Keeping the peace? Perspectives from Kenyan practitioners working in applied performance and peacebuilding on project challenges, funding and support

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Keeping the peace? Perspectives from Kenyan practitioners working in applied performance and peacebuilding on project challenges, funding and support

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ABSTRACT
In Kenya there are an increasing number of applied theatre and peacebuilding projects taking place. Currently, the perspectives and experiences of those undertaking this work, on the ground, are not adequately reflected in academic discourse or in the processes of setting up projects or establishing modes of support and collaboration. In this article we address this by outlining findings from a series of two-day workshops with theatre practitioners. In doing so, we map the challenges practitioners face, the skills and knowledges they feel they already have, those they lack, and the future support and opportunities they would value.

KEYWORDS
Peacebuilding; conflict; Kenya

Introduction
The perspectives of Kenyan applied performance practitioners and organisations involved in peacebuilding projects are not adequately represented. If donors, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and practitioners and researchers from elsewhere are to continue to engage with this work, it seems vital to us that they do so with a greater understanding of the skills, knowledges and needs of those ‘on the ground’ undertaking projects. This article addresses this gap by exploring issues in applied performance in Kenya and sharing the perspectives of practitioners and organisations involved in this work. These views were gathered through three focus groups/workshops, lasting two days each in August 2019. These sessions took place in the cities of Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa with approximately 20 theatre practitioners attending in each of these locations. A broad range of different positionalities were represented: some participants worked for well-established and funded NGOs involved in projects nationally and, in some cases, internationally, while others were linked to local Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) which usually receive more sporadic and infrequent funding. Both NGOs and CBOs tend to be focussed on the social impact of their work and are funded by development donors or partners and sometimes research institutions. Other participants were representatives from more arts-focussed organisations, for whom peacebuilding projects are not the primary concern of their work, but often one project among other kinds of initiatives. The
workshops were designed to explore the challenges practitioners and organisations encounter, and the kinds of support they would like, to help us write future funding applications that could respond to these needs. After we completed the workshops, we realised it could be useful to share the perspectives of these practitioners so that they can be drawn upon by others involved in funding, researching and collaborating or delivering training with and for applied performance practitioners and organisations in Kenya.

We begin the article by considering current literature on performance and peacebuilding that relates most to the Kenyan context. It should be noted that the issues and concerns explored in this article, and those of other researchers we engage with, often extend beyond peacebuilding and our geographical focus on Kenya. As we will show, there are both very positive and more critical positions on the possibilities of applied performance and peacebuilding projects. The positive perspectives that exist seem, to us, rather uncritical and too attached to idealised versions of projects that are rarely achieved. However, we write this article with the hope that responding to what practitioners say they require represents a small step towards more effective projects in Kenya. We then move on to outline key issues regarding the Kenyan context. There is not the scope in this article to map out the various kinds of conflicts and their roots in detail. Instead, we provide a historical overview of how current conflicts have emerged and describe some of the ways we have seen performance being used to respond to these. Here, we outline some of the different kinds of organisations and individuals involved in applied performance and peacebuilding projects. As we show throughout the article, these various positionalities to the work shape the perspectives and needs of these different actors. Because of the range of different approaches being used by practitioners, including dance, storytelling, forum theatre and film, in this article we use ‘applied performance’ to describe the work undertaken by those who attended our workshops.

**Applied performance and peacebuilding**

By large, applied performance and peacebuilding projects are regarded as transformative (Shank and Schirch 2008) and there are several reasons why this might be considered to be the case. Patrick Ebewo (2009, 30) states that participating in projects ‘enhances commitment, effectiveness, understanding and a sense of ownership’ and that this results in more sustainable projects, increased capacity among communities to act on conflict, and a sense of empowerment to do so. Elsewhere, Nilanjana Premaratna and Roland Bleiker (2016) argue that performance promotes empowerment and ensures cultural relevance, enabled through an engagement with different art forms and the increased involvement of target communities that creative approaches can facilitate. Arts-based projects are also felt to offer ‘safe spaces’ in which difficult conversations can be held (Moynihan 2008) or, through approaches such as Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), encourage playful reconsiderations of the roles that participants perform in conflict (Aguiar 2020).

Perhaps theatre offers a radical and effective way of reshaping conflict but, as others have noted, positive affirmations regarding the power of applied theatre to enable individual and collective reflection, or to empower participants to lead change, frame the field as a ‘silver bullet’ which can solve ‘all manner of social and economic problems’ (O’Connor and Anderson 2015, 43). More critical positions on the relationships between theatre and peacebuilding identify the limitations of such projects. In many ways, these relate to the problems of ‘outsiders’ from places external to the site of a conflict, or where peace is to
be ‘built’, seeking to intervene. Taiwo Afolabi (2019) reflects on his own position as a theatre practitioner-researcher working in post-conflict zones, raising relevant questions pertaining to the power dynamics of intervention. In particular, he demonstrates that practices including ‘Theatre for Development’ (TfD), ‘theatre in post-conflict zones’ and ‘humanitarian performance’, are all overtly spatialised and most commonly denote work that takes place in the global South. Such projects are heavily dependent upon the interventions of individuals and organisations from other places – typically the global North – and are, therefore, ‘plagued with a saviour complex’ (Afolabi 2019, 63).

