

Theatre for Africa: A Voice for Rural Communities

With a yearly deforestation rate reaching 10 percent in some parts, the semi-arid savannas of southern Africa are speedily losing their trees to farming, threatening biological diversity. Supported by a Global Environment Facility [grant](#) administered by the World Bank, a unique, joint initiative between Theatre for Africa Community Outreach Program, Africa Resources Trust and a network of 20 NGOs work in seven southern African countries to promote conservation and community development. The program uses theatrical and other artistic techniques to develop innovative communication mechanisms.

The program's specific objectives include: improving communications between rural communities and urban decision makers; exchanging lessons and ideas on natural resource management throughout southern Africa; and promoting local employment through the development of local theatre groups.

Fourteen actors, two from each country were selected and underwent 4 months of specialized training in theatre, extension and communications. The actors then returned to their countries of origin where they performed a series of plays with specifically researched environmental education messages and assisted communities and local decision-makers address key environmental issues. Since then, the actors came together and developed a regional theatrical road-show which is a culmination of all the lessons and challenges learned from rural communities.

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