

ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY: A THEATRE-FOR-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

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Abstract

The challenge of environmental sustainability is not peculiar to the Third World but is a global concern. Thus, one of the eight adopted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the year 2015 following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 is 'to ensure environmental sustainability'. Thenceforth, eco-conscious campaigns have become a more popular social engagement while eco-critical discourses now characterize scholarship more than ever before. Man's unrestrained activities have resulted in lamentable environmental degradation with serious ecological, economic and health implications. Typical of Theatre-for-Development (TfD) projects, this work adopts an egalitarian method of accessing and extracting information from individuals in the location under study and establishing a self-sustaining platform for dialoguing and proffering solutions to a set of identified problems. It embraces an interdisciplinary effort between the Theatre and Environmental Health Science in salvaging the deplorable environmental situation in Aba through the use of a TfD performance entitled in the people's language 'Tuturu Ya Tufuo' (translated 'Pick It up and Throw It Away'). This study adopts the sociological and artistic methodologies and discovers indiscipline, poor environmental sanitation attitude, improper waste disposal, unrestrained industrial activities, individual and government's negligence to be the factors responsible for the alarming environmental degradation in the city. It recommends individual consciousness, collective participation in sanitation exercises and adoption of eco-friendlier industrial processes as the solution to the problem of environmental degradation.

Keywords: Eco-consciousness, Eco-criticism, Environment, Environmental Health, Environmental Health Advocacy, Theatre, Theatre-for-Development (TfD)

Introduction

Man and his environment are interdependent. For as Garner and Black (1999) put it, environment is the totality of the physical, economic, cultural, aesthetic and social circumstances and factors which surround the desirability and value of property and which also affect the quality of people's life. This shows that the environment extends beyond just the physical and biological world of flora and fauna to include the social component as fashioned and controlled by man. This embraces his culture which encompasses the artistic, philosophical, religious, political and economic facets of his existence and engagements. Sadly, man's continued quest for development has not actually done much good to the environment.

As Mahatma Gandhi testifies, the “earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not every man’s greed” (Walia, 2019), man’s struggle to satisfy his need and greed alike has been the environment’s greatest undoing. Industrial activities, urban sprawl, poor agricultural practices, improper waste disposal, deforestation, man’s indiscipline and many other human factors have, in no small degree, degraded the environment. Against Niyi Osundare’s passionate caveat that “...the earth is ours to work not to waste; ours to man not to maim ... ours to plough, not to plunder” (1986, p.48), man has continued to exploit the environment in order to satisfy himself. Man’s excessive exploitation and exploration of the physical world has triggered such nasty environmental responses as ozone layer depletion, air/land/water pollutions, desertification, greenhouse effect/global warming and an array of other environmental health disasters which culminate in threatened health and heightened mortality. Thus, actions are being taken by individuals and groups in different fields of endeavour to arrest the situation.

Man is confronted by a variety of challenges that are either personal or shared. These range from social to natural disasters that threaten his very existence. To tackle these problems, professionals have often employed their expertise where and when necessary. Arts in general and, indeed, theatre in particular have contributed fabulously in taming our world for the benefit of man. The nature of theatre as a field of practice marks it out as a tool for social engineering and reconstruction. Theatre as a mirror of the society wields a lot of influence on the socio-cultural orientation of the people. Thus, the theatre artist and his art have had tremendous contributions to social development. As a tool for mass communication, theatre is a veritable agent of socialization/social change which entertains, educates and enlightens people.

In order to accomplish the function of developing human society via entertainment, education and enlightenment, the theatre often utilizes conventional (such as the literary theatre or “well-made play”) and non-conventional approaches. Defining and commenting on methodology and effectiveness of the literary theatre, Oga (2003) explains that:

The literary theatre or the 'well-made play' approach is that whereby an amateur or professional theatre group chooses the script of an individual playwright and performs this before an audience. This kind of theatre thrives on a structured stage with an admission fee charged. In the literary theatre, emphasis is usually on the artistic dexterity employed in the creative/interpretative process. The actor, through his almost magical display, is expected to win audience applause. At the end, the member of the audience is expected to go into an individual contemplation of the entire exhibition. The observation here is that the literary

theatre, because its emphasis is on the artistic process of play production, does not appear to give much consideration to how much the play has redirected the disposition of the audience in matters of social change (p.80).

The non-conventional approach on the other hand does not follow the Aristotelian descriptions and prescriptions but rather adopts some alternative pattern. This method of theatrical production includes all forms of experimental theatre, community theatre/Theatre-for-Development (TfD), street theatre, site-specific theatre, etc. One of the most effective non-conventional forms of theatre is TfD which is a form of popular theatre that adopts an egalitarian method of accessing and extracting information from individuals in a community and establishing a self-sustaining platform for dialoguing and proffering solutions to a set of identified problems. TfD has been variously employed in the promotion of awareness of hygiene, population education, women's rights and empowerment, education, health, political, social, environmental and economic reforms among others. It has often proven effective because, according Ananda Breed (2013); it locates the people and involves them in the entire process by utilizing "indigenous codes of communication, traditional practices, and cultural expression to simultaneously identify key concerns while acting out or 'performing' the solutions." The TfD form of theatre fundamentally encourages a partnership between the local community, educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and international bodies in evolving a platform for addressing key concerns on a local scale and elevating them into a global dialogue. The methodology and pedagogy of TfD is based on principles of popular education and participatory theory practices. Hence, this work adopts the TfD format to satisfy the need for mass education and eco-friendly cultural modifications challenging individuals to take up the responsibility of effective environmental sanitation without seeing sustenance of the environment as an exclusive obligation of the government. It embraces an interdisciplinary effort between the Theatre and Environmental Health Science in salvaging the deplorable environmental situation in Aba.