James Thompson (2014) offers a broader analysis of humanitarianism utilising a performance studies lens, which considers responses to natural disasters as well as conflict and violence. He demonstrates how a range of individuals, celebrities, governments and NGOs all perform their humanitarian interventions in various ways. Such actors need to perform to national and global audiences, clearly demonstrating their action and intervention in humanitarian crises in order to maintain support and legitimise their continued existence. Inherent in humanitarian interventions, of which theatre and art are included, are hero and victim narratives, the use of interventions to ‘cloak, cover or disguise’ hidden agendas (Thompson 2014, 25) and attempts by those with power to manage the lives and communities of those without power. For example, Laura Edmondson (2018), in her research on theatre with children in post-conflict zones in Northern Uganda, shows how art and drama were considered useful because the work created with children could be shown to international audiences. Such projects offer dynamic and engaging photo opportunities for reports and websites, regardless of the extent to which they are actually long-term, sustainable and participatory interventions.

Key problems with applied performance and peacebuilding thus emerge. We would also add that while applied theatre projects in Kenya are most often funded by a global North donor, usually involve some kind of partnership with an international NGO, and may also involve researchers or practitioners from Europe, North America or Australasia, we must also interrogate what Kenyan practitioners are doing and resist assumptions that because a project involves individuals or institutions from the global South there are no issues regarding their interventions. Indeed, as we will go on to consider, Kenya is extremely diverse, and many Kenyan practitioners intervene in contexts that they do not have deep cultural understandings of. Furthermore, while we do not wish to associate those who attended the workshops with accusations of poor work and opportunism, we do need to highlight that some individuals have sought to take on roles as artists and facilitators of projects linked to development issues and donor funding, despite lacking the skills to do so, and are primarily motivated by opportunities to make small amounts of money (Odhiambo 2005).

What becomes clear is that perspectives on theatre and peacebuilding are, ironically, in conflict. On the one hand, as often seems the case, applied theatre is considered positively and framed as able to make important contributions to addressing violence. On the other, such approaches seem as flawed and problematic as any other development or humanitarian intervention. The key issue here is that idealised notions of applied performance projects that encourage ownership, participation and empowerment hardly ever come to fruition due to donor agendas (Plastow 2021), a lack of adequate resources to deliver sustainable projects (Bamuturaki 2022) and an absence of training opportunities for practitioners (Odhiambo 2005). What is missing from current understandings is a greater knowledge of what practitioners on the ground, doing this work, feel about their practice and an assessment of what skills they already possess, and what they require, if their work is to be more effective.
Outlining the Kenyan context

In this section we briefly describe conflict, violence and related peacebuilding efforts in Kenya to clarify the range of issues practitioners in the country are engaging with. Historical factors concerning the challenges of working in applied theatre, development and peacebuilding in Kenya underscored our research with practitioners. Although written some time ago, an article by George Odera Outa (1997) clearly portrays the struggles faced by theatre practitioners in Kenya. He shows that during the 1980s and 1990s theatre was repressed and censored in schools and universities. This continues to shape the Kenyan context – for example, during his study of TFD in Kenya, Christopher Odhiambo (2005) found that many practitioners involved in projects lacked opportunities for sustained education and training and, in part, he attributes this to historical repression of performance. However, we should highlight that recent courses in applied theatre at Moi, Kenyatta and Nairobi universities mean a younger generation of practitioners are studying this work, which gives us reason to be hopeful. Violence and conflict in Kenya relate mainly to three key issues – contested ownership of land and resources, Post Election Violence (PEV), and radicalisation and extremism. In many ways, these three issues are inter-related. Conflict and violence in terms of land and resources, and the violence that has often erupted around elections, are particularly entwined since issues regarding ethnic groupings permeate these forms of conflict, as will be shown next.

Following independence from British colonial rule in 1963, the Kenya African National Union, headed by President Jomo Kenyatta, led the country until his succession by Daniel Arup Moi in 1978. During this time, some important developments occurred which continue to impact upon the political and social climate of the country. Kenya is extremely diverse, comprising 42 ethnic groups but, as Mati (2020) shows, the reality of these different identities has been contested as a social imaginary. Nonetheless, they have been instrumentalised in varying ways: colonial powers seized upon ethnic identities to divide and marginalise Kenyans; some Kenyans invoked their identities as part of resistance against British colonialists; and, politicians have attempted to draw upon ethnic divisions to secure and maintain power. One particular historical factor sustaining tensions between different ethnic groups is land reforms which took place after independence. These involved the confiscation of farmland from white colonialists, which were then redistributed among Kenyans. However, the primary beneficiaries belonged to ethnic groups which have continued to be considered economically and politically dominant and favoured by those in power, since successive Presidents belonged to these groups. For example, Kenyatta, Kenya’s first president, was Kikuyu, and members of this group benefitted the most from land redistribution (Elfversson 2019). Conflict over land and resources is prominent across Kenya and while colonialism and the legacies of colonialism have contributed towards the persistent nature of such conflicts, disputes over land and cattle have existed for many hundreds of years (Greiner 2013). Conflict related to cattle rustling has been particularly problematic, displacing communities as they move to avoid having their livestock depleted and leading to deadly violence and persisting conflicts and lack of trust between communities (Kaimba, Njehia, and Guliye 2011).

