

COMMUNICATING SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES THROUGH THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT (TFD): A STUDY OF EZIOKWU- BU -NDU PROJECT

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Abstract.

Among many communication tools available, Theatre for Development (TfD) is a powerful medium for communication because of its performative, festive, communal, realistic and concrete nature. It is a good medium of communicating messages to local communities for the actors are often from the local community and the villagers do not have to travel to see the performances for it is performed in their locality. Many Social and Development issues facing various communities require public investment to address them. This investment will only arise if the general community is supportive and community support is only likely if the issues are widely acknowledged and understood. Some believe that Social and Development issues have to be solved by government alone, they do not seem to understand their share of responsibility in solving the problems. TfD is known to be alive to the social and development realities of its time. It is a kind of performance where the economic, social, religious and political issues of the society are outlined, evaluated and judged. Practitioners are usually vanguards of social and developmental change in their respective capacities and they keep watchful eyes and attentive ears to the happenings in their various communities. The aim of this paper is to investigate the potentials of TfD in facilitating Social and Development change. The objective of this study is to propagate the use of Theatre for development in achieving social and development change. It examines TfD as a tool for communication that enables people

*contribute towards the development of their community. The paper analyses the role of Tfd in communicating social and development issues. Data for the study is collected using the qualitative research method approach. Focus group discussion, oral interview and the participant observation approach are employed for data collection. The study investigates the TFD workshop carried out by the researcher in Nibo community, Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, titled **Eziokwu Bu- Ndu** and concludes that Tfd can be used in communicating Social and Developmental issues. It therefore, recommends that Tfd should be used in communicating social and developmental change and suggests that its funding should be by prominent members of the community and government.*

Introduction

Theatre for Development, (TFD) is known to be alive to the social and development realities of its time, a kind of gathering where the economic, social, religious and political issues of society are outlined, evaluated and judged. Practitioners are usually vanguards of social change in their respective capacities, who keep watchful eyes and attentive ears to the happenings in their various communities. In African Drama, Theatre has been instrumental to the liberation struggle. It could be used as a force of progressive change and transformation of the society. Theatre for Development (TFD), once presented, more easily equips the masses to shout out in the face of dehumanization. This is done through conscientization, leading people to self-realization and self-definition. Practitioners have over the years used TFD to present the right and better way to live with a view to improving the lots of human existence.

Development on the other hand, is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Various societies have attained various levels of development and so, the approaches must differ from one society to another based on concrete realities of the masses who are always in

the majority. Nwamuo, in his work in *The Practice of Community Theatre in Nigeria*; considers development from the rural point of view when he posits that:

Rural Development is a process designed to create condition of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative. It is stimulation of communities to change their own affairs constructively. (Nwamuo, 75)

Contrary to the above is the Western bourgeoisie and government concept of development, which sees development in the context of per capital income. Development, from this perspective is defined in terms of provision of infrastructures such as hospitals, electricity, pipe-borne water, airports and express roads. Nwamuo's analysis on development meets our requirements, vis-à-vis the bedrock of Theatre for Development. This is because, Development at any level must start with the individual, who in turn translates development into concrete visible areas for the society. Human development is the bedrock of all other spheres of development, economic, political, social and environmental development. In Nigeria, the bourgeoisie and the government's concept of development neither reflect nor improve the lives of the masses. Some development programs introduced by the Nigerian government remained counterproductive, because most often, the identification of developmental projects to be constructed becomes the exclusive prerogative of bureaucrats and technocrat in the urban centers who are alienated from the masses. The bureaucrats, following official laid-down criteria are removed from the realities of rural poverty. Thus, consultation and participation in decision making by rural dwellers are consequently lost. Abah, observed:

The success or failure of any one project hinges on proper identification and the choice of the most biting problem for attention. The issue of “properness also raises the question of who identifies the problems and finally decides what development a particular community needs. It is in this light that TFD becomes relevant (Abah 15)

Theoretical Framework

The modernization theory of developments is adopted for this study. This refers to a model of a progressive transition from a ‘pre-modern ‘or ‘traditional’ to a ‘modern’ society. Modernization theory originated from the ideas of German Sociologist Max Weber (1864-1979). The theory looks at the internal factors of a Country while assuming that, with assistance, “traditional” countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have been. It attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and development of societies and seeks to explain the process of social evolution. Modernization theory stresses not only the process of change but also the responses to that change. The theory maintains that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices. It also believes that people can develop and change their societies themselves.