The industrial cum commercial conurbation of Aba, has earned for itself notoriety for dirtiness. This is why it was not a surprise when it was ranked as one of the twenty most polluted cities in the world as released by the World Health Organization (2016). Other Nigerian cities included on this ignominious list are Onitsha, Kaduna and Umuahia. Being a very busy commercial cum industrial city of international repute, the monthly state-wide sanitation exercises do not seem to be sufficient in keeping the city of Aba in good shape. While the streets and markets are teeming with people, the gutters stink with stagnant waters, breed mosquitoes and spread diseases. The residents dump refuse indiscriminately and show

poor attitudes to environmental care. This was the main reason for the establishment of the Abia State Environmental Protection Agency under the auspices of the State Ministry of Environment whose mandate is to ‘to keep Abia State and its environs clean for healthy living and habitation’ (Abia State Ministry of Environment, 2011). Two of the modalities employed by the agency to foster cleanliness in the state are to mount gigantic waste bins at various strategic points in the cities and introduce a monthly clean up exercise. In spite of the compulsory environmental sanitation held on the last Saturday of every month, the city of Aba leaves much to be desired in terms of environmental health. The people’s attitude towards environmental sanitation needs a lot of improvement. The World Health Organization (WHO) has attributed one quarter of the diseases facing man to prolonged exposure to environmental pollution (Kimani, 2012, p.45). Thus the need for environmental health is essential and should be a general concern. This gave impetus to the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment tagged the ‘Stockholm Conference’ as well as the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The conference featured AGENDA 21 which spelt out the strategies for improving the quality of the environment (Igwe, 2012, p.16). The current ecological/environmental challenge as Uzoji (2016, p.12) observes, can only be met when people are oriented in practice and in their daily lives to pursue the pathway of creating an environmentally sustainable society and theatre is one such weapon that has the potential to meet this challenge. The age long practice of top-bottom formulation of developmental policies including those pertaining to environmental sanitation instead of a bottom-top pattern has contributed to the weak success or outright failure of such policies. This work identifies the need for mass education and eco-friendly cultural modifications, using Tfd to orientate the people in Aba and challenge them to take up individual participatory responsibility of environmental sanitation without seeing it as an exclusive obligation of the government.

Theoretical Framework

The research thrust of this work is founded on the intellectual heritage of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre and the popular education theories –*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974) of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal respectively, as well as the contributions of other theatre scholars.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) sought to create a theatre that aroused social consciousness and political awareness in his spectators in order to address the rising fascism and other harsh

socio-political and economic realities of his time. In the 1920s and 1930s he popularized the 'epic' ideals developed by Erwin Piscato (1893-1966) modifying it into what he branded as 'epic theatre', a populist form of theatre that contrasted with the Aristotelian concepts of the theatre. Being a Marxist, Brecht's political belief and ideology reflected in his theatrical patterns and values. He advocated a theatre where reason should override emotion. In his theatre, the spectators and the actors did not identify emotionally with the characters. He achieved this by employing 'verfremdungseffekt' (a German coinage whose closest English translation is 'alienation') and 'historification'. His was a didactic theatre where the actors were teachers and the audience pupils. An application of Brechtian theory in a play shows itself in such features as casting and costuming on stage, storytelling, audience/actor relationship, emotional distancing, revelation of sources of lights and effects, et cetera. For Brecht, the theatre's ultimate aim should not be to effect catharsis in the audience but to bring about social change, seeing the theatre more as a tool for enlightenment and education than entertainment.

Professional literature, policy documents and case studies on non-formal education, literacy and adult education, according to Epskamp (2006, p.10), can be traced back to the widely acclaimed father of education, Paulo Freire (1921-1997) of Recife, Brazil who in his *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1976) emphasizes the necessity for education to be participatory, informal and liberating; maintaining the view that education requires communication in the form of starting a continuing dialogue between learners or trainees and their trainers, teachers, animators or facilitators.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Paulo Freire advanced pedagogy of liberation with Brazilian peasants. He sought to break away from the prevailing 'culture of silence' and arouse popular participation in socio-political emancipation of the masses. Epskamp (2006, p.10) observes that since then, Freire's methodology and techniques of political mobilization have also served other purposes – for instance, in advocacy and awareness raising on issues concerning the environment, health and family planning. Freire was not concerned about individual autonomy but about empowering the masses to take charge of their political and social environment. For him, the best method to effect positive change is by getting the people convinced of the need for change through dialogue, reflection and action which bring about 'conscientizacao' his term for critical consciousness and revolutionary wisdom.

The people also must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and whose mark they bear; propaganda cannot achieve this. While the conviction of the necessity for struggle, without which the struggle is unfeasible, is indispensable to the revolution. Indeed, it is this conviction which

constituted that change. It is also necessary for the oppressed (Freire, 1972, p.17).

Applying the foregoing theory of Freire to this study, environmental sanitation which leads to environmental health can be achieved in Freire's parlance as a consequence of people's beginning to reflect on their capacity for reflection about the world, about their work, about the power to transform the world, about the encounter of consciousness itself, which thereby ceases to be something external and becomes part of them (1972, p.81). It is about the actualization of group's or communal emancipation hinged on individual realization, realization borne out of critical thinking and conscious application.

Epskamp has identified Freire's ideas and ideals as being chiefly people-oriented – self-actualization, critical consciousness and participation, stating that for the latter, the people

must be offered the opportunity to become conscious of the fact they can change their situation. To do so they have to take their own life experiences as point of departure for their education. First, everyone must experience 'standing up and speaking out loud'. Second, participants must learn to listen, analyze and react to others. In fact, they must learn what it means to enter into 'dialogue' with others (2006, p.10).