Alongside conflict over land and resources, which compound ethnic tensions, a history of political subjugation, where smaller and less powerful political parties were often repressed, also fuels animosity. For example, the Kenya People’s Union (KPU), which
emerged in the mid-sixties, was banned by the end of the decade. Once Moi took over from Kenyatta, political freedoms declined further, and Kenya was declared a one-party State in 1982. It was not until the early 1990s that democratic reforms were ushered in, resulting in the establishment of several new political parties and the first open elections being held in 1992. However, questions of identity continued to permeate politics. In the years since, ethnic identities have been instrumentalised by politicians to secure support (Mati 2020). In turn, resentment towards certain groups has been fuelled due to perceptions that they have held on to political and economic power. These tensions combine with repeated accusations of stolen elections, corruption and a history of political repression to form the context in which the collective violence that has often surrounded Kenyan elections takes place. Most devastatingly, in 2007 over 1000 people were killed and 650,000 displaced (Human Rights Watch 2017). PEV remains a concern for Kenyans, with the period before and after voting being particularly tense.

Another key concern for NGOs and donors is radicalisation and extremism. Indeed, Breidlid (2021) shows these issues are deeply inflected by Western discourse and, as a result, problematically frame radicalisation as primarily linked to religion and, specifically, Islam. While Al Shabaab is active in Kenya and has claimed responsibility for acts of violence, including the shootings in a Nairobi mall which made international headlines, as Amani People’s Theatre’s (APT) work in this area has highlighted, it is very often the material inequalities and lack of access to employment or education that lead to individuals becoming involved in extremist causes, rather than their own ideological positions. Extremist groups including Al Shabaab and groups calling for a separate state around Mombasa can exploit the challenges individuals face and offer money and support that is otherwise lacking.

In recent years, there has been a huge increase in the number of arts-based projects funded to engage with issues of conflict, peace and violence in the East African region (Plastow 2021). Christopher Odhiambo (2016) has analysed the work of organisations such as APT and SAFE Kenya, highlighting that such projects resemble other kinds of applied theatre initiatives and are ‘oriented towards social transformation’ and ‘draw [...] inspiration and modus operandi from the works of Freire [...] and Boal’ (Odhiambo 2016, 139). We would also add that there are a range of other ways of working in Kenya. It is not our intention to describe and analyse these in depth, but it is important to bear in mind that not all practitioners are working to the frameworks Odhiambo outlines, and nor should they be. As has been identified, a reason for working through arts in peacebuilding is that it can offer more culturally appropriate and familiar ways of investigating issues with communities (Premaratna and Bleiker 2016).

**Methodology and ethics**

This research was underpinned by a concern to hear from the practitioners who are leading applied performance and peacebuilding projects and ascertain from them the possibilities and limitations they encounter in their work. As noted earlier we were concerned that, very often, such voices are absent from academic literature. We also wanted to avoid leading focus groups that would involve asking practitioners to respond to a set of discussion points and questions. Instead, we wanted to facilitate a creative environment where, alongside sharing their perspectives, there would also be space to share different approaches and practices. By doing so, we were able to circumvent the extractive nature of focus
groups, where findings are taken away to be analysed by researchers with little benefit to participants. The workshops thus provided opportunities to learn and share. Since a subsequent funding application to build a global network of artists involved in peacebuilding was successful, informed by our findings from this research, many of these practitioners have also been able to remain engaged in a community of practice.

When planning the workshops, we ensured these reflected the kinds of approaches we use in the community contexts in which we both work. We began with a combination of games and warm-up activities we both enjoy and felt could lead to conversation and reflections around the nature of conflict. Maxwel often uses an improvised form of collective storytelling in which a provocative situation is set up – for example, a stranger arrives in a community, causing concern and gradual divides to emerge. Participants then build on the story, taking it in turns to add a sentence and build up the details of the conflict that takes place. Through discussion and drama exercises, the imagined situation is explored further, helping the group think together about the ways conflict might unfold. Bobby has worked mostly with young people and uses games to begin to ease into issue-based conversations which can inform devised work. To begin, we ran a game involving two teams sat in lines, holding hands. One facilitator stands at the end of one line holding a coin and another facilitator stands at the other end with a bottle. When the coin is flipped and lands on ‘heads’ it is the signal for a squeeze to be passed down the line of their teammates. When the person closest to the bottle feels the squeeze, they must grab it: the first team to do so wins a point. This led to conversations around the nature and role of pressure in conflict situations. The coin was interpreted variously as representing votes, land and cattle, leading to conversations regarding conflict within and between communities over resources and the feelings experienced as one side is pitted against the other. We then moved on to use approaches such as image theatre and improvisation to explore issues around theatre and peacebuilding in more depth. An important aspect of the second day was that practitioners were asked to share their own games, exercises, or short performances. This allowed us to gain a sense of the different approaches being used and provided opportunities for learning and sharing between the participants.

