

**The People's Theater for breaking the silence surrounding violence against women**  
By Olimata Gaye

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**Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI)**

The African Network for Integrated Development (RADI) is a pan-African NGO created in 1985 by African intellectuals. Its mission is to combat poverty, injustice and ignorance. RADI endorses peoples' initiatives, and privileges the process of integrated development, participation of the people, and democracy.

It is involved with seven out of eleven regions in Senegal in the following areas: education, credit /savings, environmental protection, water resources development, health, legal support, and public health.

It includes numerous departments and units, which are: education, public health, the rural integrated development program, decentralization, the legal program, and the follow-up evaluation.

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**Oulimata Gaye**

Madame Oulimata Gaye, lawyer by training, is an activist for civil liberties and is responsible for the formation of RADI's service and assistance to disadvantaged populations. Thus, since 1989, information centers and legal clinics have been established in four regions of Sénégal for education, training on human rights (with a particular emphasis on the rights of women, youth and prisoners, empowerment of women, microcredit and development of community organizations).

Ms. Gaye has represented RADI at several national and international assemblies. She is also a founding member of several international associations such as the International Network of Legal Clinics that aggregate 17 African countries. At the national level, she is a contributing member of numerous associations and serves as the president of the Committee to Combat Violence Against Women.

She has been assigned to a follow-up evaluation of the 11 NGOs responsible for creating a mass registration electoral list and an active cooperation of peoples in the 2000 presidential elections in Senegal.

From January to June of 2002, Ms. Oulimata Gaye was named vice-president of the special delegation of the Medina district of the city of Dakar, to ensure the interim municipal panel until the local elections of 2002.

September 2004

Dear friend,

Welcome to the “Workbook Series of New Tactics in the Human Rights Tactics!” In each book, a human rights practitioner describes an innovative tactic that has succeeded in advancing the human rights cause. The authors take part in the comprehensive and varied human rights movement, including NGOs, governmental perspectives, instructors, police personnel, truth and reconciliation processes, defenders of women’s rights and mental health. They have adapted and designed tactics that have contributed to human rights in their country of origin. Moreover, they have used tactics that can be adapted to other countries and situations in order to confront an entire range of problems.

Each notebook is composed of detailed information about how the author and his/her organization went about achieving their goals. We want to inspire other human rights practitioners to think in a *tactical* manner and we also want to augment the number of tactics that are considered effective in the advancement of human rights.

In this notebook, Oulimata Gaye explains how she and her organization break the wall of silence that cloaks violence against women in Senegal, as it does in many other countries and cultures. How do we begin to “repair” human rights problems when people will not speak of them? How do we make people talk about them? The tool used here is theater. At times amusing, at times sad, the sketches involve the audience, literally and metaphorically, in familiar situations. The people see the situations on stage and they also have the opportunity to play a role and to discuss what they have seen. As a result, they begin to recognize the abuse that they have seen hidden or silenced: it is a first step in stopping the abuse.

The unabridged series of the Tactical Notebook is available online at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org). Additional notebooks are also available and more will be added. On our Web site, you will also find other tools including a searchable database, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners, and information on our workshops and symposiums. For a subscription to the New Tactics newsletter, please send an e-mail to [newtactics@newtactics.org](mailto:newtactics@newtactics.org).

The New Tactics Project in Human Rights is an international initiative led by a group of diverse organizations and diverse practitioners from all around the world. The project is directed by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), and was developed from our experiences designing new tactics, as well as from our treatment center that calls for human rights from a unique perspective – that of healing and of encouraging community advancement.

We hope that these notebooks will be useful to you and will inspire new ideas.

Best regards,

Kate Kelsch

New Tactics Project Manager

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

What can be done so that people examine subjects that they do not want to face? How can a cultural taboo that is not discussed, but one from which numerous people are suffering, be overcome? Human rights problems are, at times, trendy – and the public can come to life and rally around a particular cause by which it's affected. However, sometimes there are threats to human rights that remain concealed. We consider them parts of daily routine, that which is *normal*. These abuses are often the most difficult ones to address, because society refuses to consider them as real.

The human rights organization in Senegal, RADI, found a way to break this silence: the people's theater. Thanks to their years of experience in raising awareness about human rights issues for groups of women, the paralegals knew that conjugal and sexual violence against women were part of these disregarded abuses; a taboo subject about which even the victims themselves did not want to speak. This violence is justified as a "family problem", it is perceived as a male prerogative in a patriarchal society, where victims are convinced that it is they who are to blame – or that there is nothing wrong with the violence to which they are subjected. And, no one speaks nor doubts this state of things.

Through a campaign that incorporates professional actors into groups of women in order to perform sketches on the theme, RADI succeeded in opening a public dialogue about violence against women in numerous communities. The women were themselves, invited to participate in the sketches, which gave them the opportunity to play roles side by side with well-known actors of the region. The sketches were both amusing and serious, breaking the silence surrounding this question. For the first time, communities were able to recognize the severity of this problem, its consequences from a Human Rights standpoint, and the search for solutions.

The people's theater is an ancient method of political education. There is also street theater, union theater, political theater and many others. This practice had remarkable effects in terms of discrimination, war and peace, and all types of injustices. Each culture has a theatrical tradition – and many are those that think that one of theater's principal functions is to stimulate the people's political and social awareness.

The traditional human rights movement is learning that in order to change behavior, it does not suffice simply to tell them what is wrong. It is necessary to touch the heart, through laughter and tears, so that they reflect upon that which seems "normal" to them in their society. In Senegal, RADI gives us an example of this strategy that is both practical and inspiring.