Fascinated by the above critical pedagogics of Paulo Freire and inspired by the aesthetics of the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, the German communist playwright Augusto Boal (1931-2009), engaged the audience to participate actively in the process of producing theatre. Consequently, he blended the two innovative influences to advance a critical dramaturgy and a variety of theatrical strategies and games in the 1970s and 1980s. His theatrical innovations were documented in his seminal piece, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974). His was a didactics of progressive theatre techniques in which he experimented 'with the use of theatre as rehearsal of social interventions', and as 'a laboratory and a platform for conscientisation, awareness-raising and problem-solving' (Epskamp, 2006, p.12).

Two of the theatrical strategies developed by Boal are 'Simultaneous Dramaturgy' and 'Forum Theatre'. The former involves a 'combination of participatory propaganda and community-generated theatre', while the latter entails repeating a performance before an audience, inviting audience's participation in the second one. Having joined in the second, the audience is allowed to change the play and appraise its thematic philosophy by debating with the actors and one another. The dramatic flow is broken by posing thought-provoking questions

and challenging the spectators (who have now become 'spect-actors') to proffer answers. During a performance in Boal's theatre, according to Ken Gewertz,

audience members are free not only to comment on the action, but also to step up on stage and play roles of their choice. In doing so, they discover new ways of resolving the dilemmas that the play presents. In follow-up exercises, community members learn how to translate these insights into social action (2003, p.12).

The idea here is to match dramatics with social realities, thus forum theatre becomes a process of analysis as it engages group participation not just on the level of discussion but dramatization which is the core of the learning experience. This dramatic strategy seeks to eliminate the disparity between the actor and the spectator and make everyone an actor such that acting becomes a rehearsal for action. In Boal's seminal essay, *Poetics of the Oppressed* (1974), he reacts to the Aristotelian dramatic principles in *Poetics* decrying it as the 'finished theatre of the bourgeoisie' (254) which is degrading to the audience as it allows it no more than eye participation in the theatre which ought to be for its edification. He opines that the theatre should be a platform for social discourse as against the finished product the bourgeois theatre dishes out to its audience. To him,

the bourgeoisie already know what the world is like, their world, and are able to present images of this complete, finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently, their theatre will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle (1998, p.254).

The conventional theatre promulgated in Aristotle's *Poetics* is, for Boal, an artistic replication of the oppressive political system of his time which favoured the bourgeoisie (who were the actors on the political stage) at the expense of the preliterate (mere spectators, excluded and disenfranchised). Boal seeks to create a theatre of popular participation 'contrary to the bourgeois code of manners; the people's code allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions to dialogue, to "participate"' (Boal, 1998, p.255). Using the blueprint of Freire's popular literacy programme, Boal designed his Forum Theatre to get the people to participate actively in the process of bringing about socio-political change by dialoguing and translating the philosophical insights of the drama into social actions. Boal sees his theatre as a series of continuous experiments that one knows how they will begin but not how they will end as the spectator is freed to become the protagonist, responding to the real needs of the popular audience (Boal, 1998, p.255). Boal's revolutionary dramaturgy and the contributions have influenced the emergence of theatre for development as a tool for social intervention.

One of the culminations of Freire's and Boal's influences is eco-pedagogy which according to Richard Kahn is a form of non-formal popular education, borne out of developed ideas and practices of environmental preservation and conservation "that stirs many people to become self-aware of the role they play in environmental destruction and to become more socially active in ways that can help to create more ecological and sustainable world" (cited in Uzoji, 2015, p.24). Eco-pedagogy is an outgrowth of developments in critical pedagogy, a compendium of educational concepts and practices influenced by Paulo Freire whose goal is to develop a robust appreciation for the collective potentials of man and to foster social justice throughout the world. Summarily, its primary goal is to realize "culturally relevant forms of knowledge grounded in normative concepts such as sustainability, planetarity (i.e. identifying as an earthling) and biophilia (i.e. love of all life)" (cited in Uzoji, 2015, p.24).

Eco-pedagogy and Environmental Sanitation/Health: A Brief Discourse

The importance of the environment to man cannot be overemphasized. This is because there is a natural relationship between man and the environment in that man lives in and constantly interacts with the kingdom of nature. His food, cloth, shelter, air, flow of energy and information are bestowed on him by nature to form his environment. Consequently, any threat to the environment is invariably a threat to man.

Michael (2008 Encarta) has identified the factors threatening the environment to include water pollution, air pollution, population growth, global warming, depletion of ozone layer, habitat destruction and species extinction, groundwater depletion and contamination, energy production and environmental racism. Constant environmental pollution and man's failure to carry out effective environmental sanitation endanger the very existence of man as the living environment is destroyed. This environmental pollution which is a process of contaminating the environment in a way that makes it unsafe for man is often an effect of economic and domestic activities and technological development: toxic emissions from factories, automobiles and other machineries, industrial and domestic wastes, etc.

The alarming rise in global environmental challenges has necessitated ecological concerns and environmental education across disciplines, all over the globe. One of the global measures to address environmental degradation has been the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) initiated in 1972 whose goal is to defend and improve the environment for present and future generations. Following this, the UN declared the 5th June of every year as "World Environment Day" to accentuate the essentiality of green environment to man and

to promote global awareness of the environment. The federal government of Nigeria with the amended Decree No.59 of 1992 established the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) (which later, in 1999, became the Federal Ministry of Environment) to tackle the rising environmental issues by protecting, restoring and preserving the nation's ecosystem. One of the recommendations of FEPA was that Environmental Conservation Clubs be set up in secondary schools (Igwe, 2012, p.143). The agency was to work in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education on the development of an environmental education master-plan and curricula for both formal and informal educational systems in Nigeria. In the same vein, state governments in Nigeria have established environmental agencies to undertake environmental responsibilities. An example of such is the Abia State Environmental Protection Agency.