A complication of working in this way transpired after our delivery of the workshops. Owing to the way in which the workshops were conducted, which were dynamic, based on group activities and participatory conversations, and included a total of over 60 participants, the audio-recordings made were extremely long and, unfortunately, mostly indecipherable. While creative workshops offer an engaging and rich catalyst for dialogue, which we felt helped us meet our aim to listen to and amplify voices of practitioners, paradoxically the quality of recordings means we cannot provide verbatim quotations and clearly attribute all points made to specific individuals or capture all the nuances and variances that occurred. Nonetheless, our reflections as facilitators of the work, photographs and the notes of participants made during the workshops provide enough data for us to be able to share findings that can be useful to others engaged in related practice and research and we are able to identify where viewpoints corresponded to particular positions, such as working for an NGO or being located in either rural or urban settings.

Inevitably, our different positionalities and interests shaped the workshops. Bobby is a white, British academic who has worked in East Africa since 2015, including partnerships with APT on several projects since 2016. He has often found that high status is attached to his academic role and that individuals sometimes think he might offer skills or knowledge,
or connections to funding. This needs to be sensitively handled, since knowledge exchange between different cultures can be valuable and, often, those from the global North are able to provide links to funding. However, these concerns can shape interactions with the result that conversations focus more on modes of international support or on the practices and knowledges of exogenous practitioners, which can dominate other arts practices. Maxwel is the Artistic Director of APT and a multidisciplinary practitioner specialising in theatre-based approaches to achieve peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and social change. He aims to use TO methodologies, alongside Kenyan storytelling traditions, to deconstruct structural and internalised oppressions and achieve emancipatory forms of daily peace. His expertise is therefore mostly centred on theatre and an assumption both he and Bobby made was that practitioners would similarly be working through theatre-based approaches. However, as previously identified, many drew on other forms, at times bringing together a range of approaches. Therefore, some gaps in our own knowledge exist concerning the issues and methodologies that some participants raised. However, we would argue that our positionalities also enabled us to guide conversations that might not otherwise have been had. More specifically, the different knowledges and experiences we have of national and international practices and funding structures, for example, meant that we could reflect on these issues with participants. This is particularly important in Kenya because of tensions between attempts to utilise local knowledge and practices in applied performance projects and the way in which such initiatives are very often shaped by international donors and the interventions of researchers and practitioners from other places.

Finally in this section, the workshop/focus group participants were invited to attend sessions closest to where they are based, and where their work mostly takes place. Each participant was remunerated to ensure that their time, travel and subsistence were covered during the two-day workshop – this is important since participants were being asked to share their professional practice and insights and should, therefore, be compensated for doing so.

**Perspectives of Kenyan theatre and peace building practitioners**

A broad range of individuals and organisations attended the workshops, reflecting the diversity of different approaches used and concerns and challenges faced. More arts-focussed organisations included Zamaleo Arts and Culture Trust (known as Zamaleo ACT), based in Nairobi and Ahero Cultural Dancers, based in Ahero – a small town located approximately 14 miles from Kisumu. Both organisations draw heavily on Luo traditional artforms: Zamaleo ACT are influenced by Sigana folklore and storytelling which includes riddles, banter and dance (Zamaleo ACT 2022). Ahero Cultural Dancers create pieces that celebrate forms of dance local to Western Kenya and while both organisations undertake peacebuilding projects, this is not the primary focus of their work. Zamaleo ACT describe themselves as an ‘artistic centre for excellence since 1996 for robust creation, reflection and presentation of African diverse expressive cultures’ (Zamaleo ACT 2022). On the other hand, Ahero Cultural Dancers explained that their focus was on learning Luo forms of dance to connect to their culture and ensure that these forms survive. Some practitioners were linked to a range of organisations, working on a more ad hoc basis and we also noticed an urban/rural divide between attendees. Those who were living and working in more rural locations, such as Nicholas Ondiek – a practitioner working with several groups in Western Kenya – told us they were using forms of
storytelling local to these areas which participants would be very familiar with and which they, themselves, also know very well as they have grown up with this culture. On the other hand, practitioners such as John Titi Namai – who works with Zamaleo ACT and is based in Nairobi – juggle a range of approaches. While Zamaleo ACT primarily draws on Sigana, in their work in other parts of Kenya they also attempt to utilise different forms, and John has worked in Turkana County – a region in the northwest of Kenya with many semi-nomadic communities – through storytelling approaches local to this region. As we will explore in more depth later, it can be challenging for practitioners to operate in less familiar contexts and draw on different forms of cultural and artistic expression.