A Presentation of *Eziokwu-bu-Ndu (Truth is Life)* TFD Project
***Eziokwu-bu-Ndu (Truth is Life)* TFD Project** was organized by one of the researchers in conjunction with some women of Nibo Community at Nibo Civic Centre, Awka South L.G.A., Anambra State. The project was developed to expose issues like, autocratic leadership, land dispute, corruption, drug abuse etc. The performance was built on the activities of the Women Council of Umuama Community where leaders strive to sustain autocratic and

elongated leadership tenures. In the community, the executives often rotate the offices among themselves without giving room for democratic and inclusive leadership. The incumbent president at the time of the research, had served the women for over 15 years under the leadership recycling system which they were sustaining. Before she became the President, she was the Vice President, but took over, at the demise of the former President. Under the undemocratic system that they were running, the women council of Umuama community had not conducted any election for over twenty-five (25) years, and no one had the courage to question them. This may have contributed to the retrogression in the community in terms of social and developmental factors. The leadership became devoid of new ideas and continued to resort to the recycling of obsolete ideas. With time, the president, became too frail to attend all meetings taking place at the state level and therefore only sent representatives, who used the opportunity for personal aggrandizement and hardly reported back to her on their return from such meetings. Neighbouring towns, were all benefiting from government developmental projects because of the efforts of their Presidents. An instance was when the governor's wife, made donations to widows and commissioned many projects during her tour of many Communities, but did not visit Umuama Community or commission any project there. Other Communities, usually have August meetings hosted by different denominations to discuss the welfare of the Community, but Umuama Community has not been coordinated enough to benefit from such developmental plans. During meetings of women groups, the leaders are usually autocratic so that none of the member dares challenge them, resulting in their having the final say in all matters concerning women's participation in the community. However, the Eziokwu bu Ndu TFD Project was used to create a scenario where a character Mrs. Okoli tries to correct and speak out during the meeting and she was intimidated and asked to sit down or face the consequences. Following this development, the entire women express

dissatisfaction with the mode of leadership and convey a secret meeting where they discover amongst other discrepancies and impunities, that the incumbent executive had never rendered any financial account of their stewardship for the past fifteen (15) years. The women then decide to report the happenings to the President General of the Town, who then reports the matter to the Igwe (traditional ruler) of the community. The project also captured issues of dust to dust rites. Widows are not allowed to perform the dust to dust (pouring of sand in the grave to bid one's late husband farewell) rites at the demise of their husband.

On the part of the men, The TFD Project captured their practice of indiscriminate and fraudulent sales of land. The case is also presented to the President General and a Committee that is set up by the President General, (land committee), became charged with the responsibility checkmating fraudulent sales of lands and creating access roads with the cooperation of affected land owners. The TFD Project also captured promiscuity amongst girls of school age, and the increasing dropout rate amongst school boys, as well as increasing abuse of substances, stealing and other vices. Repercussions were projected as deterrents where Emeka, who is the leader of a gang involved in all the mishaps, is arrested and Ada, a promiscuous girl is infected with HIV. At the denouement of the performance, all the problems were taken to the President General, of the Town Union; who promises to look into the issues. He discusses with the Igwe and they agree on several measures. The Igwe, through the town crier, invites all the village executives of women, men, youth and all the subcommittee Chairmen and while admonishing the sitting executive of women for their high handedness, spelt out the new measures which will be put in place for social cohesion and communal development. He thus charges the women council to conduct an election as soon as possible and elect new executives who will take over for the progress of the community. He appoints a committee to look into all the cases of land disputes and report back to him, with special attention paid to

those who sold lands that do not belong to them. He declares that if anyone is found guilty, he must refund the buyer his money and vacate the land for the owner to take back. He advises parents to monitor the activities of their children and train them properly from the cradle. The land committee that destroyed people's crops during road construction are asked to stop work and negotiate properly with the land owners while paying compensation to those whose farm lands were destroyed in the process.