Environmental health has been defined in a 1999 document by the World Health Organization (WHO) as those aspects of the human health and disease that are determined by factors in the environment (1999). It is a concept that addresses all the physical, chemical, biological and other related factors that are external to a person but impact their behaviours. At the nucleus of environmental health is environmental sanitation. The environment must be taken care of by way of sanitation which is a range of activities geared towards improving or maintaining the standard of basic environmental conditions in order to maintain the well-being of the people. The current environmental anxieties and the exigent need to promote environmental health have necessitated inter-disciplinary efforts in that regard rather than restrain it to scientific assignation. Everyone needs to understand the basics of ecology. Anyanwu et al (2014, pp.2-3) have established that ecology is a multi-disciplinary subject that incorporates many fields of study for a profounder grasp of the connection between organisms and their environment. They describe it as 'both theoretical and applied science' (2014, p.3). For Smith Robert Leo, ecology is the study of the relationship of plants and animals to their physical and biological environment –the physical environment being light and heat or solar radiation, moisture, wind, oxygen, carbon dioxide, nutrients in soil, water, and atmosphere while the biological environment includes organisms of the same kind as well as other plants and animals (Encarta). Human ecology which is the study of the interplay between man and his environment –the natural and synthetic worlds around him in their varying complexities has, in the light of the current environmental anxieties, acquired an increased social relevance. Environmental education being a multi-disciplinary engagement has accelerated towards reforming the web of relationships between man and his environment and with his fellows.

This web of relationships according to Selby (2010, p.14), could help advance new treaties between societies, cultures and nature and bring about new values, languages and meanings that could usher in social change that is so critical at this time. For Standing (2008, p.12), ecological victory will require a trans-valuation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present and the arts and humanities, including the theatre, must play a role. The widening interdisciplinary involvement in ecological education and popular environmental consciousness has generated in modern scholarship such eco-critical coinages as eco-consciousness, eco-literacy, eco-theatre, eco-cinema, eco-pedagogy, etc.

Eco-pedagogy is an upshot of a body of scholarly arguments and discourses in the area of critical pedagogy whose form and content have been shaped by the socio-educational contributions of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal. It sets out, according to Martin and TeRiele (2011, p.23), to construct credible and compelling social alternatives as well as create new social contexts and encounters that value alternative meanings, knowledge and actions. According to Kahn (cited in Uzoji, 2015, p.130) eco-pedagogy is

a form of non-formal popular education borne out of developed ideas and practices of environmental preservation and conservation that centre on self-consciousness, awareness and the need for action by self-realization. As an outgrowth of critical pedagogy, it questions the status quo, and liberates the mind towards change from dehumanization to humanization.

Eco-pedagogy disparages the disjunctions between environmental theories and activism but espouses praxis –the necessary matching of theory with practice. Gaard (2010, p.14) has observed that eco-pedagogy evidently distinguishes itself from a type of environmental education that seeks inclusion within a universal neoliberal framework that clamours for “sustainable development” without challenging the unsustainability of an economy advocating endless growth. He cites Richard Kahn to have identified in his essay entitled “From Education for Sustainable Development to Eco-pedagogy: Sustaining Capitalism or Sustaining Life?” three varieties of eco-literacy as goals for an eco-pedagogy that seeks to develop more just, democratic and sustainable planetary civilization:

First, eco-pedagogy seeks to develop basic environmental literacy, which often means bioregional literacy, developing an understanding of the ways that local, regional, and global ecologies interact for better and for worse. Its second feature, cultural eco-literacy, involves both a critique of unsustainable cultures and the features thereof, as well as a study of sustainable cultures and their strategies for resisting assimilation, strengthening community, developing appropriate technologies, and organizing collective knowledge (Gaard, pp.14-15).

Theatre-for-Development: An Overview

To build an advanced society characterized by material prosperity, secure healthy environment and better life prospects for the citizens predicated on their capacity to understand and transform their environment for their individual and collective good is development. And this has been the propelling force behind man's engagement in arts, science and technology. Whereas science and technology are essential for society's material advancement, it is art in its cultural, religious, socio-political and philosophical forms that gives content, meaning and direction to the people's vision in their quest for an egalitarian society. Pepple (2015, p.16) has identified moral attitude of man as one of the problems militating against development. To rectify this has been the major concern of the theatre in all its forms and contents, hence it seeks to develop the mind and reform character for the betterment of society. Tfd as a form of theatre is development-oriented as it seeks to evolve a socio-cultural framework for the education of the mind via popular consciousness and participatory commitment to a common cause. Its primary goal has been popular education through drama and theatre. As Hagher (1990, p.3) puts it, Tfd is

a theatrical style which stresses "participation" "dialogue" "critical consciousness" etc. the practitioners of this theatre are committed to social transformation through cultural action, using the theatre. Through it they hope to involve the peasants and worker in finding solutions to their common problems through research, dramatization, analysis, and follow up action.

It is a shift from the more formal but less interactive conventional theatre practice to an informal but more dialogical nonconventional theatre with the people of a community as a way of inspiring them to voice out their concerns and brainstorm on them, thus empowering them to solve their problems.

