a livelihood option by both parents and youth has been very low in the past, with a preference instead for state sector employment. This research has revealed a decreased preference for the state sector amongst parents, influencers and young people who had seen Palama.*

*Ethnic stereotypes related to enterprise and the perception that Muslims are more skilled than other groups at business have been prevalent in Sri Lanka. Now, respondents to this research pointed out that the propensity for all ethnic groups to engage in business had increased in the last three years, relative to the past, when mostly Muslims were involved in business. Tamil respondents had thought more about the idea of starting a business than Sinhalese respondents.*

- **Changes in behaviour**

*Around 6% of the respondents interviewed during the assessment had started new businesses (slightly more men than women).*

*Around 13% of existing entrepreneurs said that they had improved their businesses after the performance. There were no gender differences here.*

*Several non-entrepreneurs indicated that they had gone to one of the service providers listed in the brochure distributed at the end of Palama events for more information. This was also a small minority of respondents.*

*Micro-financiers revealed that their loan portfolios had significantly increased after the performance – in one village, by around 179%. The number of new clients joining small savings groups had increased, as well as loan repayment among existing clients.*

*In several villages, such organizations requested the Theatre Company to perform a second time, indicating that they saw a link between the performance and the positive behaviour of villagers.*

- **Processes of change**

*The Palama performances drew large audiences (450 people on average). This meant that everyone who wanted to actively participate in the Forum Theatre plays did not necessarily get the chance due to time constraints or they were too shy to perform in front of such a large audience, although they might have been more comfortable in a smaller setting (as originally*



*planned).*

*An overwhelming majority (99%) of respondents considered Palama as a positive experience. They commented on the skilful acting, the stories, the entertainment value and the social messages.*

*Looking at “spect-actor” involvement in the performance, the majority (58%) of respondents interviewed had not actively participated – either by performing in the forum theatre or having an idea to present which they were unable to due to lack of time or shyness.*

*18% of respondents had performed and a further 24% indicated that they had ideas to present in the Forum Theatre in their minds.*

*The number of respondents who remembered the plots and characters were relatively high, even among those who had seen the performance more than a year ago. Thus, the performance appeared to be a memorable event for most respondents.*

*Among those who performed in the Forum Theatre, most were confident and pleased at the opportunity they had received to act and present their ideas. Many had presented business ideas, as an alternative option to earn a livelihood, so that the main character could find a way out of his/her dilemma.*

*Three kinds of messages were received by audiences, according to their own perceptions and interpretations: a business/enterprise-related message (the benefits of starting/operating a business); a business message combined with a social one (the benefits of starting/operating an enterprise, as well as refraining from undesirable social behaviour); or a social message (refraining from undesirable social behaviour).*

*Among total respondents, around 42% received a business or livelihood-related message, while 33% received a combined business and social message. A minority (14%) got only a social message from the plays while 11% could not remember or could not say what message had been given by the performance.*

*Overall slightly more women than men grasped a purely business-related message, while more men grasped a combined business and social message. A considerable minority of women interpreted a purely social message, while men were predominant among respondents who could not remember or did not get any message.*

*More non-entrepreneurs grasped a business-related message than entrepreneurs and influencers. Social messages related to issues of alcoholism, overseas migration, and domestic violence.*

*The most common responses to the performance included discussing the play, thinking about the idea of starting or improving a business and finding strength to continue existing enterprises. Of these, the most frequent response was to discuss the performance with family, friends, neighbours and relatives – around 73% respondents did that.*

*Considerably more men (78%) discussed the Palama performance than women (68%). A high*

*proportion of young people (78%) discussed the play with friends and family. Many respondents simply stated that they had discussed the play with others but had done nothing concrete after that. In some cases, respondents indicated that they were saving money to start an enterprise.*

*Around 18% of respondents said that they have considered the idea of starting a business after Palama. In cases where respondents had started businesses this was often after a year of seeing the performance. Considerably more men than women considered starting a business, and around 39% of young people said they have considered this idea following Palama.*