## **TACTIC: THE PEOPLE’S THEATER AND THE TABOOS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

*Daba, in a sweat, fiddles with the saucepans, in spite of the clumsiness and fatigue that keep her from concentrating. Feverishly, she looks around for her utensils, bumps into the pot on the fire and sighs. Tightening up suddenly, she says, “Oh my God, if Malick arrives before I’m ready, I’m done for.” At that very moment, heavy footsteps are heard on the doorstep: “Daba! Where’s my dinner?” Agitated, Daba stammers, “But Malick, you know very well that you only gave me the money at 10 o’clock, the baby is sick, I wasn’t able to get away in time, and...”*

*Furious, Malick interrupts her, floods her with insults and charges toward her, hitting her with the back of his hand. Daba, usually the consenting victim, no longer contains herself in this violent rage and suddenly cries out with all of her might. Upon hearing this, Daba’s mother appears and rushes to her daughter’s rescue. Little by little, the conversation worsens and the mother notices that marks have been left on her daughter’s body (others are already there from previous fights) yet Malick tries, in vain, to deny his role in the debacle. Ashamed, Malick no longer knows where to stand when the next-door neighbor appears and shouts, resentfully condemning Malick for never having allowed his wife to attend the daily discussions held by the women, which would’ve taught her to defend herself and to know her rights as a woman. Feeling nervous and on dangerous ground, Malick, asks forgiveness from his wife, but surprisingly, she stands up and threatens to denounce Malick if he ever dares to lay another finger on her. On that note, she announces that from then on, she will be attending the village meetings in order to better understand her rights.*

In fact, these discussions are held as a learning forum, thanks to RADI, a Human Rights Organization that aims to teach women different ways of protecting themselves (see the skit in the appendix).

This scene, commonplace in life in Senegal, takes place one afternoon beneath the amused, sad, or simply attentive eyes of the audience. The scene occurs in the public square of the village of Thiès where each week, an organization called RADI (*Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré* (The African Network for Integrated Development) organises a sketch like this one, which brings certain women spectators to tears because it so closely resembles the daily life of Thiès’ inhabitants. Daba, the unfortunate wife in the sketch is a member of the group of women supervised by RADI in real life. Malick, however is simply a professional actor, and the two other women (the mother and the neighbor) were spontaneously chosen (like Daba) from the audience that afternoon.

Next week, Malick will play the part of a father, who wants at all costs to marry his under-aged daughter; and the scene will incite the audience to feel a whole other range of emotions.

The history of these sketches in Thiès comes from RADI, which decided to create this strategy, allowing the village’s women to not only break the monotony of their afternoons, but to speak out about violations of their rights and to learn how to protect

themselves and give them the tools to do so.

While violence as a phenomenon is very frequent, it is necessary to underscore that as a subject it is still taboo to which neither women, nor administrative, political and judiciary authorities give it the importance that they should. This is why the problem, though serious, was altogether trivialized and was not taken seriously either by political authorities, since no juridical measure was protecting women in a specific way against it, nor by administrative and judiciary authorities who were receiving complaints from women.

In order to combat this phenomenon, it was necessary first and foremost to encourage the victims to speak about it, then to make them aware of the injustice of their situation, and to teach them about the legislative measures that were there to protect them.

The tactic that was used to break the silence surrounding domestic violence and to get the women to speak out, consisted of introducing discussions about the topic by presenting skits about the subject, performed by real actors, female members of the groups, and sometimes paralegals. (See the skit in the appendix.)

The desired goal then was to contribute to the eradication of the phenomenon of domestic violence.

The purpose of the tactic was to:

- Restore confidence in victims of domestic violence so that they cease to blame themselves
- Make them aware of the injustice in their living conditions
- Make them understand that they were protected by new legislative measures
- Have them know that they could come out of isolation with the help of Human Rights associations and other female members of the groups.

The tactic that had targeted the entire family, emphasizing the Senegalese woman as the main victim of this violence, had positive results on a community-level since the attendees began to speak about it publicly. They became aware that these violations constituted a serious and unjust phenomenon that needed to be fought. With the help of a juridical clinic (*Centre d'Information Juridique* (CIJ) Center of Juridical Information) of RADI, the victims began to denounce the violent perpetrators to the police and judicial authorities.

The strategy consisted of using the people's theater as a means of expression, of education and of expansion of women's rights. The people's theater is used because in Senegal, the people's theater fits perfectly into the context of the country's cultural politics. Theater is often used as instructive foundation in the policy of IEC (Information Education Communication), in the Ministry of Youth, for example. It has an instructional character and plays a role in moral reformation and in the reform of certain types of

mistreatment that are inherent in a number of social beliefs; therefore it is a means by which mentality changes and society advances.

Moreover, for over 20 years, the people's theater has met a renewal of life in Senegal through competitions organized each year between groups of various regions. It is presented in various national languages and the public acts as both a participant and a spectator.

The people's theater is also quite often used as a promotional and commercial framework to advertise certain products.

A sketch showing a woman who falls victim to violence, also enables the integration of other societal components affected this type of conflict, namely the immediate family, (mother or mother-in-law, sister-in-law, etc.), neighbors, and the authorities. The sketch emphasizes the way in which these various people naturally react to this type of situation. At the same time, the sketch conveys information about what written laws exist to protect women and about structures in place to guarantee their recognition, such as human rights organizations. (See sketch example in its entirety in the appendix.)

Overall, the people's theater plays a vital role in the process of behavioral change. In urban and rural settings alike, the people's theater, which takes place in various national languages and uses its spectators as actors, has always played an important role in moral reformation and the remodeling of ideas of mistreatment inherent in certain social beliefs. In this medium that was used, professional actors worked with female group members in a spontaneous and unrehearsed way.

We will present the global context in which the tactic was used, beginning with an exposé on the sociopolitical context of Senegal, then on RADI, the organization that launched the tactic, emphasizing the important role played by the moderators in the various steps taken for its implementation, the means used, and the results attained.

We will end with a critical analysis of the tactic by highlighting the difficulties encountered and the perspectives.

## **THE SENEGALESE CONTEXT REGARDING THE ISSUES OF CONJUGAL VIOLENCE**

Situated in West Africa, Senegal's population is approximately 10 million, the majority of which are women and children. This former French colony, which gained its independence in 1960, asserts its adherence to the government's rules of respecting rights, to the rules of democracy, and to public and individual liberties.

