

## Activity 2.16 When Communication Breaks Down

### Module: 2. Intercultural Dialogue

Duration: 90 Minutes

**Social Development Themes:** Social Development Themes:

#### Summary

A role-play activity that gives participants the chance to explore what happens when dialogue breaks down. It also gives participants the opportunity to put into practice some of the skills and approaches they have learned so far.

#### Learning Outcomes:

Team Self Confidence

Self-Awareness

Understand dialogue and when it can be used – principles of dialogue

#### Approach:

1. Ask the group to reflect on what they have experienced in Active Citizens that could help them have conversations where they learn and share with others.
2. The group is now going to see if they can apply some of these techniques.
3. Split the group into groups of four or five and ask them to think about a time when they've experienced a conversation break down and a conflict.
4. After 15 minutes, ask the group to choose one of their stories that they all connect with. Alternatively they can create a new story that combines elements of more than one.
5. Each group now has 30 minutes to create a role play where we see the story and the resulting conflict. There should be a beginning middle and a clear end.
6. The story should be played out until the moment of conflict and it should end badly for the central character or characters who encounter a number of

challenges and finally don't get what they want or what they need. For example, a story that shows a family discuss, and then have a big argument about their daughter's relationship with a man/boyfriend. The parents won't listen to the daughter and won't let her meet with her boyfriend, and she ends up shouting at them and storming out of the house.

7. After 30 minutes ask the groups to come back and form an audience.
8. Watch the role play. At the end, ask the group what they saw happening. What did the central character want or need? Did they get it? Why not? Why was there conflict or tension? What were some of the communication styles we were we seeing?
9. If they were the central character, what would they do to bring about a better outcome? What approaches or skills have we learned during Active Citizens that could be useful?
10. Ask the actors to go back to the start of the role-play and repeat it until someone in the audience shouts 'stop'.
11. They should shout 'stop' when they have an idea for how something could be done differently. They are then invited to replace the central character. They try out their idea and the actors respond to it – they improvise.
12. After each intervention, ask the audience: was there progress? What was the strategy? Would this always work? Is this possible in our own communities?
13. You can repeat a scene several times with audience members acting out on stage different approaches to dealing with the situation.

Summary/Approach – going deeper with the arts

Forum Theatre is being used as an effective tool for supporting communities on the margins to creatively identify strategies for dealing with some of the challenges they're facing. Part of Augusto Boal's

Theatre of the Oppressed movement, Forum Theatre is now being used to great effect all over the world, from rural communities in Malawi to the homeless community in New York City.

The above exercise in the toolkit uses forum theatre methodology to support learning around different kinds of communication and potential conflict but the technique can be used in a number of different ways when thinking about change and development in communities. It can be used to explore the idea of rights and what happens when people feel they've been denied their rights as citizens, it could be used to explore sensitive issues such as gender inequality or youth participation. Facilitators might wish to refer to the 'Guidance for Facilitators' for more in-depth advice about working around these sensitive issues during discussion.

For instance, a way into an interesting forum theatre session can be to explore the idea of human rights. Is every citizen a human being? Is every human being a citizen? Ask the group to think of a time they feel they've been treated differently because of who they are or who someone thought they were – a young black male, someone with a disability, or a strong regional accent... this also a great way to explore assumptions and judgements.

### **Alternate Approach:**

1. In small groups invite the participants to share the story and see if there are similarities or recurring themes and ideas in the stories. Either choose one story that the group particularly identifies with or create a new story that combines some of the important themes or questions that are in all of the stories.

2. Repeat steps 3 to 12 of the above exercise, create a short role play of three to five minutes where we see some of these challenges and the main character doesn't get what they want, or what they need. In the resulting presentations, the groups can collectively brainstorm ideas for progress and change based on what they've seen.