*Around 39% of existing entrepreneurs said they got the idea to improve/expand or found more strength to continue their business following Palama. This was considerably higher among male (44%) than female (29%) entrepreneurs.*

*Several respondents pointed out that the impact of the performances could have been higher if the theatre group had come to villages with the active support of local CBOs, Egos or religious institutions, which could have offered follow-up activities and guidance.*

*Most influencers and entrepreneurs responding to the research at district level perceived positive changes including increased support for enterprise development among government and private sector service providers, a better understanding of the value of business in the state sector and attitudinal change in high-level government officers.*

*Influencers in one district said that while the messages of the performances were considered appropriate, they suggested that the manner in which they were conveyed could be improved in consultation with MSE Forum members. They were also critical of the lack of coordination between Palama and the other components of Enter-Growth.*

- **Attribution of impact**

*Around 44% of respondents considered the Palama theatre performance as “very important”, “important” or “somewhat important” in changing their view or behaviour towards enterprise.*

*Around 23% identified Palama as the primary factor, and 21% considered the performance as a contributory factor in their change of attitude or behaviour towards enterprise.*

*In terms of the project goal of increasing by 20% the number of people who consider enterprise as a desirable livelihood (of those who had been exposed to project activities), this impact has been achieved already by considering the proportion of respondents who identified Palama as the primary factor for change in their attitude or behaviour. If the contributory factor of Palama to these changes is also taken into account, the proportion of respondents affected by the social marketing campaign doubles.*

*Overall, the impact assessment clearly shows positive impact among respondents in changing attitudes towards business as a way of making a living, business people and their role in society, as well as women engaging in business. Impact in changing behaviour (especially accessing service providers, starting or improving businesses) is not revealed as clearly*



*through this assessment. However, there is some qualitative evidence, based on information provided by officers of NGOs that such behavioural change has occurred as well.*

*The impact of the social marketing campaign has been enhanced wherever the performances were coordinated with other local organisations engaging in enterprise/livelihood-related activities, and greater synergies could be created.*

This data also reveals something of the *shape* of Palama's influence as a campaign, as visualised in the diagram below. The pale green areas represent the degree of influence of the campaign at various stages of thought and action regarding enterprise, ranging from:

**Adverse or ambivalent toward business;**

*to*

**A positive attitude toward business generally;**

*to*

**The consideration that business might be a specific possibility “for me”**

*(latent entrepreneurship, a stage which could last years);*

*to*

**Having a business idea and intent to put this into action**

*(nascent entrepreneurship<sup>91</sup>, again a stage which could take years: “I had had plans to start the fish farm a bit before Palama, but Palama aroused in me a new enthusiasm to get going with it”<sup>92</sup>);*