Economically impoverished, Senegal has been subject to political upheaval for decades. As a result the state has withdrawn from certain social sectors such as health and education, in which there has been a growing population of noticeable poverty among women, who are also the principal victims of illiteracy. Regarding the socio-cultural plan, 95 % of the Senegalese population is Muslim and those responsible for violence justify it through religious arguments based on the Koran.

Directly following its independence, Senegal, a country with a strong tradition of democracy, established equal rights between the sexes by ratifying most of the international laws, including the elimination of all forms of discrimination regarding women (CEDAW). However, the use of legal tools often clashes with socio-cultural constraints, such as the low rate of literacy among women, (77% are illiterate). This is one of the reasons that women (since they generally have no knowledge of their rights) are vulnerable to violence used in the private sphere, as well as in the public sphere.

Violence threatens their security, their freedom and their autonomy, and represents an underlying violation of human rights. This includes the right to life, liberty, mental and physical integrity, the right to live free from torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading punishment, and the right to equal protection under the law and to equality within the family.

The violence done to women is generally not reported to the authorities. Instead of denouncing this violence, the majority of women prefer to keep their silence out of fear, shame or a feeling that they are to blame. The psychological, emotional and economic condition of a woman who is subjected to physical or psychological abuse can, in fact, alter her perception of reality to the point that she is led to believe that she is entirely powerless and incapable of making choices or to flee her situation.

Even though it is a serious problem, since it constitutes an infringement on human rights and on fundamental liberties, domestic violence is trivialized by populations, starting with women who justify it, if need be.

Beginning in the 1990s, well-known cases of domestic violence were attracting the attention of public opinion on the severity of these incidents, which needed to be opposed with force in Senegal. Among these influential cases was that of Doki Niassé and of Fatou Dieng.

These cases were crucial to leading human rights associations to take the first step in

#### Case Examples

Doki Niassé is a young, 22 year-old woman who was killed by her husband in Kaolack, a city located about 180 km from Dakar. She had refused to prepare lunch for her husband's friends because it was Ramadan (a month of fasting for Muslims). For that reason, her husband beat her to death and the women of the city spontaneously organized a march to the governor's palace since he's the highest authority of the region. In the end, the husband was arrested and put into prison but was released after a famous trial.

Fatou Dieng is a 45 year-old woman who was mistreated by her husband, who was a retired high-ranking army officer, for 22 years. With the quick action of RADI, her case prompted the mobilization of every human rights and women's rights organization to create a supporting committee for Fatou Dieng. Following the marches, petitions, and radio debates organized by the supporting committee, the husband was arrested and sentenced to eight months in prison (which was the time he had already served) and to pay damages and reparation to Fatou Dieng. The prosecution, through the Justice Minister at the time, appealed, claiming the sentence was not severe enough. The Committee to Support Fatou Dieng became the Committee for the Struggle Against Violence Against Women.

speaking out against domestic violence in Senegal. Thanks to their influence, a specific law protecting vulnerable groups against various forms of violence, including domestic violence, was passed in January of 1999.

This new law provoked a negative reaction from a certain constituent of the population (particularly religious leaders), which contributed to reinforcing the silence surrounding this issue. RADI, which played a vital role in the vote on this written law, took the initiative to participate in a campaign that served on the one hand to raise consciousness about violence against woman, and on the other to familiarize the people of Senegal with the new law.

## **INTRODUCTION TO RADI AND TO ITS JURIDICAL PLAN**

The tactic was put into play by RADI, a pan-African NGO created by a group of African intellectuals in 1985. Their goal was to pool their experience and expertise in order to benefit the development of Africa.

The group's mission is designed to combat ignorance, poverty and injustice. For this reason, RADI is committed to collective and individual advancement of populations through a process of integrated, participatory, civic and democratic development.

From the project study to the education of populations living by farming RADI mediates within several domains including legal and judicial assistance for disadvantaged populations with the creation of urban and rural legal clinics in the Dakar (1989), Kaolack (1991), St. Louis (1994) and Thiès (1999) regions.

RADI's juridical plan, which targets provisional detainees of common law, children and women aims to improve the most destitute of socioeconomic conditions by furnishing them with the knowledge and the necessary skills to have their rights respected.

Its specific objectives are:

- To make the law more understandable
- To help people become aware of their rights and responsibilities
- To enable access to justice in order to defend their rights

To reach the goals that the organization has set on the subject of women, RADI trained female moderators or judges who are supervised by other judges working in legal clinics. They form the cornerstone of the juridical program since they ensure its operation in the community.

RADI's moderators, who are all women, are based on their familiarity with the target environment (particularly with women and local customs), their intellectual level (they must have at least ten years of schooling in the formal academic system), and their ability to communicate.

The moderators receive training on legal subjects related to the identified needs in their zones of intervention. They were already working for RADI on violence done to women

well before the implementation of the project, and they had already acquired a certain amount of experience in hosting discussions in women's groups, or *mbottaye*. (*Mbottaye* is a term in Wolof that means an informal group of people from the same generation who have similar goals. In general, they are groups of women of the same age, family, neighborhood, etc. It is a social structure that has always worked and which still exists presently, but it is better known as women's groups. These *mbottayes* can organize "tontines"<sup>1</sup>, come together during family ceremonies, organize cultural activities, etc.)

The moderators organize periodic discussions with groups of women, or *mbottayes*, in the neighborhoods and villages. The discussions, of which the themes are decided upon by the women, generally take place in the central square of the village or in the yard of someone's house (usually that of the group leader).

### **The Reason for Choosing Thiès**

Thiès, which was reported by the press as a sector in which violence had reached a frequency of disturbing proportions, particularly domestic violence, was deemed an ideal location for the execution of this project. Several cases of such violence had been reported on the radio and in certain newspapers. We were able to complete a study that led us to conclude that the problem of violence needed to be addressed even though it was not one expressed by the women.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE TACTIC**

It had been said that communication techniques used by the moderators for the informal discussions (without a sketch) were, at the time, successful in changing the behavior of the target group regarding the themes such as marriage or birth certificates.

