

Briefing

Collaborative Art-Making for Deliberation in Africa

Across West Africa and East Africa, policy actors and citizens have tended to discuss socio-environmental issues in ways that recognise emotional, subjective viewpoints, but can be antagonistic.

Although deliberation literature suggests that collaborative arts-based activities can encourage consideration of affective dimensions, their major value in these emotive, hierarchical and antagonistic contexts is to promote more convivial working relationships.

Key messages

- Verbal policy-focused discussion in West Africa and East Africa often involves emotive and subjective rationales.
- Collaborative art-making may help promote convivial working relationships in hierarchical contexts where actors have antagonistic interactions, and thus could be more widely used by policy actors and citizen groups.
- Collaborative art-making workshop participants prioritised communication to the public through high-quality aesthetic outputs facilitated by professional artists.



Collaborative art-making may help promote convivial working relationships in hierarchical contexts where actors have antagonistic interactions.

**Aminata Niang,
Lansine Sountoura,
Kaderi Bukari,
Imogen Bellwood-Howard
and Peter Taylor**

Arts-based deliberation and arts for change

Democratic deliberation has been conceptualised in Western contexts as taking place among social equals, who reach consensus on policy issues based on a common understanding of evidence developed through rational consideration. More recently, it has been suggested that arts-based techniques could prompt consideration of value-based, emotive and subjective concerns of different groups, alongside rational elements, within a deliberative space. Arts-based methods have been used to drive change in socially engaged art and arts-based community actions. Arts-based activism is well documented in West and East Africa, under the label 'arts for change'. In these contexts, cultural activism has prompted discussions within wider society, but there are few records of intentional arts-based deliberation.

Encouraging conviviality through groupwork

We conducted workshops in Kenya, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, bringing

together policymakers, researchers, citizen advocates, and artists to co-create artworks, which can be viewed at **Art-Environment-Africa**, the website of the Pan-African Network. These activities were conceptualised as deliberative events, where participants could express their subjective and emotional opinions, and reach some understanding of each other's views, or even consensus. Workshops discussed environmental themes (including climate change-induced sea-level rise and water resource depletion) before doing the artistic activity.

Subjective imperatives (sometimes antagonistic) were very present during discussions, reflecting the hierarchical contexts of the groups taking part, and their sectoral or siloed working. Because emotional imperatives were already evident, the artistic activities were not necessarily responsible for introducing this dimension. Instead, the process of collaborating on an artwork allowed expressions of emotion to become more convivial.

Workshop participants believed they were taking part in the types of activities recorded in the 'arts-for-change' literature



Source: A painting about sea level rise created by workshop participants in Senegal, facilitated by Samba Sarr. Photo taken by Aminata Niang.

rather than deliberating in a way intended to develop relationships or create synergies. Their main focus was creating an artwork that would raise people's awareness or change behaviours. The process of taking part in such a collaborative activity, which they perceived as fun and informal, created a degree of trust and facilitated new working relationships between people from different professions. The experience of working together seemed more significant than the fact that it was an art-based activity, although the levelling effect of working with media unfamiliar to most participants – creative writing, visual art, and music – was another contributor.

Because the participants prioritised their co-created artistic output, rather than the relationships they were developing, they convened around a simple message to communicate to a public. This symbolised their convergence around an idea, such as peace or environmental protection. The aesthetic qualities of the piece were central to this communicative function.

Attending to aesthetics and hierarchies

Although short-lived, the development of working relationships during the workshops was significant, in a context characterised by strong hierarchies and lack of trust between sectors. It implies that the primary value of collaborative art-making in these contexts is not that proposed by traditionally Western-focused arts-based deliberation literature, but is rather the generation of relationships, which is important in deliberation but also arts-for-change literature.

If collaborative art-making is to promote understanding between groups, it must be expertly facilitated. This means that artist-facilitators must be credible as aesthetically gifted professionals, and that facilitators (whether artists or with other skills) must promote deliberation styles that acknowledge extant hierarchies and roles, while encouraging people to cross professional divides, and provide space for all to express opinions.

Recommendations

Policy actors and citizen activists:

- Consider using arts to communicate and deliberate on development issues.
- Consider using collaborative art-making to encourage more convivial ways of working, particularly between groups with historically antagonistic relationships. Art could be used in events such as *barazas* – Kenyan forums where policy actors and others engage in dialogue.
- Invite socially engaged artists to help facilitate community sensitisation activities, town hall meetings, and policy dialogue events.
- Consider whether collaboratively produced artworks could play a role in communicating messages to the public.