*to*

**Starting the business**

*(gestating entrepreneur);*

*to*

**Trading;**

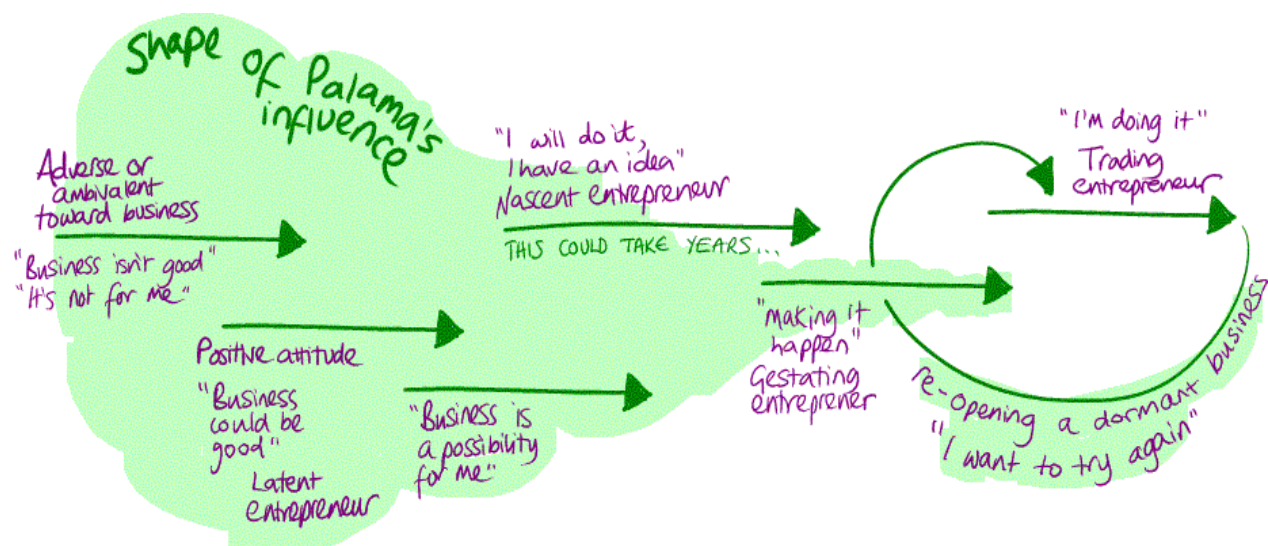
*or*

**Re-opening a dormant business.**

---

<sup>91</sup> Joachim Wagner, September 2004, Nascent Entrepreneurs, University of Lueneburg and IZA Bonn Discussion Paper No: 1293

<sup>92</sup> Palama Theatre Company Actor, July 2008.



In addition, the Palama campaign audiences were also influenced by the activities of others such as business service providers locally, their parents, partners, friends, family and teachers. In turn, most audience members spoke about the Palama afterwards. There is clear evidence that Palama opens wide “communicative space” both during and after the performance amongst spect-actors and audience members and with their friends and families – *whether or not those people actually attended the Palama event*. Palama performance events triggered a cascade of conversations, with some people even filming the performance on their mobile phones to show their friends: *“We discussed with the family about the people from the village who performed on stage. We have a livelihood so we don’t have to find another one. But it gave an idea to start for those who don’t. I recorded it in my mobile and showed the video to my mother, brother and friends on the beach. Pity, they couldn’t make it”*<sup>93</sup>.

#### 4.4 Palama’s effect on business development services

Business development service suppliers and MSE Forum members responded positively to the overall strategy of using Forum Theatre for Palama<sup>94</sup>:

*“Street drama is very popular in delivering messages, but Forum Theatre is more direct, and as a concept, it is excellent. With it, local, rural people have got entertainment as well as messages on their own doorsteps and at not cost to them, plus Palama has worked through the formation of the theatre companies to develop young people locally.”*

*“The audience get a thrill if they get the chance to go on stage.”*

<sup>93</sup> Sinhala Catholic, non-entrepreneur man.

<sup>94</sup> Quotes from ILO Enter-Growth District MSE Forum Members, July 2008.

Some gave a clear indication that they had seen a rise in demand on their services following a Palama performance event in their locality:

*“We had 3 or 4 programmes with Palama and it was quite possible and easy to convey the required message to the people through the drama. It provided the opportunity to discuss issues concerning starting up a business, and it was very successful. In the whole local population, 10% of people have some kind of involvement with our services. In the time after Palama, this rose to 60% of people. The reasons why people wanted loans and their objectives also changed after they’d seen Palama. For example, we received applications for hotel shops, dairy farming, clothes shops and ornamental plant businesses. We felt that Palama was very close to our [microfinance] programme, which offers loans and credit for self-employment purposes.”*

Some even offered their services directly to help the Palama Theatre Companies establish themselves: *“My organisation could provide free transport. We could encourage them to go a little bit further, to watch other dramas, have occasional capacity building with experts in their field to encourage them. They need encouragement for the continuation of this process.”*

One unexpected effect of Palama was that some business development service suppliers replicated the principles and ideals of Forum Theatre including them in their mainstream, non-theatre work, as part of their everyday facilitation: *“we have copied so many things from these Forum Theatre concepts, especially getting the people we work with to fill in the gaps themselves. It’s a great way of finding out the needs of the people. Now, we ask people to come and tell us, we ask if anyone else was in this position to come and fill the gap. We don’t do it in a theatre style, but we make opportunities for people in meetings to come and tell... they must have ideas in their heads and we want to hear them”.*

## 5. What do we know now? - Some conclusions and lessons learned

Palama has been a project of contrasts and paradoxes: but what do we know?