These techniques consisted of opening a debate in the form of an exposé and formulating questions in order to engage the public. Nevertheless, in spite of the cooperation between the moderators and women, the former were not able to address the sensitive subject of domestic violence, and the latter did not initiate a dialogue to talk publicly about it either.

The need for discussions on the taboo subject of violence was not expressed, nor had it ever been, by the women for whom they were intended.

Another reason of equal importance was that ordinary conversations failed to draw in as large a crowd as did those accompanied by a sketch.

We thought that in order to reach our established goals and to discuss this sensitive subject with which nearly all women are familiar (most of them being victims to this problem), it was necessary to use their first-hand experiences. As an introduction to discussions and to break the ice, we wanted to employ sketches using professional actors

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<sup>1</sup> The microcredit groups ["tontines"] are in fact an organization's ["Mbottayes"] activity that consists of establishing, based on individual contributions, a certain sum of money that each member would receive in turn at a regular interval. The "tontines" are very popular in Senegal and constitute an informal way of offering savings or loans without interest rates.

along with women from the groups.

Establishing contact with the most well-known theatrical group in Thiès was not difficult. RADI, which was responsible for hosting a program on the regional station of national radio, was easily able to meet one of the actors who also happened to be one of the most prominent hosts of the station. Formal meetings were organized with those responsible for the theater group in order to discuss the method of collaboration. These discussions made it possible to study the tactic together, which they deemed both original and operational.

## **THE STEPS TAKEN TO ESTABLISH THE TACTIC**

### ***THE LAUNCHING OF THE PROJECT***

Before the legal clinic began, we had done a study in urban and rural areas. This study, in which sample populations were questioned, lasted one out of the five weeks, and allowed us to understand the legal needs of the town. While the study was not specifically geared toward violence against women, we were able to note that the need to address this issue was real, and that the reason it was not expressed had to do with socio-cultural pressures.

In the course of this study, the regional administrative authorities, and in particular the captain of the central police of Thiès, the prosecuting attorney, and the NGOs drew our attention to the existence and sensitive nature of this problem.

After detailing the project to a local financial partner, we got in contact with the actors, one of whom was a radio show host for a regional station. One of RADI's female legal practitioners, who hosted another show, contacted him to suggest working with us. He, in turn, put us in contact with those responsible for the theater group, who found the project to be interesting, and different from what they were used to doing.

Once the finances were obtained, we organized a five-day training session with the help of an external consultant (a judge), moderators, actors and a radio hostess. The training dealt with different forms of violence, its effects and its consequences.

Following the training session, the moderators informed the groups of women of their availability to address new themes relating to violence against women and related to those for which the moderators had just received training. Certain women continued to deny the existence of this phenomenon in their homes by saying "we get along very well with our husbands; it's a problem that we're lucky enough to ignore." In other groups, reactions were split and certain women were open in saying, "It's useless to lie, some of us are living in impossible situations from the violence carried out within the family structure and it is time to talk about it in order to find solutions.

Even in the most reticent groups, the moderators were persistent in having them understand that even if these types of violence did not exist in their community, the women could still benefit from the information and help other women who were victims.

The project had not included the preparation of written scenarios. Rather the actors and

the women were to play the roles spontaneously after a short explanation about the part that each one would take on.

### ***PREPARING THE DISCUSSION/SKETCH***

As soon as the discussion was organized, RADI's team (actors and moderators) arranged a meeting to sort out practical aspects (how to get around, specific problems of the village that needed to be taken into account, the place of meeting in the village, etc.).

### ***THE ARRIVAL OF THE TEAM ON SITE***

We chose to have the discussions coincide with the women's group meetings. This arrangement guaranteed that attendance would be at least 90%. The moderators tried to lead four to five discussions per month, and the groups of women met with them once a month, on average.

Upon arrival in the village, RADI's moderators and actors were enthusiastically greeted and welcomed by women. From that moment, women and children were publicizing the upcoming activity. (The actors were quite renowned since their theatrical works are broadcast on both television and radio.) It is important to make clear that the group of women was in charge of relaying this type of information – the date and the theme of the discussion sketch to be conducted by RADI – to the community. People were eager to attend and emerged from their houses with mats and benches.

Welcomed by the heads of the group, RADI's team made a detour to the home of the village leader to extend their greetings. This is a very important custom in Senegal, because it gives legitimacy to the activity, especially when it takes place in rural areas. It is seen as an endorsement of the activity by the village leader, which the women needed to feel more comfortable and confident in their discussions with the moderators. It also gives more credibility to whatever is taking place in the eyes of the people.

RADI's team of people and the heads of the women's group met up in the place where the activity was planned. The audience usually formed a circle in someone's home or in the center of the village. Sometimes, religious and traditional authorities were present or represented.

### ***PROCEEDING WITH THE ACTIVITY***

Once order is established, the moderator takes the stage and greets the crowd, thanking everyone for coming. Next, she announces the theme of the discussion, which the women have already chosen. It is important to emphasize that they are the ones who have chosen the subject because the themes should never be imposed on the women. Since sex is a taboo subject, requests for discussions on sexual violence were not often made, and therefore rarely addressed.

Next, the moderator introduces the actor(s). In general, the moderator does not need to introduce herself since the group members know her already. She's recruited by RADI because she is someone who has already been involved with these groups of women prior

to the execution of the project on violence against women. The women trust her since she has already gained familiarity with the group.

When the moderator has finished her introduction, the actor takes the stage and proceeds to joke around with the women in order to break the ice. In doing this, the actor is also able to identify potential participants from the crowd. In general, the actor teases them saying things like “Today, we are going to talk about economic abuse, but it seems as though this village doesn’t have any good cooks. Don’t you think that’s a good enough reason for men to not give a daily allowance to you? You do realize that a prepared meal that ends in the trash can during these hard times is a waste?”

Certain women react with a comparable way of joking in response to what the actor said. The actor takes advantage of such moments, identifying women who are more outgoing and who can participate in the sketch.