Other organisations and practitioners used approaches which are likely more familiar to applied performance practitioners in other contexts. For example, SAFE Kenya and APT use TO approaches, particularly forum theatre. However, SAFE Kenya incorporates choral speech and have also used film to reach audiences whereas APT draw on varied Kenyan and African oral storytelling traditions. Many organisations, such as Lagnet Theatre – a CBO based in Ahero – also use an approach known as ‘Magnet Theatre’, developed by Daniel Olouch Madiang (who attended our workshop in Kisumu) and CY Gopinath, an Indian practitioner visiting Kenya, in the early 2000s when they were working with PATH International (Warheit 2017). This approach involves short scenes being presented to an audience with key moments then being paused, while a facilitator invites conversation and discussion from the audience (Plastow 2021). Magnet Theatre therefore stops short of asking audiences to intervene in the action, and instead creates space for dialogue.

Other important factors to consider are the varying realities for different kinds of practitioners and organisations in terms of their access to money, wider support and to training. Some attendees represented relatively well-funded NGOs with a broad reach across the country, and beyond. For example, SAFE Kenya is based in Mombasa but works in other regions and is registered as a charity in the UK with an annual income in excess of £100,000 over the past 5 years (Charity Commission for England and Wales 2022). This makes it, relative to other NGOs using the arts in Kenya, very well-resourced. APT is another well-known NGO that has been active in Kenya since 1991 and has also undertaken projects, trainings and exchanges across other African countries and in Thailand, North America and Europe. Many practitioners have received training from APT in the past in TO approaches. Despite its reputation and early financial support from Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and Drei Konigs Aktion (DKA) – an Austrian catholic donor – that covered some of the organisation’s core costs, in recent years APT has struggled to secure substantial and ongoing funding. Alongside larger NGOs, CBOs, which work at a more local level and usually obtain short-term funding to do so, also attended the workshops. For example, Lagnet Theatre has partnered with Amnesty International to create short pieces of performance about peace and conflict but, unlike many CBOs which often struggle to make global connections, has also devised performances about conflict with researchers from the University of Alberta, Canada (Selman and Battye 2016), and about health issues with partners based at the University of Leeds (personal correspondence). Very different experiences therefore exist regarding the financial support practitioners and organisations receive. Although training in Magnet Theatre and TO have been led by a range of national and international theatre practitioners, our research shows that there are several ways in which the various needs of Kenyan organisations and individuals involved in delivering projects are not being met, as we will show next.
Two images typify responses from practitioners when we asked them to think about the difficulties they face in their work. Across all workshops the interventionist nature of practice, usually involving practitioners external to a community, was highlighted as challenging. For example, the religious and cultural differences practitioners encounter, and their own perceived lack of knowledge and awareness of these differences and nuances, meant they often felt unwelcome in communities, or severely under-prepared to run projects. As one still image showed (Figure 1), this often leads to confusion for practitioners – of feeling that there are multiple signs and meanings which are difficult to untangle and understand, and which pull in multiple different directions.

An important point for further consideration emerges here: while many have reflected upon the problems of exogenous practitioners and organisations (usually from the global North) intervening in other countries (e.g. Wickstrom 2012; Ahmed 2016), the extremely diverse Kenyan context means that within one country these same issues are acutely felt. Some of the practitioners who attended the workshop in Nairobi, for example, had

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**Figure 1.** A group of theatre practitioners in Mombasa show the confusing signs and layers practitioners are met with when working on issues of conflict in communities. Photo: Reynold Majiwa.
attended university and are part of a growing urban middle-class in Kenya. For these individuals, working in parts of the country they have no family or cultural links to means that they may be unfamiliar with languages spoken or with the specific cultures in these regions. Although some have argued that arts and cultural approaches to peacebuilding can enable more local, culturally specific and participatory project to emerge (for example: Premaratna and Bleiker 2016; Magak et al. 2015), in extremely diverse countries such as Kenya the reality is more complicated. Languages and cultural practices vary hugely from one area to the next and theatre practitioners must sensitively navigate their relationships to participants who may have very different backgrounds, whether due to ethnicity or divides between rural and urban Kenyans. Therefore, extremely local, specific and multi-layered forms of partnership are required, and it was suggested by individuals based in both rural and urban contexts that this would require establishing deeper and long-lasting connections between practitioners and co-developing projects together. Another still image built on this further, raising multiple potential meanings (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Still image of individuals refusing to talk to, or acknowledge, each other. Made by theatre practitioners in Mombasa. Photo: Reynold Majiwa.
In this image, the practitioners stood together in a tight triangle. However, they refused to acknowledge each other. For the rest of us observing, this was a thought-provoking scene that raised two possibilities.