Artists:

- Consider training as facilitators for policy events, inviting policy actors to private views and exhibitions of engaged art, and engaging policy actors as participants in socially engaged artworks such as installations/performance pieces.

Researchers:

- Explore how far the relationship-building effects of collaborative art-making are due to artistic or collaborative components.
- Explore the role of collaborative art-making in engendering public debate.

All:

- Consider joining groups such as the **Pan-African Network for the Arts in Environmentally Sustainable Development**, which are exploring these questions. ■

Sommaire

Dans l'Afrique de l'Ouest et de l'Est, les acteurs politiques et les citoyens ont eu tendance à discuter des questions socio-environnementales d'une manière qui reconnaît les points de vue émotionnels et subjectifs, mais qui peut être antagonistes.

Bien que la littérature sur la délibération suggère que les activités artistiques collaboratives peuvent encourager la prise en compte des dimensions affectives, leur valeur majeure dans ces contextes émotifs, hiérarchiques et antagonistes est de favoriser des relations de travail plus conviviales.

Recommandations

Acteurs politiques et citoyens activistes :

- Envisagez d'utiliser des ateliers d'arts collaboratifs pour encourager des méthodes de travail plus conviviales, particulièrement entre des groupes dont les relations sont historiquement antagonistes.
- Des méthodes artistiques pourraient être utilisées dans le cadre d'événements tels que les Barazas Kenyans, où le dialogue se produit entre les acteurs politiques et d'autres groupes.
- Invitez des artistes socialement engagés à animer les activités de sensibilisation des

communautés, les assemblées publiques et les événements de dialogue politique.

- Considérez si les œuvres d'art produites en collaboration peuvent jouer un rôle dans la communication de messages à un public.

Artistes :

- Envisagez de se former comme des animateurs pour les événements politiques, d'inviter des acteurs politiques à des expositions d'art engagé, et d'engager les acteurs politiques en tant que participants à des œuvres d'art socialement engagées telles que des installations ou des performances.

Chercheurs :

- Étudier dans quelle mesure les effets de la création artistique collaboratif sur l'établissement de relations sont dus à des composantes artistiques ou collaboratives.
- Étudier le rôle de la création artistique collaboratif dans l'engendrement d'un débat public.

Tous :

- Envisagez de rejoindre des groupes tels que le Réseau panafricain pour les arts dans le développement écologiquement durable qui explorent ces questions. ■

Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton, BN1 9RE, United Kingdom +44 (0)1273 606261 ids.ac.uk

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England. Charity Registration Number 306371. Charitable Company Number 877338.

Further reading

Lee, C.W. (2016) 'The Arts and Crafts of Participatory Reforms: How Can Socially Engaged Art and Public Deliberation Inform Each Other?', *Field 3* (Winter): 7–37


Martin, A. and Rutagarama, E. (2012) 'Just Deliberation: Can Communicative Rationality Support Socially Just Environmental Conservation in Rural Africa?', *Journal of Rural Studies* 28.3: 189–98

Bellwood-Howard, I. et al. (2023) **Les arts dans le dialogue et la communication sur l'environnement en Afrique de l'Ouest et de l'Est**, IDS Working Paper 593, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2023.037

Bellwood-Howard, I. et al. (2022) **Citizen Voice and the Arts: Opportunities and Challenges for Citizen-Policy Engagement on Environmental Issues in Sahelian West Africa**, IDS Working Paper 584, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2022.088

This *IDS Policy Briefing* was written by **Aminata Niang** (independent consultant), **Lansine Sountoura** (Groupe de Recherche en Économie Appliquée et Théorique, GREAT), **Kaderi Bukari** (University of Cape Coast), **Imogen Bellwood-Howard** and **Peter Taylor** (Institute of Development Studies). It was produced as part of the Pan-African Network for the Arts in Environmentally Sustainable Development, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IDS or the AHRC.

The authors acknowledge support from **Fatoumata Sow** (GREAT), **Haoussa Ndiaye** (Organisation Mauritanien pour le Développement), **Eric Kioko** and **Peter Wangai** (Kenyatta University), and **Bronson Eran'Ogwa** (The Source Plus).

 © Institute of Development Studies 2023. This is an Open Access briefing distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence** (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.

DOI: [10.19088/IDS.2023.036](https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2023.036)