At the end of the Igwe's briefing, both the leaders and members of the community vow to embrace positive change., The workshop ends with a cultural dance by the Women of Umuama, who joyfully celebrate the 'change' in the community, which will ultimately usher in development. The TFD Project performance drew many spectators, amongst whom were the traditional ruler (Igwe) of the town, the President General of the town, the President of the Women Council, some religious leaders and some prominent members of the community.

The Role of Theatre for Development (TFD) in Communicating Development and Social Issues

The reality of the need to address developmental and social problems has started dawning on many communities. Identifying developmental and social problems allows the community to use its communal resources for the elimination of such problems. Certain problems may not be viewed as having communal significance, whereas they may have negative communal impact if they remain unresolved. Theatre for Development is one of the oldest methods of effective communication. In developing countries like Nigeria, where most people live in the rural areas, where mass media is out of reach and inadequate electricity supply is the norm, Theatre for Development is very relevant and essential. It enables people identify and solve common issues and problems affecting them. In '*Eziokwu Bu Ndu*' TFD Project, the community members identified their major problems through dialogue, because the

facilitator engaged them in dialogue to determine their major challenges. This may not have been very effective through any other media.

Communication in Theatre for Development involves a process of dialogue and interaction in which the facilitators and the villagers increase their understanding of the problems they are facing in their community. It is used to engage with local people and bring views of those who are generally excluded to a broader arena for sharing and exchange. In 'Eziokwu-bu-Ndu'; the facilitator, being an indigene, engaged in sensitization and paid visits to village heads and the Igwe of the community, notifying them of the need to stage productions based on the issues bothering the community, and his consent was given. Before then, some women were visited and the researcher/facilitator, conscientized them on the disadvantages of ignoring the atrocities going on among the women wing of the community. She further explained that the women wing has not benefitted from the government due to their ignorance. Theatre for Development is created as a focal point for the audience to discuss their own experiences, and it is often used to gain access to the community. During data collection, Mrs. Okoye Bridget from the community expressed her opinion thus:

Our meetings do not interest people anymore. Do you know that we were not allowed to talk during meetings of the women council? If you talk or question any of their decisions, you will be sanctioned. We will be glad if the executive will be corrected. (Oral Inter.)

One of the researchers/facilitator had a similar experience being a member of the Community. Another member of the community also narrated how her farm produce were destroyed by

some villagers who were attempting to construct a road through her farm without consulting her or compensating her. So, Theatre for Development, through dialogue and interaction, engages the community members on the important issues bothering them. In “*Eziokwu-bu-Ndu*”, the researcher, who is a member of the community discussed with the women, then came up with the themes – autocratic leadership, incessant land dispute, corruption and drug abuse. These were identified as the major problems facing the community.

Theatre for Development is transformational, because when it involves the audience, it is never a process that terminates after raising critical consciousness; rather it is one that leads to subsequent action and even feedback. It offers opportunity for people to express and challenge idea and issues. It provides an avenue for people explore their personal experiences and idea without feeling exposed and offers conducive environment for positive transformation. Theatre for Development is a tool to raise which leads to positive Social change. In ‘*Eziokwu-bu-Ndu*’, the audience were made to understand that they would have benefited from many government programmes and social amenities if their community had enjoyed effective representation. This knowledge spurred them into action and made them determined to change the statuesque. In the TFD performance, Mrs. Odogwu discusses with some of her friends in the market, about what has been going on in the community:

Mrs. Odogwu: My sister, do you know that I visited my father’s house, at Umudiana and was discussing with my mother. She was rejoicing and celebrating our Governors wife and insisting that her new name is “*Oji Ulo eme ogo*” – one who performs charity by giving out houses” – she explained that the Governor’s wife, through their President General Women council, built houses for some widows in

their Community. But such a thing has never happened in our community.

Mama Nkechi; I am not surprised. I also heard that she mobilized some indigent women, and trained them in skills acquisition and set them up by giving them equipment to start off. In our town, our 'Ochiora (Leader) is old, she does not attend meetings. How do you expect such things to happen in our town? We are not adequately represented.

Mr. Odogwu – (stands) we must do something about it. I have to speak to other women. Our 'Ochiora' must be changed. I will take it up.