First, the image was read as a challenge that practitioners are often confronted with when working in communities where there is conflict or violence: those involved rarely want to come together to explore the issues and enter into dialogue. For those who are intervening in areas that they are unfamiliar with, this is further compounded since their lack of knowledge of the specific context can create hostility and mistrust among participants and communities. Furthermore, organisations working in areas where communities are considered vulnerable to radicalisation, such as Eastleigh in Nairobi or the Kenyan Coast, also need to tread very carefully not to break trust. These communities are often suspicious of external interventions given historical injustices that have disadvantaged them, the sensitivities of the issues, tensions between them and institutions such as the police and government, and problematic attempts to tackle radicalisation and extremism that have further fuelled mistrust (for example, see Mesok 2022).

Second, the image was read as a breakdown in communication among the various organisations and individuals involved in peacebuilding, which undermines efforts to address conflict. This point was made in connection to both cooperation between arts and theatre organisations involved in peace and regarding a lack of adequate dialogue with, and engagement from, peacebuilding and development actors. Most participants agreed that there is a lack of understanding of theatre and arts approaches by the wider peace and development sector, and that there are not sufficient opportunities for artists and peace and development practitioners to connect and share learning and knowledges that could overcome this and enrich arts-based projects. In terms of communication and cooperation among those involved in applied performance, some practitioners, such as Obat Masira – an experienced practitioner who set up Misango Arts Ensemble in Kisumu, which has implemented many theatre and peacebuilding projects across Kenya – argued that this is exacerbated by having to compete with one another for scant funding and opportunities. This effects different practitioners and organisations in varying ways. Local CBOs often find they are offered a small amount of money to quickly devise a performance or workshop on a one-off basis. An exception here is Lagnet Theatre, who are in a rather unique position of having attracted global funding via their international academic partners, which has supported longer-term and better-resourced work. However, in order to sustain their work Lagnet have also had to accept the more piecemeal offerings of support from different donors and charities that other CBOs access. APT is in a difficult position since their methodology is relatively expensive. Their work usually involves training local CBOs to work in partnership with them and deliver projects, ideally over a sustained period. APT do not create one-off performances or accept funding to do so, as the guiding principle of the work is that it should be based on dialogue and that performances are co-created with communities. Consequently, APT requires larger amounts of funding that can support the costs of a facilitator to train and collaborate with local teams and which can enable the longer process this entails. However, not only are they competing against organisations using arts and performances (who might claim to be able to do this more cheaply) but also other peace-building organisations, whose approach might be viewed more positively by donors. This came up as an issue in all three workshops but was particularly notable in Kisumu,
where a greater number of CBOs attended. Participants therefore reflected together that they often find themselves wanting to work to achieve similar goals but driven apart because of competitive development funding and the dearth of funding for the arts in Kenya.

In each of the three locations, our conversations moved on to consider knowledge and skills. In groups, individuals were asked to discuss what skills and knowledge they currently have, before then identifying those that they think they need. After hearing back from each group, we began to make links between individuals and organisations present who might be able to address gaps in knowledge or skills. For example, if a group had identified a skill in writing funding applications we considered whether there might be opportunities for them to support others. The caveat here is that, as identified, the landscape of arts and development in Kenya is competitive and there is very little funding to go around. Therefore, we remain unsure of whether this kind of support among organisations and practitioners is realistic. Table 1 outlines in more detail some of the skills and knowledges participants across our three workshops felt they had or lacked.

To create this table, we collated the various responses across the three sites, which included looking at our own reflective journal and flipchart paper we asked participants to use to document their discussions. Due to the way in which we facilitated the sessions, we cannot attribute each of these skills or areas of need to each specific individual who identified them. However, there were some areas where, through further discussion, it became clear that different kinds of participants needed, or already possessed, certain skills or knowledges. For example, those who are internationally well-connected such as APT, SAFE Kenya or individuals who have collaborated with practitioners travelling from other countries, often had a knowledge of TO approaches. As shown earlier, such international links led to the creation of Magnet Theatre, based on TO. Most participants were familiar with Magnet Theatre since there have been numerous trainings in this approach across Kenya. The use of puppetry, while relatively infrequent, has mostly