The moderator (who can also participate as an actor) announces a break for the actors to have the time to prepare. The chosen woman is taken to the side by the actors who explain to her the role that she will play (the mother of the victim, an abused woman, the neighbor, or the husband). In general, everyone knows how a violent husband behaves and how a mother-in-law or a neighbor reacts in these types of situations. It is enough to say “play the role of the mother-in-law or the violent husband”. Accepting to do this spontaneously, the woman is implicitly acknowledging already having been either a victim or a witness to a violent scene.

Next, the actors put on their costumes or disguise themselves in a particular way (as a man or woman) before taking the stage.

### ***DURING THE SKETCH***

The professional actors are the first ones to speak (one exception to this has been noted at this level) as well as the last ones. This is to avoid running over the allotted time for the sketch, which is 10 minutes. The actors never finish the sketch by saying that the perpetrator will end up in the courthouse or at the police station. However, they always educate about the penal measures in place (such as prison and fines), as well as the civil ones (for example, financial retribution paid to the victim). The actors always end on a positive note, lightening up the mood.

During the sketch, the moderator watches the audience and takes note of their reactions. After the sketch, the moderator quiets the crowd and asks an opening question to get the audience talking. Example: What just happened? What do you think about what just happened?

The mood of the sketch can be both amusing and serious, depending on the nature of the issue raised. When it is a question of dealing with unethical treatment of a woman who does not have a child, the feeling is serious, even sad. This is felt when silence permeates the crowd. It is important to emphasize that the actors always end on a positive note.

In principle, the crowd does not participate in the sketch, however several times it has

occurred that the crowd was in accordance with what was being done or said and showed its approval with applause or laughter. When the abused woman retreats to the audience, the crowd expresses its indignation (by pointing out her tattered clothes, for example, or the wounds she has on her arm or face).

It is worth noting that forty-seven groups had benefited from regular consciousness-raising.

### ***AFTER THE SKETCH***

In general, the crowd steps in spontaneously to offer its point of view and advice. In the cases where the crowd does not intervene in an unprompted way, the moderator gets people to talk by basing discussion on their reactions during the sketch and by asking questions to specific people. “Why were you upset just now? Why did you laugh? Why did you applaud for this or that?”

The women chime in to substantiate what the sketch was addressing, ask questions or give precise examples experienced by someone that they know. It is worth noting that they almost never recognize themselves as victims of violence. On rare occasions, a woman will publicly acknowledge that she has been a victim of economic violence.

At the end, there are exchanges between the moderator and the women about the methods of taking legislative action and the best strategies for using them.

Before leaving, the moderator and the women members of the group agree on the theme and the date of the next discussion. Certain women who have individual problems, or whose family or friends do, accompany the moderators for additional information.

### ***NECESSARY RESOURCES***

The advantage of this tactic is that few resources are needed.

As far as personnel are concerned, there was an external training consultant, two arbitrators who ensured the follow-up of discussions, four moderators, four actors and a radio hostess. In addition to that, there was the program director from RADI whose job was to oversee the entire project.

On a financial level, the overall cost was 8 million CFA (French Colonies of Africa) francs, or \$14,545 (one dollar = 550 F CFA) to cover a contribution for the operational costs of the clinic, the moderator’s monthly stipends, and compensation for the actors, the radio personality and the resource personnel.

The employed tactic works well in the global strategy of RADI’s legal program, which, during different assessments, had felt it necessary to get backing, by means of sketches, for example, in order to help make the discussions more attractive. The women were also in support of this.

RADI had developed a year-long experiment that addressed legal issues in the form of a

In order to minimize these difficulties, RADI joined with other organizations that deal with these same issues. Example: One organization agreed to handle the victims of physical violence in helping them to obtain a medical certificate necessary to file charges. Another organization handled the payments made to the attorneys responsible for their defense in court. television program. The program consisted of two parts: a sketch to introduce the subject that lasted 7-10 minutes followed by a discussion with a resource person who addressed specific questions for 20 minutes. This project was a success.

Another aspect of the project that needs to be considered is the place that theater takes in Senegal with regard to spreading ideas. The amount of money allotted and the limited amount of time (a year) for this project, in relation to the project's goals, prompted RADI to favor this particular tactic over more traditional strategies that the organization had previously used to educate. In its three-year program, (2003-2006) RADI integrated and broadened the use of the tactic for all sensitive legal issues in its four centers.

### **THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT**

Senegal does not yet have statistics that tell us about the extent of domestic violence incidents. After completing the project, we conducted an assessment, in conjunction with an outside consultant that included a sample analysis based on a quantitative and qualitative survey.

The qualitative survey allowed for us to calculate that 94% of those questioned had shown a strong interest in the project's activities and already felt an impact in their daily lives. In fact, 83% said they knew their rights better, and were living better in regard to both their family and their couple relations. 72% claimed to have used what they had

Commentary from the target audience and the discussion participants:

- "Moral violence is among the most frequent, the most unjust, the most difficult to support and the least severely disciplined"
- "Domestic violence has been noticeably reduced and the results would've been even more interesting had men attended the consciousness raising meetings alongside the women."
- The number of women speaking out against violence, and even taking legal action, has increased and he has even noted some cases where women are going to pursue CASSATION.

In spite of the positive aspects reached by this project, which addressed themes related to physical, moral, psychological, economical, and sexual violence, it is vital to recognize that we had some difficulty confronting certain effects resulting from the project:

- A heightened demand for legal help even though the center was dealing with a limited amount of human resources.
- The inability to bring subsequent support to the victims of violence because there was no organization to give support to the victims who came to the center.

In order to minimize these difficulties, RADI joined with other organizations that deal with these same issues. Example: One organization agreed to handle the victims of physical violence in helping them to obtain a medical certificate necessary to file charges. Another organization handled the payments made to the attorneys responsible for their defense in court.

learned in dealing with other members of their family and with their friends who had a positive take on the project's activities and who showed a real interest in participating in them. 89% of the target audience better interprets the messages diffused by the sketch/discussions.

Regarding the frequency of violence, economic violence is by far the most common (39%) followed by moral violence (31%). Physical violence is at 19%. Sexual violence is only at 8%, but these figures are skewed since taboos surrounding sex prevent many women from talking about it openly. This was determined during the assessment of evaluation results. At the center in Thiès, the participants were actually very concerned about sexual violence. During this assessment, everyone that met during the course of the evaluation, came to the premises of Thiès' legal clinic.