Epskamp (2006, p.9) has described Tfd as a recent phenomenon, tracing its pre-history in Western Europe during the 1960s when it was variously designated as 'popular theatre', 'people's theatre' or even 'activist theatre' –terms that are reminiscent of the period before the end of the Cold War in 1989 and applied to artistic performances utilized as a 'weapon' for fighting socio-political oppression. The practitioners of these precursors of Tfd, according to Epskamp (2006, p.7), had profound socialist or Marxist orientation. Consequently, both Tfd and its forerunners are founded in political or ideological premises. In this context, Epskamp foregrounds two pioneers in the development of what has come to be known as Tfd today – Paolo Freire, a renowned Brazilian adult educator and philosopher, and Augusto Boal, an innovative theatre director. This duo stands out as a result of their fabulous contributions in developing and systematizing some of the didactic ideologies of their time:

During the 1960s Freire experimented in Brazil with innovative and participatory learning methods within the context of adult education and literacy training. During the next decade these ideas inspired his fellow-countryman Boal to experiment with applied forms of drama, stimulating the active participation of audience members and supporting them in awareness training and problem solving at community level (Epskamp, 2006, p.9).

This is corroborated by Amanda Breed (2002) when she submits that Tfd as a genre of community theatre emerged during the 1970s as a vehicle of mass communication when other forms of mass communication such as newspapers and television were unable to access rural areas. Tfd or popular theatre as it was called during the 1970s thus provided a suitable alternative for development agencies to reach the rural masses for problem identification, deliberation and possible solution. This was the foundation laid by Boal's Forum Theatre. While alive, he practiced his Forum Theatre in South America, took it to North America, Europe and Asia. Even after his demise in 2009, Boal has continued to influence the development of Tfd to date through his writings in such a powerful way that Tfd has come to be considered a developmental intervention tool to be employed within the context of development support communication and/or non-formal education chiefly to occasion or accelerate social change.

Although Boal did not bring his Forum Theatre into Africa in his lifetime, one way or another its influence made its way onto the Black continent and culminated in Tfd. Breed (2002) identifies such practitioners of Tfd as Ross Kidd, Michael Etherton, Martin Banham, and David Kerr who worked mostly within African universities to create collaborative development programmes with mainly health and sanitation NGO's. According to Epskamp, popular theatre or Tfd was first experimented with in Botswana in such theatrical performances as songs, dances and puppets. The first experiment was christened 'Laedza Batanani' a blend of theatrical performances and group discussions aimed at educating the community (2006, p.14). The theatrical contents were used to attract the people for collective brainstorming for social change. The Canadian University don, Ross Kidd working in Botswana was one of the key pioneers in this regard. With the successes recorded in Botswana and Kidd's contact with his fellows in the field of theatre domiciled in the neighbouring countries, popular theatre was gradually replicated and domesticated in the southern, eastern and western parts of the African continent, especially by universities. Expatriate lecturers like Kidd exuded great fervour in using African universities as sites for experimenting with popular forms of theatre. They collaborated with such African indigenous theatre workers like Dickson Mwansa, Mapopa

Mtonga, Steve Abah, Stephen Chifunyise, Daniel Labonne and Ngugiwa Mirii (Epskamp, 2006, p.15).

The “Tuturu Ya Tufuo” Tfd Project in Aba: A Reportage

This project was done in 2016/2017 by this researcher as a practical component of his master's research. He led his team of theatre artistes and environmental health experts from the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria to carry out the project aimed at addressing environmental degradation and advocating enhanced environmental sanitation/health using the Tfd approach. The study/project was done in five locations namely (a) Obada along Port Harcourt Road, close to National High School Aba, (b) Asa-Nnentu Motor Spare Parts Market, (c) Ariaria Main Market, (d) Ekeoha Shopping Centre, and (e) Aba Main Park all within Aba City of Eastern Nigeria. The project had the following stages:

i. Research on Problem

To research on the problem of environmental sanitation in a city like Aba would be a daunting task for an individual researcher. Therefore, this researcher quickly recruited more hands, orientated and equipped them to form a research team to assist him. This group of ten persons (including the principal researcher) went to the five locations of the experiment to source information. The research data collection processes were participatory and featured interactions and exchanges of ideas between the research team and those who resided or/and did business in the areas. This was geared to getting acquainted with the people's perceptions, dreams, lifestyles, expectations, fears, etc. The team adopted the flooding and journalistic methods of research data collection.

In the flooding method, the team members went in smaller groups of twos into the area under study and integrated themselves with the people in order to gather information from them concerning the problem of sanitation. They went to see the leaders of trade unions within the centres. They also went to beer palours, football viewing centres, worship centres and such other places of social gatherings and engaged people in some forms of informal discussions on the subject while unobtrusively taking note of the points made. Employing the journalistic or interview method on the other hand, the team members solicited audience with people in the streets, homes, shops and other work places in order to get their views on the subject. Here each team member assumed the role of a journalist interviewing somebody while recording or writing down the responses. At the end of each of day, the team met to compare information. At the end of this stage, the information collated from these exercises were analyzed carefully

and the problems became identifiable. The solutions as suggested by some of the city people were considered. These would form the foundation upon which to build the scenario for performance.