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Perceptions of current skills and knowledges.</th>
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<tr>
<td>What skills/knowledge do you feel you need?</td>
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<tr>
<td>We need enough information on the issues we are required to address</td>
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<tr>
<td>We need to practice patience</td>
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<td>We need to know the theatrical methods to pass information</td>
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<td>We need to know how to be neutral</td>
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<td>To know how to become a ‘shock absorber’ – you should be able to take in negativity without retaliating</td>
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<td>Script production skills</td>
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<td>Research skills</td>
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<td>Financial management</td>
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<td>Relating to donors</td>
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<td>Knowledge of theatre (relating specifically to indigenous forms)</td>
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<td>Capacity-building</td>
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<td>How to research and document participatory theatre</td>
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<td>How to adapt and work with different cultural practices to prevent conflict</td>
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been led by the Kenya Institute of Puppet Theatre (KIPT), based in Nairobi and founded in 2007. KIPT seeks to promote puppetry as both an important artform and as a participatory approach to education and working with communities (KIPT 2019). It was not widely felt by participants that they had skills in monitoring and evaluation – instead, it is well-resourced organisations which have specific members of staff to deal with this aspect of projects where these skills exist – such as SAFE Kenya. Indeed, SAFE Kenya seemed unique in that how to relate to donors, write funding applications or monitor and evaluate projects was less of a concern for those working with this organisation than for others.

From the above table, and through our discussions with participants, we would suggest that there are five areas to address regarding the needs that practitioners identified:

1. Research skills – this includes ways of finding out more about a given community and how to understand more about approaches to theatre and/or peacebuilding. At various points across our workshops it became clear that participants, including academics from Maseno University, Kisumu, strongly felt that they lacked access to up-to-date texts or research which could be of use to them, highlighting problems with access to publications in the global South.

2. Measuring and reporting impact – it was highlighted that the best ways to measure the impact of projects was unclear. Practitioners are not sure of how to design surveys, of the role of interviews, or of how to best bring this information together in order to feedback to donors or to accurately understand what a project has achieved. Better resourced organisations such as SAFE Kenya and APT (when funds have allowed) can employ members of staff with expertise in this area, meaning this is less of a concern for them.

3. Community facilitation – although many practitioners discussed the skills they had acquired in facilitation and performance-making with communities, a significant number expressed a lack of confidence regarding the specifics of working with communities in conflict. A diverse range of practitioners joined our workshops – some from relatively well-funded organisations, some who had studied theatre or degree programmes that might prepare them for community work, and others with little formal education. We would not suggest that there is a hierarchy here in terms of who knows more or knows best. Indeed, there are many individuals working in theatre and peacebuilding with no formal training, and for very little money, who have deep understandings of what needs to happen to effect change. What is shared, however, is that there is little to prepare practitioners to deliver theatre and peacebuilding projects. Often, money is made available to facilitate such projects with little understanding from donors or NGOs regarding the support they might need to provide artists to create effective programmes or to feel confident in their delivery of these.

4. Management of projects – for many of those who attended, managing grants and relationships with other partners or donors was outlined as complex. This meant that Kenyan practitioners do not feel the level of ownership over projects that they wish to.

5. Artistic skills – several areas for further development were outlined regarding the participants’ artistic practice. Although many practitioners had participated in previous
Magnet Theatre trainings, and some who had been associated with APT or SAFE Kenya had skills in TO, it was highlighted that practitioners wanted to know more about ways of working which could more effectively pass on information. This is not surprising since, as with applied performance and TfD more widely, donors or NGOs are primarily interested in art and performance as tools to pass on predetermined messages. We would argue this should be resisted in favour of supporting artists to build skills in co-creation with communities, and working with NGOs and donors so that they can better understand the value of such approaches. Alongside a desire to build skills in these areas, some participants also wanted to learn more about script-writing to help enhance the performances they are devising and to gain a greater understanding of the various Kenyan and African performance forms that others in the country are working through.

To an extent, some of the issues outlined above might be addressed through greater support and sharing among practitioners of their skillsets. For example, while some identified gaps in knowledge and skills regarding community facilitation in conflict situations, others stated that they possessed key skills in this area. Here, we should also highlight that many identified these skills as very culturally specific. Knowledge of languages or forms of performance and cultures were often linked to a practitioner’s own ethnicity. Overcoming gaps in knowledge in this area might, therefore, mean more effective partnerships being fostered between ‘indigenous’ and ‘exogenous’ theatre practitioners. Of note is that most of the responses to our question ‘what skills or knowledge do you have?’ relate to creative and artistic capabilities. This was particularly interesting to Bobby, since much of the work he has been involved with outside of the UK has been predicated on sharing theatre and performance approaches through workshops or resources to support delivery. However, there was just as much focus on needing support to manage funding, evaluate projects, or for practitioners to undertake research for themselves. As can be seen in Table 2, we asked practitioners to expand further on what kinds of opportunities and support they felt would be useful in the future.

We would argue that this list is indicative of a sense throughout all three workshops that Kenyan arts practitioners want to be more in control of the work they are doing and to be better connected to each other nationally and to others elsewhere in the world. Those from smaller organisations or who do not have lots of experience writing funding applications want support in this area. As Bobby writes elsewhere, much of the funding that theatre practitioners in Kenya access is through global partners who have identified a source of money and apply for and manage it, or NGOs who offer small amounts of money for practitioners to create work. Where this is the case, practitioners want to be more involved in these aspects of projects in order to better shape the extent of funding, the agendas they have to meet, and to secure better support for their work. The knock-on effect for many, who are paid small amounts to quickly create work, is that the workshops or performances they create are rather simple and made in haste since the time to craft deeper kinds of projects is not supported (Smith forthcoming).