At a community level, the project facilitated the recognition of violence as a serious social phenomenon which has lasted long enough and which needs to stop. At the same time, it was a source of motivation, boosting women's confidence to combat violence by first denouncing it. The assessment also allowed us to note a recognition, on the part of the women, of the need to involve men in consciousness-raising. CIJ/THIES became a reference for the fight against violence against women.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE TACTIC**

In this final part, we would like to show you in turn the challenges we faced as well as our achievements. This will help you in the case where you'd like to use this same tactic under other circumstances. We will begin by talking about a couple of technical difficulties faced, then we will make an in-depth analysis of the role played by the professional actors. Thirdly, we will examine the function of the moderators in the process. The final point, which is perhaps the most important, will be devoted to the impact that the tactic had on the public.

## **THE LOGISTICS**

Just as in the unfolding of any other complex activity, it is necessary to pay attention to practical and material details. For example, our legal clinic, not having a car, had to organize its own transportation and therefore often arrived late, which made the entire operation run behind schedule. We also noticed that when the audience exceeded 100 people, it was difficult for the moderators to make themselves heard without adequate audio equipment (such as a microphone or megaphone). Thus, these problems need to be worked out in advance.

## **THE ACTORS**

The fact that we were able to recruit well-known actors from Thiès' community was vital to the success of the tactic. This gave credibility to the process and attracted crowds, including men and children. However, it is possible that the tactic could have had the same results with ordinary actors. In this case, however, it would be important that the actors know how to express themselves adequately in front of the public, but also with them. The actors came from different educational sectors: some of them had attended

university while others had attended school for fewer than six years. At times we were concerned about their ability to incorporate legal concepts during their training. In fact, in certain cases, legal aspects were set aside by certain actors who had the tendency to extrapolate. It is therefore important that the moderators clearly track each meeting by taking notes and that they clarify and detail what happened by revisiting certain messages given by the actors. It would be advantageous to use the personnel from your organization as the on-site director. Not only does this reduce the necessary costs, but also allows for clearer direction which would help avoid the type of obstacles with which we were confronted while managing the group of actors. Unfortunately, we did not have sufficient financial means to deal with the actors' prerequisites for being filmed or recorded for television or radio programs; they emphatically refused to take part in such distribution of their work without receiving royalties for it. Thus, we have no video or audio recordings illustrating these events, which limited the "multiplying" aspect of educating the masses, which should have been an outcome of our work.

### **THE MODERATORS AND THE INFORMAL DISCUSSION PROCESS**

Is the moderator's role absolutely necessary? In the framework of RADI's efforts, the fact that the moderators had already worked with the same women was an essential asset. They had already developed a certain degree of trust with them and the women were eager to participate in the meetings. Since the questions addressed were often of a sensitive nature, it was important to establish trust. This type of relationship also allows RADI to track the evolution of the women after the discussions have taken place and to help them take care of themselves and to change their attitude. These women also agreed to go to legal clinics affiliated with RADI so that they could discuss problems that they would hesitate to bring to the attention of the authorities.

It is, however, possible to conceive of a civil (or political) education program in the absence of a legal component, which would eliminate the need of the legal moderators. Their role could be filled by "facilitators" or "hosts". In this case, you would still need someone to establish trust with the public and to do a follow-up evaluation of all of the activities, even if the legal aspect is missing. All of RADI's moderators are women, which eased the relationship established with the women of the group. In addition, when sensitive themes are discussed (like AIDS), men, or anyone capable of open expression in the public eye can direct the debates. The imperative is that the moderator/facilitator have a certain credibility and have the trust of the community.

The moderators/facilitators, being the official representatives of RADI during these discussions were, at times, in a delicate position. Unfortunately, it was impossible in a rural setting to quickly take counsel regarding urgent questions for which they had no answers. For example, at times religious fundamentalists would participate in the informal meetings and intimidate the women by contradicting all that was said by the moderators. We therefore found it important to give the moderators training in developing religious arguments in the case where they might find themselves in an Islamic region, dealing with fundamentalists who would be capable of justifying a man's abuse of a disobedient woman. If they are well-prepared, the moderators are able to counter-attack such arguments with ones that are also religiously-based, which have been

taught and developed by Imams who are opposed to violence against women. On a similar note, concerning other circumstances, it would be useful to plan in advance responses to conflicting arguments that could come from the audience. Since our moderators had already been engaged in several discussions with the women's groups before the theatrical component was launched, we learned valuable lessons on how to deal with this issue.

- The moderators must address the least sensitive themes. It is hardly recommended, for example, to begin with the theme of sexual violence since sex is a taboo subject in certain societies. It is important to begin with subjects that are not distressing. (Example: economic violence like the issue of a family man not wanting to feed his family.) In spite of the connection between the moderators and the female member of our groups, we were barely able to find a way of separating from the questions of sexual violence in a way that would allow us to talk about it.
- Neither the moderators nor the actors should encourage the women to rebel against their husbands because the risk is high to have the women themselves refuse to participate in future informal discussions.
- It is central to have the women decide for themselves which themes they want to debate. If this is not the case, they will not participate in the debates. For example, if the subject of something like genital mutilation is imposed on them right away, they will listen but they will not directly participate in the discussions.

## THE PUBLIC

We were afraid the women would be reluctant to participate in the sketches (informal discussions) or would not ask questions. Actually, there was the possibility that their husbands would forbid their participation. We were also concerned that the concepts learned could become a source of conflict between the couples, conflicts in which women generally lose. The women's groups were unable to address questions connected to sexual violence and the moderators were not in a position to force them to do so. Even the actors found it difficult to expand on scenes showing this type of violence. We discovered, however, that children are more interested in these types of questions and tend to address them more readily than the adults.