- Palama has been successful well in excess of its targets for audience and participant figures and in terms of its influence, both with rural Sri Lankan people and for business development suppliers.
- The design process, involving socio-cultural and media research, and a multi-disciplinary team, resulted in a campaign design that proved to be largely realistic and effective, and was therefore appropriate.
- With Forum Theatre, the project designed a strategy which spoke to rural Sri Lankans in both entertaining and thought provoking ways.
- Although Forum Theatre does not usually promote an overt message, using it in the context of a performance, and carefully designing the forum plots, did make it possible to transmit a pro-enterprise message to most in the audience.
- The influence of the programme spread wider than the confines of individual events and performances.
- The project stimulated conversations about enterprising culture that otherwise wouldn't have happened.
- When Palama "comes to town" enterprising activity increases.
- Given the campaign's effectiveness and outreach, its cost is well within the range of what can be expected.
- It has taken a great deal of will and commitment to achieve these results...
- ...and we know that, at times, this determination has come at the expense of relational practice.

Palama has called on the International Labour Organisation to embark on radical work: to open itself to the possibility of two-way conversation with thousands of villagers. This kind of work demands that development agencies like the ILO are dynamically responsive at all levels, confronting challenges to their basic structure, activities and expectations. This work of promoting enterprising culture ironically demands of the ILO that it becomes more entrepreneurial and responsive in the moment.

## Thoughts from a case study compiler

Journal entry, 7 July 2008, Colombo

*There's a great deal of ambiguity in what everyone's telling me about their experience of this project, which is innovative and creative, involving and popular at the same time as having exceeded its budget and being administratively challenging (to say the least). This is not an either/or issue, but an "at the same time" one, where the very nature of the project is challenging ILO's internal systems for finance and procurement, management and delivery. ILO managers are not theatrical producers, after all. ILO's infrastructure and capacities are very different from those of a theatre company. Is this a maverick project? Is it a rule breaker/maker? Is it a loveable rogue? Or is it one of the largest scale Forum Theatre pieces Sri Lanka, or elsewhere has ever seen?*

*And, does Palama represent a taste of things to come – working in a mass, yet participatory, engaged, dialogic way. Who's participating in whose process?*

### Some recommendations – what could be done better

- Pay more explicit attention to the qualities of relationship building and communication at every level – with each other, between the actors - even if this additional attention to process (and investment in relationship and communication) comes to some degree at the expense of audience numbers;
- Pay stronger attention to articulating, realising and implementing quality criteria for this work;
- Have more and clearer discussions with a wider range of people about the intentions and sense of purpose for this work so that the articulation of those intentions gets honed over time;
- Invest more in partnership approaches to this work with other local organisations with a stake in enterprise development. Invest in these relationships, for example with local business development services providers, MSE Forum members (and equivalents), existing local theatre groups;
- Work with the Theatre Companies more intensively from the start about their individual and shared future possibilities. Where possible, work with existing theatre companies at the local level, especially where they have pre-existing stage craft skills and links with business service providers. This very local focus helps in terms of logistics, accommodation and transport;
- Work with more experienced and mature actors who already have stage craft skills and are able to concentrate their efforts on perceiving and flexibly responding to local issues;

- Ensure that the project has an overall artistic direction which is held separately from the micromanagement of the campaign;
- Invest in the development of the Jokers – enable, encourage and require them to learn from each other;
- Budget for and invest in the Theatre Companies learning from each other;
- Ensure that time is allocated to pre-research and re-visit villages, again, even if this means fewer performances;
- Be more courageous in initiating spaces again and again for the difficult conversations to happen as openly and transparently as possible. Design such reflective spaces into the structure and management of the project;
- The relative rigidity of ILO project processes and procurement systems runs counter to some of the unknowable factors in such a complex and people-and-relationship-based project as Palama. Expect to need to be flexible;
- Consider how such large scale approaches might also be relevant for other issues such as child labour.