Regarding greater connectedness, those in the global South struggle to access research and current literature which some of the participants at the workshops linked to feeling out of date or cut off from what is taking place elsewhere. Others have noted that it is not only access to research that is an issue, but also inequalities in knowledge production which
mean those in the global North dominate applied theatre discourses (Omasta and Snyder-Young 2014). Alongside greater access to research, there is clearly a demand to collaborate with other artists working in other countries. However, some of the future support and opportunities envisaged are more national in scope. Practitioners felt that they needed more mentorship opportunities and wanted to learn and share more about African arts and performance cultures. As the storyteller Wangari Grace argued in our workshop in Nairobi, artists in Kenya do not always know the specific names and qualities of various modes of art and performance in different parts of the country. In part, she attributed this to ongoing legacies of colonialism which severely limited artistic expression and favour art and culture from the global North. However, there were some participants who already identified that they already had deep knowledges of specific arts practices and cultures; those working with Zamaleo ACT, Ahero Cultural Dancers and Lagnet Theatre were all experienced in terms of creating work that draws on Luo artforms. In terms of working with less familiar cultures, some practitioners such as John Titi Namia (referenced earlier) have built up understandings of working in other places. More opportunities to support each other and share these knowledges could address issues in this area.

**Conclusion**

As we have shown, far from the largely positive portrayals of what applied performance and arts can achieve regarding peacebuilding, the situation in Kenya is complex and the work practitioners undertake limited by several factors. To conclude, we argue that to address many of the concerns identified in this article national and international networks of support for practitioners and organisations are required.

Regarding national networks for support and collaboration, our workshops were held in some of Kenya’s largest cities, and it was clear that intervening in rural contexts, or where a practitioner does not have a deep understanding of different artforms or languages, is complicated. As a result, practitioners often encounter hostility in the communities they work in and feel under-prepared to negotiate this. Fostering greater networks of support among practitioners working in Kenya are therefore necessary, and these could enable more linked-up ways of working across different regions and cultures. More opportunities are also needed for practitioners to learn about approaches to conflict, as well as facilitation strategies, so they are better-equipped to intervene. Related to both of these points, greater depth and nuance in how we understand binaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 2. Outlining future opportunities or support needed.</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What kinds of opportunities/support would be useful for you?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater access to research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities and support to document the achievements of theatre and cultural methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>More artistic platforms and structures to facilitate arts programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration with other artists, researchers, institutions and practitioners using theatre in peacebuilding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
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<td>Media and publicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevant training on theatre – especially African theatre and cultural practices</td>
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<td>Digital platforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity building in arts and culture management</td>
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<td>Government support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentorship programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>There should be global cultural exchange programmes – opportunities to learn from other places and people</td>
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such as local/global is required. Regarding the latter, much of the literature around applied theatre projects that takes place in the global South focuses, rightfully, on the problems of North–South power dynamics. However, what we have observed is that there are also complex national dynamics and issues that need to be considered more robustly. One factor that currently limits more joined up, collaborative approaches in Kenya is the highly competitive nature of funding, which often pits practitioners and organisations against each other (Plastow 2021).

In terms of international linkages, networks and forms of collaboration, the workshops demonstrated that while further training in theatre or art-based approaches is welcome, many are especially interested in support that can enable them to claim greater ownership over their work and lead on funding and management. Furthermore, all too often projects are shaped by the perceptions and agendas of exogenous agencies and individuals (Prentki 2015; Afolabi 2019; Plastow 2021). Here, there is an implication for artists and practitioners from other places seeking to work with Kenyan practitioners: while it is often assumed that exchanges or trainings focused on arts practices are most useful, these other aspects require attention. While larger and better-funded NGOs have the resources to spend more time developing projects and monitoring their outcomes, this is not possible for many of those who attended the workshops. Most of the participants highlighted that they do not feel prepared to deal with funding applications and find working in partnership with larger NGOs, who rarely understand the arts in greater depth, extremely challenging to the extent that it impedes their work. From Maxwell’s own perspective, agendas are often set exogenously and are not always connected to the needs of the beneficiaries that Kenyan practitioners and organisations are working with. For smaller organisations, such as CBOs, the majority of their work in this area is under-resourced, resulting in short-term or one-off performances or workshops which do not stand up to the claims made for applied performance regarding its empowering, participatory and transformative capacity. Kenyans involved in applied performance and peacebuilding projects clearly want to have greater ownership of their work and to take more of a lead on shaping agendas – alongside (or in place of) arts-based exchanges, creating opportunities to develop the skills that can enable this are important. Therefore, those working in collaboration with Kenyan partners could reflect more on how to provide support in these areas to both enable greater access to global research and conversations but also to demystify the process of securing and managing funding.

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