### Anecdote:

In the middle of one of the discussions, one of the moderators was verbally attacked by three people: an imam, a Koranic cleric, and a fundamentalist who all took apart her argument. However, that very night, all three came to the moderator's house without consulting one another, in order to rebuke their critical attitude and to admit that what she was saying was not a contradiction of the Koran.

One of our first suggestions would be to assess the cultural context and the social realities in which you are going to intervene ahead of time. Men should be a target of choice in this practice. The limited number of men who attended the exercises as group members (certain groups can be mixed) or as village leaders, or even as imams, rarely got involved in the debates. However, the few times when they did, they supported the women and opposed the arguments. The women easily discussed these questions, even in the

presence of men. We thought that the men would be influenced positively by all of these discussions. Unfortunately, we were hardly effective in influencing the men who stayed outside of the groups. A way to enhance the tactic would be to emphasize the importance of incorporating a larger number of men in the debates. Ideally, men would be trained in preparation for projects similar to this one because this approach would have more impact on the male population by raising consciousness about these issues.

These sketches attracted a lot more people than traditional debates. People came to see the actors and, over all, to observe how women from the rural groups, who had never been on stage, would behave in the presence of well-known actors. The public was thus able to participate in our diverse activities in a way that was as formal as it was playful. This proved encouraging to both men and children who, under normal circumstances, would never have dared participate in the debates. We noticed that the audience participated in a spontaneous way like when people feigned surprise when they saw the fake wounds on the woman's body. They took note of the fact that her clothes were tattered or offered to take her to the hospital. The moderators made a note of how the public reacted and encouraged those who reacted to participate in the discussions. Our experience also showed us that the members of the target group are willing to improvise spontaneously. We only had to explain to the designated person once, and without long explanations, that they were supposed to play the role of husband, mother-in-law, etc.

This procedure also helped us to determine the public's level of comprehension concerning the chosen theme and to analyze their reaction once that particular theme had been presented. Actually, by spontaneously accepting to participate, the female actor implicitly recognized already having been either a victim herself or a witness to a violent episode. We also learned how important it is to end each sketch on a positive note. We never ended by saying, for example, "Go to the police!" Rather, we let the audience come to the conclusion that it is **necessary** to go to the police.

This reinforces the credibility of the entire process by giving people the impression that you are not there to dismantle established order but rather that they have the ability to make their own decisions.

#### **GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ARRANGING THE TACTIC**

This tactic allows people to portray difficult everyday problems without shocking or hurting those they touch. It is also useful in a context where there is a high rate of illiteracy, where those possibly benefiting from it remember more easily lessons given in sketch form. In this category, the people's theater can be used in various settings. The tactic could also be used for human rights, for helping groups dealing with the health field (STDs, AIDS, vaccination promotion) and the environment. If the theme is really sensitive, like that of sexual violence, that would probably require a different approach, possibly using masks. A crime like rape would thus be presented as an "attempted rape" in order to not alarm the public.

The public plays an important role in the tactic's evolution, but there is an inherent selection process between the theme and the public. Using the tactic on a theme like

AIDS, for example, would require particular adjustments. AIDS is a disease that frightens and marginalizes. Thus, one must consider the way of bringing together those who are infected and those who are not in a way that doesn't exacerbate the marginalized feelings of the former group. It is important to establish trust and credibility with the public when sensitive themes are debated.

It is necessary to find local organizations so that partnerships can be formed. These local groups can be key in establishing trust in the heart of the community. This will be useful in the case where you will need respected figures from the community. Using police officers, for example, in a sketch about human rights violations can draw the public's attention to the importance of the problem and the importance of filing charges.

If the subject is AIDS or another illness, making use of medical authorities can have a similar effect of strengthening the public's trust. Actors and police officers could be important partners in this type of project because their support maximizes its impact. It is crucial to familiarize the police with this because they are responsible for producing the proof of abuse and for upholding the laws, just as doctors are responsible for healing the victims.

In regions where customary or religious authorities play an important role, one of the recommendations would be to "brief" them on the project's goals by focusing on the fact that it does not mean to encourage the separation of families but rather reinforces the cohesion of family through information. It also endeavors to promote individual awareness and a reduction of violence, this generally being the cause of conflicts. The public will be more trusting if it participates in activities which will have received the support of customary and religious authorities. Also, you will have to convince the community that you both understand and respect their culture. For example, if you are in a region where men and women are not allowed to sit in the same physical space, it will be necessary to organize separate discussions for each group.

#### **CONCLUSION : RADI'S EXPERIENCE**

Finally, the use of the people's theater to educate politically had a very positive result. Actually, this method was fun, accessible to everyone, and it affected a large number of people in an emotionally positive way. The impact was noticeable through the questionnaires (studies and evaluation groups): results can be obtained within a year and we do not regret the investment of energy and resources that were required.

To conclude, the people's theater is an excellent way of communicating and teaching because it is a fun tool that, at the same time, allows people to reinforce both their social and professional skills.

All campaigns that endeavor to generate moral or social change would benefit from using this tactic. We hope that our experience will help you to consider possibly using this creative means of promoting human rights as well as a change of tactics in your own work.

## Appendix 1

### EXAMPLE OF A SKETCH

The scene takes place in the courtyard of an area containing three huts. In one corner of the courtyard, slightly off to the side of the huts, Daba, the lady of the house, rushes around fiddling with kitchen tools and things that she was supposed to serve in preparation for the afternoon meal.

It was really hot during this August month, which fell in the winter period. The awning that was shading the kitchen was not protecting her from the brutal sun. Her face was dripping with sweat and her clothes were sticking to her skin. She was trying to light the fire, but her nerves prevented her from succeeding, and her facial expression was filled with anxiety.

**Daba:** « If Malick ever comes home and doesn't find the kettle on the fire, it'll be my head. » she said out loud.

*As she feared, at that very moment, Malick passes quickly through the front door, and stops, astonished.*

**Malick:** « Daba!!! » he blurted out in a tone that let her know he was upset. "...don't tell me that... » *The words no longer come out. His blood-red eyes are coming out of their sockets. He is shaking with fury.*

**Daba** « Wait Malick, I can explain... »

*He cuts her off.*

**Malick:** « There's nothing to explain. I always tell you that I want Friday's meal to be served exactly at noon so that I have time to get to the mosque. Shut your mouth...worthless woman. All of the good wives are serving meals to their husbands right now, and you, during this whole time you failed to even light the fire.»