In the course of the research data collection processes the team members encouraged the members of the public to attend the four day TfD workshop held at National High School. This was to provide a platform for communal participation in the play production processes. Those who were available during the workshop sessions played a vital role in the success of this project. They took part in the discussions and evaluations as well as the creation and production of the project play.

ii. Identification and Prioritization of Problems

The field research revealed a number of problems facing the area under study as identified by the people. Interestingly, the information collated from the five centres – Obuda (near National High School, Aba), Asa-Nnentu Motor Spare Parts Market, Ariaria Main Market, Ekeoha Shopping Centre and Aba Main Park, featured almost the same range of problems as common denominators namely, bad roads, dirtiness/pollution, irregular power supply, insecurity and dwindling sales. The people within Ekeoha Shopping Centre and Obuda locations as well as other areas along Port Harcourt Road especially complained bitterly about the dilapidated Port Harcourt Road which has lain in ruins for many years and has practically become a dumping ground with mountains of refuse. The road features an ignominious display of deep water-filled potholes, refuse-blocked gutters with breeding mosquitoes and an assortment of offensive odours. This condition has put the road out of use for years and has thus, impeded commerce with severe economic implications. The gigantic heaps of waste and mosquito-infested stagnant gutters pose serious health threats to both the residents and visitors to the town. To this end, these problems formed the issues that would be considered as subject matters during the scenario formulation.

iii. Scenario Building

After analyzing the problems identified by the people, some of the issues were given priority and woven together to create a story. The story was developed by the joint effort of all those who participated in the TfD workshop sessions as guided by the principal researcher and the other members of the research team. It took a lot of brainstorming, argumentations, counter-argumentations and creative energy to evolve a logical scenario that would be stage-worthy and apt for the purpose. In the end, a scenario emerged –the story of a people in a city whose environment and health are jeopardized by their neglect of sanitation, the people deliberated

and unanimously agreed to title the story “TuturuYaTufuo” (translated “Pick it up and Dispose of it”):

Amid music and songs, the play opens, we see a narrator who greets the people and introduces the play and furnishes us with its background. He directs our attention to two young men who are engaged in a quarrel along a busy road. Passers-by intervene and seek to settle them. One of the fighters explains to the people that his challenger is his next door neighbour whose habit is to defecate into black polythene bags and store near his window. The offensive smell from this gets into his room and keeps him uncomfortable. This morning he was wicked enough to leave the house without disposing of it; so, he traced him to this place to confront him. The other young man in his defense says he forgot to carry it along while going to his shop this morning as he normally does. When asked why he does not make use of the toilet, he discloses that the septic tank is full and needs to be emptied but the landlord has failed to do so even after the tenants have been levied to that effect. This infuriates the narrator as well as the people who then demand that the landlord be brought forthwith. Soon, the landlord is fetched and interrogated. He claims the sewage disposal company he contacted to do the job failed him because according to them the road to his house is not motorable, but he has contracted another. The people mandate him to get that done before the end of the week or risk a mob action. The narrator condemns this and decries people’s tendency to keep a dirty environment. He seeks the contribution of an environmental scientist in their midst who seizes the opportunity to educate the people on the need for cleanliness, exposing the various diseases and other risks associated with dirtiness. Just then the narrator sights a man throwing something into the gutter and a woman emptying her trashcan onto a heap of rubbish near the road. He calls and reprimands them. The people nod in support of what he is doing. The environmental scientist explains to them the environmental and health implications of such habits. Just then, one of the onlookers drops an empty sachet of water after consuming its content. The environmental scientist draws everyone’s attention to this and condemns it; and teaches them the right thing to do. He explains extensively proper waste management. A woman enters carrying a sick child. The environmental scientist asks her what the child is suffering from and she says her neighbour who is a nurse says it is dysentery. According to her, her children and others in the neighbourhood always suffer from one ailment or the other. The environmental scientist explains to her the link between dirty environment and such diseases as dysentery, malaria, typhoid and more. The environmental scientist advises her to take the child to a nearby clinic. Sadly, before getting there the child dies. The death of the child causes a general air of sorrowful quiet as the people are overtaken with sympathy for the bereaved woman. However,

this spurs them to action as they begin to ask the environmental scientist what they must do to save their surroundings. In response, the man outlines for them the 4 R's of waste management and environmental responsibility: reduce, reuse (repair), recycle and recover.

Just then, a politician enters with his boys who are engaged in dedicated praise-singing to him. He greets the people and they murmur their response. He thanks them for voting him the first time and solicits their support for a second term. One man from the crowd raises his hand and says he has something to tell the politician. He is granted to speak. He comes out to assume a vantage position, covers his face with a bag and speaks vehemently against the politician's failed promises and leadership ineptitude. He says he has covered his face because an adage has it that when a king misbehaves too much an aggrieved subject wears a bag on his face and calls him to order. He blames the politician for their collective suffering and stresses that he has failed. Having failed to keep all the promises he made while they gave him their mandate for first term, no one shall be voting him for a second term. The people echo their support and begin to hail him for his fearlessness. The politician gestures them to calm down. He advances reasons why his government has performed below expectations and apologizes, promising to right his wrongs. To this end, he promises to fix the bad roads and clean up the environment. He encourages the people to help keep the environment clean by binning their wastes and participating in sanitation exercises. The people agree to support him if he will deliver on his promises henceforth. The politician thanks them for that hopeful promise and bids every hand to be on deck. He identifies the environmental scientist among the people, mobilizes him to get refuse sacks and waste bins. Having done that, the politician directs him to educate the people on how to bin their waste. The refuse sacks and bins are distributed among the people while they are encouraged to make proper use of them at home, shops and other work places. Their bagged wastes should be brought out at various designated locations for the government agency in charge of sanitation to dispose of them properly. The people are happy about this.

iv. Audition, Casting, Rehearsals and Play Criticism

Audition is the critical consideration of intending performers for a production by way of trying them out. According to Bell-Gam (2003, p.74) the main purpose of an audition is to determine the suitability of persons for the roles in a play by subjecting them to a practical demonstration of their talents. But since acting in a Tfd performance does not glory in professionalism, there was no audition in the technical sense of it, rather, actors were chosen from among the participants at the Tfd workshops based on their availability and willingness to perform.