It is obvious that the women understand that their town needs to key into external and internal developmental plans. With the above conversation, Mrs. Odogwu mobilizes other women and speaks out during the next meeting of Umuama women wing. They point out to women what their community had been losing because of lack of effective representation. The President general of the women wing insists that she has never been invited to any meeting. But on inquiry, it was discovered that all invitations were sent through text messages. But due to old age and unfamiliarity with phone technology, she could not access them. Through Theatre for Development, they understood their problem and decided to speak out.

Theatre for Development engages the attention of people through a dramatic presentation of issues. It makes the audience to view their problems in a critical way such that it has a positive influence on the audience. It aims at treating societal issues with the aim of improving standards. With its possessive and participatory method, the masses are encouraged to take up suggestive correctional roles in drama, which when considered appropriate by the majority of the audience, are utilized in making community policies. Another major problem identified in *Eziokiwu-*

Bu-Ndu' Project is the issue of Drug abuse. Drug abuse is a serious public health problem that affects almost every community and family in some way. It leads to violence, stress and child abuse. In the dramatic performance, the family of Okeke suffers the effect of drug abuse. Their son Chinwuike, is mentally ill due to high intake of drugs and engages in child abuse. He becomes a terror to the community especially the neighbours. The participants collectively decide on what will happen to those who take drugs and they mandate vigilante groups to monitor those who smoke or engage in any form of harmful behaviour. This is an indication that, theatre for Development enables people to identify and solve common issues and problems affecting them. Theatre for Development has always addressed the problems affecting the society ranging from cultural conflicts to development problems which include corruption, exploitation and oppression. As could be seen in the performance, the Tfd project captured most of the critical problems plaguing the community and the Igwe's verdict was calculated to proffer solutions and usher development to the community thus:

Igwe: By the power bestowed on me as the Igwe of this community, I hereby decree that, a special vigilante group will monitor the activities of the community and that any goat, sheep or cow seen destroying crops in the farm will be taken and the owner will pay a heavy fine before taking it back and any boy or girl caught smoking will have to undergo our form of rehabilitation.

On the issue of girls engaging in promiscuity, the Igwe advised parents to pay more attention to the activities of their children and endeavour to train up their children, either in formal schools or in skills acquisition. On the issue of selling of lands, the Igwe mandated all who sold peoples lands to return the money to their buyers and quit the land or face the consequences. Theatre for Development thus helps the rural community to see their problems

and instil in their minds a great need for change. This could be seen in the meeting of the women council where Mrs. Odogwu challenged the President on the need to render account of their stewardship and conduct election just as the Igwe mandated when the case was taken to him.

TFD is a problem solving processes, through its use of traditional machinery such as folk songs, folklore, drumming and dancing, its participatory and communicative prowess can be used to harness the various resources that had hitherto been neglected. Apart from this, its mode of operation is in total contrast to the Top-bottom government attitude of policy imposition. Theatre for Development speaks to the people in their own language and idioms that deal with issues of direct relevance to their own lives. Development is thus achieved by, with and for the community through dialogue and communication. TFD creates awareness which makes members of a community see themselves as they are and as they ought to be thereby taking the bull by the horns. Theatre for Development helps the community members to create plays on any issue bothering them. Highlighting the advantages of Theatre for Development over other media, Iorapu and Bamidele asset that:

Theatre for development has several advantages over other media forms ... it is interactive, it allows instant debate and feedback, it provides new opportunity to negotiate new community development options ... it provides for collective questioning of issues and resolution... (39)

The above assertion has said it all. It is obvious that Theatre for Development has an edge over other media and it is a powerful tool for communicating development and social issues. It provides opportunities that other media do not provide. An opportunity to

discuss issues on the performance floor and give issues immediate attention especially as the messages are authentic and culturally accepted. In *'Eziokwu-bu-Ndu'* the president of the Umuama women Wing, after the meeting with the Igwe, changed her leadership style immediately and embraced democracy. The women of Umuama now discover their rights and insist that subsequently, they must be allowed to express their views during meetings.