**Daba:** « Listen, Malick, you know that the baby has had a fever for two days. Since the nurse comes by the health center on Fridays, I made a little detour over there on my way to the market because I was preoccupied with his condition. Incidentally, the nurse said that he's got malaria... »

**Malick:** "I don't give a damn about the sick baby. What I want is my meal ready on time. The rest is just details. You're a good-for-nothing. Look at you. You look like an old monkey. I wonder what in God's name I did to deserve such a fate! I should've listened to my mother and married my cousin, Marème. In any case, it's not too late. I think it's necessary to have another woman around this house to keep you in line. I have no idea why I give you a daily allowance if I can't even have my meal on time at my own house."

**Daba:** « That's just it, Malick. When you gave me the money this morning, it was already past 9:00 a.m. and it wasn't enough because right now, since it's winter, there's

nothing at the markets and the prices have doubled. It's..."

**Malick:** « What? You mean to tell me that what I give you isn't enough, you damn...I'm going to teach you to respect your husband. »

*While saying this, he grabs a stick that was in the courtyard and begins to hit her.*

*Daba doesn't cry for the first few hits, thinking that he will stop soon enough. She is also concerned that the neighbors will know that her husband is once again treating her like a good-for-nothing. Not one week will pass without them coming to split up a fight.*

*Malick strikes her violently on the head and at the sight of blood, she screams for help with all her might.*

*Immediately, a woman of considerable age, who is actually Daba's mother, comes out of one of the huts with prayer beads in her hand.*

**Mother-in-law:**« lahila ha illalah ! What's going on? Malick, stop. You're going to kill her. »

*Frozen, Malick stops hitting her when he sees Daba's mother.*

**Mother-in-law:** "I can't believe my eyes or my ears. Malick, is this how you treat my daughter...?"

*She's unable to finish her thought because she's already begun to cry.*

**Mother-in-law:** « For years she's been complaining that you rough her up, but we never believed her. As far as I'm concerned, I always told her that all home-life is challenging and that if she wanted her kids to succeed in life, she had to obey her husband and aim to please him. But I can't support the hitting. I know that my daughter doesn't deserve to be treated like that..."

*She continues to cry while she helps her daughter to her feet.*

**Malick (disturbed)** « My dear mother-in-law, I...I...I didn't know that you were here. »  
[Turning to Daba] "Why didn't you tell me that your mother was here?"

**Mother-in-law:** « You didn't give her the time or the opportunity to tell you. I heard everything, but I was praying, so that's why I didn't come out. I had no idea that it was going to turn into hitting...besides, how does that change things if I'm here or not? Do I have to live here in order for you to stop beating her? Things are not going to continue like this..."

**The neighbor:** « What's going on here *this* time. I knew this day would come. I knew Daba's parents would eventually see this because a week can't go by without you mistreating your wife. The authorities have done everything to... »

**Malick:** « You, go mind your own business and take care of your own household. »

**The neighbor:** « Actually, I'm really worried. You didn't want to listen to anyone. You even disregard the Imam and the head of the village. I'm letting you know that we've discussed your situation in our group. And, it might interest you to change if you don't want us to report you to human rights groups. Have you ever heard of Doki Niasse, Fatou Dieng or Aby Sall? You can't ignore them. They're Senegalese women, well-known for having experienced the worst domestic beatings. For weeks human rights groups rallied radio and television stations in order to condemn these acts, and there were even protests that were joined by the President's wife...do you remember, or would you like me to continue?

**Malick:** *[with a blank stare on his face appearing to try to remember]* “No, it's not worth it. Even though we're out in the country, I remember very well those stories...Daba, I promise that I won't ever do this again. My dear mother-in-law, forgive me. I promise that this will be the last time that I raise my hand to her.”

*[Turning toward Daba]*

**Malick** « We have to take care of your wound, but I beg you not to say that I was the one who hurt you, and please, don't notify the human rights groups of this.

**The neighbor:** « Yeah, whatever! I'm going to tell everyone, starting with the women's group.»

**Malick:** « No. C'mon Fatou! I don't want to go to prison. C'mon, Daba, you don't want your children's father to go to prison, do you?... »

**The neighbor :** « Were you thinking about your children as you were hitting her?! »

*[The mother-in-law aggressively approaches Malick.]*

**Mother-in-law [angry]:** « Neither Daba nor the women's group is going to blow the whistle on you. I'm the one who's going to do it right away. It's all over. We're no longer going to hide this kind of brutality. We're not keeping quiet any longer. In my day, this was unbearable, and it's even more so today. These things should not be tolerated or hidden.”

*[Daba looks at her mother for awhile, astonished.]*

**Malick:** « Please, Mom, don't do that. I won't hit her anymore. It's all done. I swear on the head of my spiritual leader, marabout. ”

**The Neighbor:** « That's not true. That's what he always says.”

*[Daba frees herself from her mother's grasp and goes to Malick with conviction, looking him straight in the eye.]*

**Daba:** « No one's going to take care of this problem except for me. I swear, Malick, if you ever dare to raise your little finger to me, I will not hesitate one second to inform the human rights groups and the authorities about you.

You never allowed me to get involved with the women's group in the village, but I have a lot of friends who are and I know what my rights are. I know that there is a new law in effect that protects us from monsters like you and that you can even go to prison; if *you* aren't ashamed to treat the mother of your children like this, I don't see any reason why I will feel shame for informing the authorities about you. I hadn't been able to do this up until now, because I didn't have the support of my mother. Now that she's seen it with her own eyes, I won't give it a second thought.

**Malick:** « You don't have to, Daba. It will never happen again. »

**Mother-in-law:** Daba, we have to take care of your wounds. Let's go to the hospital. We'll deal with all of this later. You can be certain of one thing, Malick, things have changed for good.

## **Appendix 2**

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