Very closely related to audition is casting which is the art of allotting roles or characters in a play to human agents or artists. In a conventional theatre one of the main factors to consider here is the skill/professionalism of the performers in order to achieve verisimilitude but for a non-conventional theatre such as the TfD production of “Tuturu Ya Tufuo”, casting is done as democratically as possible as is common to TfD performances whose cast is chiefly made up of volunteers. However, the role of the Narrator was exclusively reserved for Bama Godwin, a trained theatre artist and one of the facilitators. Similarly, the role of the Environmental Scientist was played by Sunday Nwagboso, another theatre artist who had received intensive orientation from Mr. Ima Aaron, the professional environmental scientist and chief resource person on sanitation. The above two roles are central to the story of the play and must be handled well if the play must make a moral impression. Moreover, the two actors here, besides their ability to sing and dance, were fluent in the languages of the performance and versed in the overall social communication nuances of the people. Their voices commanded attention and their actions wooed approbation. Having had a consensus on the scenario to be dramatized, members of the group made up of the researchers/facilitators and workshop participants volunteered and took up roles in the play. To get the performance ready, there was need for rehearsals, or at least similar exercises that would help the performers get acquainted with their roles.

Unlike the conventional theatre where the performance is often considered the ultimate goal of the production, TfD as a nonconventional theatre tends to place greater emphasis on rehearsals. The rehearsals were a major part of the workshop exercise. The sessions were used to put the performance in order. Participants were encouraged to observe the rehearsals critically so as to comment constructively on the play’s general flow and message as well as the individual actor’s performances and their significance to the entire play production process. In some cases, an actor was challenged by someone else from the group; and if the latter proved better than the former, they took the role from them. It was during this stage of the process that the play assumed its full shape. The criticisms helped broaden individual horizons and general understanding, improve the dialogue and actions of the scenario, and adjust the duration of the performance. As such, within a few days, the play was ready for presentation.

V. Performance/Presentation

TfD workshop and performance is a planned, structured and coordinated effort. Its success depends on many factors such as: political, religious and socio-cultural conditions as well as practical obstacles. Conditions for achieving the

objectives must be favourable: room for genuine participation; sound basic conditions for local ownership; cultural openness to the approach; and the existence of opportunities to apply TFD (Epskamp, 2006, p.64).

The above submission of Epskamp is nothing less than valid. The prevalent conditions in the city under study afforded the workshop cum performance aspects of this project a commendable level of success. The creative efforts of this project climaxed into a play performance at each of the five locations of the experiment. To get people to watch/participate in the TFD play, the event was scheduled to hold in the evening when people must have retired from the business of the day. Aba being a commercial city does not play with business time. This factor was considered. The research team had in the course of the preproduction research data collection informed the respondents about the play. And each member of the volunteers had been told to invite people to the venue.

On the performance day at each of the venues, a band of native musicians would start drumming and singing to attract people to the venue to watch/participate in the play. The music seized the air, dancers as well as members of the volunteer group started dancing and later some enthusiastic onlookers were seen joining in the show. Gradually, a little crowd started gathering. Aba is known for its fondness for spectacles, hence the popular Igbo phrase “Aba naanya” (loosely translated: Aba loves viewing). When a sizeable cluster of spectators had been formed, the principal researcher would address them. The address was to orientate the people on what the exercise is all about. They were also told what was expected of them during and after the performance of the day. Interested ones were requested to pick and fill the questionnaires that would be distributed.

At each of the venues, the research team and the group of volunteers blended with the spectators to create an exquisite communal theatre experience. The dialogue was improvised and the language was chiefly Igbo, the lingo of the people of Aba. However, English and Pidgin were intermittently infused in the dialogue. The acting was made to be as natural as possible. Music and dance was a significant feature of the play. The play also employed some well-known songs and common expressions of the people. The spectators were consciously integrated into the performance via the question/answer technique. At some points, someone from the crowd would be asked their opinion on an issue. At other points the entire crowd would be made part of a decision making process.

The play presentation proper lasted between 25 to 30 minutes. The music and dance performance made the overall show time last over an hour.

vi. Evaluation

A critical appraisal of the overall significance of the communal dramatic experience to the lives of the target people is essential in every ideal TfD project. The essence of this assessment is the goal of the entire exercise. There is need to weigh how much the ‘spect-actors’ understand the play beyond its entertainment value to assimilating its moral cum developmental contents and their willingness to apply same to effect the desired change. To achieve this, the theatre worker/researcher initiates discussions immediately after the performance by posing critical questions that elicit judgments from the performed play. After the performance of ‘Tuturu Ya Tufuo’ at each of the five venues, an assessment or evaluation of the play’s significance i.e. people’s overall perception of it was carried out through interviews and questionnaires.

vii. Follow-up

The MAMSER training manual describes follow-up as the most important part of a TfD project. According to the document, the purpose of a follow-up is

to ensure that action comes out of the drama process so that the society can be transformed. The follow-up is usually organized by the theatre worker who initiated the programme in the first instance. If follow-up is not organized the people may relapse into passivity so that what was started would end up as nothing short of a jamboree. The theatre worker therefore has to keep up the pressure and momentum so that the people can organize themselves for action that will transform their lives (p.9).

One week after the performance of ‘TuturuYaTufuo’ at each of the venues, the researcher and a few available members of his research team paid a couple of visits to the areas to follow up on the play’s impact on the areas. During these, visits the team looked forward to the results the TfD project had yielded. The team bore in mind the fact that the place under study is a township that has a very large population; and the fraction of the population reached by this experiment is negligible compared to the general population. The team revisited some of the leaders of trade unions, some shops and residences. Interestingly, some of these shops and homes that did not keep waste bins now have while the trade union leaders assured the team of a more effective enforcement of general regular clean up exercises in their business areas by their members.