Theatre for Development (TFD) is a practice that uses performance as a participatory tool to help community members share their experiences with the intent of creating social change. It offers a practical exploration of the ways in which communities can create social change on their own terms. The underlying components of all Theatre for Development work are representation, conscientization, participation and sustainability. It has potential to build developmental consciousness among members of a community by tackling topical issues bothering them. It also provides a forum for addressing socio-economic and developmental realities, thereby changing the way people think, socialize and act through sensitization. Chiduo Obadiegwu states that:

Theatre for Development performance is an attempt to cause the people to look inward and know the source of the problems, and the varying possible solutions to them. It is therefore a rehearsal for anticipated change in the ugly conditions that does not favour them. (18)

Theatre for Development validates issues through post performance feedback. It makes findings real, since seeing is believing and it encourages feedback. Follow up techniques also assess the validity of the project by returning to the participants for discussions. During an oral interview with the President General of Nibo Town Union, immediately after the TFD Project, he

appreciated the production which tried to portray the ills of the community and expressed hopes for positive change. During a visit to Mrs. Nneoma, the President of the women council, the impact of the TFD Project could be felt in her speech:

“Ikwu amaro, Ibe ezi ya’ – “what one fails to know, another teaches her” I have been sending someone to represent me at the meetings of the President Generals, she has never told me of all these developments. I have decided to start attending all meetings till I leave office. We need young people like you to attend our meetings, it will be of great benefit to us. (Oral Inter.)

Although the production appeared to be an indictment on her leadership style, she (the leader of the Women Council) considered it a success. Mrs. Nwana Nwanneka, one of the active member assets that:

Since the production took place, we have recorded great changes in our meetings. I appreciate the play because it opened our eyes to so many issues. (Oral Inter.)

The chairlady of Umunzekwe women wing of the community Mrs. Ekwunife Ifeaga also reiterates:

After the production, a meeting was organized by all village leaders, we planned on how to approach the

issues acted upon. We visited our P.G. and mandated her to represent us well, to enable her attract development to the community, so that, our community can benefit from the state Government as well. (Oral Inter.)

Emma Nwasor, Chairman Development Committee of Nibo Community discuss the issue of road constructions after the performance thus:

The essence of our work is to make most places accessible to people by creating roads. It was never intended to destroy people's crops. Road construction is part of development, however, we accept that we were wrong in not notifying those women whose farm lands will be affected before embarking on the road construction. We shall make amends. (Oral Inter.)

One of the researchers from another post-production visit to the community, further observed that a sanction has been placed on anyone who sells any land without the knowledge of the land committee. The community will thus ascertain if really the seller owns the land before putting it up for sell. This will reduce the incessant cases of land dispute. From a follow up visit to the community, it was also observed that an election was held on 7th August 2021 and the community have elected a new leader after almost 28 years of not conducting elections.

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that Theatre for Development communicates developmental and societal issues. It is a tool for sensitization and conscientization. Theatre for Development enables the facilitators and rural dwellers work towards social mobilization as rural Development is an important aspect of Theatre for Development. Theatre for Development also helps the participants and community members to acquire new skills and knowledge which will help them participate actively in the developmental programs of their community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Theatre for Development is a theatrical performance made in relation to issues relevant to a particular community. It creates awareness and enriches the lives of those who take active part during the workshop. It is a medium for communication and development and also serves social functions of entertaining, educating, conscientizing and mobilizing groups within the community. The researcher strongly recommends that:

- Government should utilize the potentials of Theatre for Development in communicating issues to the rural populace
- The State Government and notable individuals should sponsor the establishment of Theatre for Development groups in local Government Areas of their State as this will create job opportunities for trained artists while tackling the problems of the various communities.
- Funding Theatre for Development groups should be taken seriously by the Government because Theatre for Development has potentials of enhancing state development. If individuals are enlightened and educated accordingly, the country will be a better place.

Conclusively, Social and Developmental issues are effectively communicated through TFD because the individuals

who are affected are fully involved in the process of proffering solutions to their problems. Through drama performances, communities are agents of their own change. The drama combined with songs and dance of the local community help to pass the message effectively. Theatre for Development touches both emotional and intellectual aspects of human life for it combines research and education through entertainment which spurs audiences to reassess their own lives, and take positive action. Theatre for Development gives people voice and hope to embark on the developmental and social issues raised in the performances with the target to achieve results and meet the needs of the community. Theatre for Development inculcates new habits and behavioural changes. It strives for style, techniques, and characters that are culturally appropriate. It encourages rural communities to take part in identifying their own problems and proffer solutions to them through participatory research, analysis and discussion. It is interactive in nature.

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