On one of the follow-up visits to Obuda, one of the respondents, a participant at the TfD workshops affirmed his efforts at being more committed to environmental sanitation following what he learnt during the workshop. He explained that he now applied the knowledge by binning his wastes and disposing of them properly. However, he appealed to the team to call

on the government to help clear up the huge mountains of waste blocking their own part of Port Harcourt Road and then fix the dilapidated road.

It was noticed that the number of people who now bin their wastes have increased. The only centre that does not seem to record much of this change is Aba Main Park. A closer consideration of the possible cause of this points to the fact that this centre is a motor park with lots of people coming in and going out of the place; and as such are too unsettled for any observation of the impact of the Tfd performance. The peculiarity of Asa-Nnentu Motor Spare Parts Market is that most of its wastes are metallic materials. However, the market also features some nonmetallic wares which results in nonmetallic wastes.

Discussion of Findings

The findings that were made in the course of this study are discussed as follows:

- i. The theatre holds great potentials of re-educating minds and reforming behaviours as an agent of socialization and mass communication. Albeit some people were unsupportive and indifferent to the project, the level of enthusiasm with which most other people received the project in the city of Aba was highly commendable. The excited participation of some people attracted and influenced others such that in the end, we had a good number. The level of business activities in Aba is high, and indeed, this was a major challenge to the project. In the end people were still attracted to participate in the performance. This shows that the theatre holds great attraction for the people.
- ii. The major cause of the deplorable environmental condition in Aba is the indiscipline among the residents therein. The average Aba dweller believes anything goes for anything, and he/she supports whatever they do by telling you that 'this is Aba'. Indiscipline is demonstrated in evasion of environmental sanitation exercises, improper waste disposal. The commonest of this is the indiscriminate littering of the streets with empty sachets of water and other discarded containers.
- iii. The Abia State government is as guilty as the residents if not guiltier for the dirtiness of Aba due to its poor enforcement of environmental laws and the inefficiency of the Abia State Environmental Protection Agency in the city of Aba. In most cases, when the people manage to dispose their wastes at some government designated dumping sites, the agency fails to live up to its responsibility of clearing

those locations. Some of the ASEPA large bins have been full for a long time but have not been emptied. People keep throwing refuse there leading to those areas being in a total mess.

- iv. The commonness of littering the environment in Aba is a result of poor environmental policing. People who litter the environment hardly face any prosecution.
- v. Some dwellers in the dirty part of the city of Aba are so used to the unhealthy environment that they no longer see anything wrong with it, thus there is need to diversify and intensify environmental consciousness in the city of Aba using such mediums that the people can easily identify with.
- vi. Realizing a theatrical production with a company of amateurs such as the volunteers in this TfD performance can be a daunting task. The people would not have sufficient regards for rehearsals/production ethics. They would come for rehearsals at their own convenient time (that is if they managed to come at all) with total denigration for call time. They wanted to do things their own way and need a lot of directing, cajoling and encouragement before getting things done. For most of them, acting is all comedy, and as such, they wanted to be funny like Osuofia (Nkem Owoh, the popular Nigerian comic actor) even when the role/situation demanded otherwise. However, with a dose of patience and tolerance the researcher was able to manage them to achieve the purpose.
- vii. Most of the participants expressed surprise over seeing a theatre project dealing with environmental issues. TfD actually gets people to understand and appreciate the frontiers of the theatre as a field of study and/or an area of practice.
- viii. There are many raw talents in the streets begging to be refined. These possess the potentials to enrich the theatre and the society at large if well harnessed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The importance of the environment to man is so great that man is described as a product of his environment. The implication of this is that however man chooses to treat his environment invariably boomerangs on him. Many people may not always be conscious of this fact. Therefore, there is need for regular creation of awareness and boosting of consciousness. In this regard, TfD holds great promise. There is need for continued mass education and eco-friendly cultural modifications using TfD and other popular means to orientate the people in Aba and other communities and challenge them to take up individual participatory

responsibilities in environmental sanitation. In the same vein, the people should be involved in the formulation of developmental policies including those pertaining to environmental sanitation instead of a bottom-top pattern which has contributed to the weak success or outright failure of such policies. Finally, the solution to the environmental dirtiness in Aba begins with the education of the minds of the individuals in the city.

Having observed the enthusiasm with which people receive theatrical events and the potential of Tfd to make social changes through people's involvement therein, this study recommends that more Tfd projects be initiated to address other societal problems. This can be sponsored by the government or individuals. More campaigns and mass mobilization/education should be carried out on regular basis to raise and maintain eco-consciousness among the people of Aba. When individual minds are well educated on the need for proper sanitation, the right actions will likely follow. This study also recommends that the people be involved in policy making processes through exercises/programmes that are similar to this. Some of the top-bottom policies may not be as practicable as the ones formulated on bottom-top basis. The opinions of the people should be accommodated.

The Abia State Environmental Protection Agency (ASEPA) should step up its game to meet up its statutory function. The existing dumping sites should be attended to and cleared up regularly. More dumping sites should be created considering the distribution of people and industries/factories, settlement patterns and population density of the city. Similarly, indiscriminate dumping or littering of wastes should be criminalized and adequate policing be put in place so that people would be mindful of how they dispose of their wastes. This will definitely result in improved eco-friendly conditions and environmental health.

Every household, office, workshop, worship centre, business centre and the likes should be mandated to mount trash bin(s) at strategic positions so as to enable people see where to dispose their wastes properly. In the same vein, larger bins should be mounted at not-too-far-apart intervals on major roads, streets, boulevards and other pathways so that users can dispose their wastes properly. These bins should be emptied regularly by paid workers whose job it would be; just the way we have road sweepers in some towns. Similarly, the government should provide ASEPA with favourable conditions to operate: among other things access roads so that their disposal trucks can access the dumping sites.

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