

**THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT AS CATALYST FOR
EMPOWERMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS THROUGH
CYBERNETIC PEDAGOGY IN SELECTED EKITI STATE
COMMUNITIES**

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ABSTRACT

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a type of community-based or interactive theatre practice that aims to promote civic dialogue and engagement that uses performances as a participatory tool to help individuals and groups share their experiences with the intent of social transformation and empowerment. But the policy has failed to involve or include the people in the rural areas in development that concerns their lives. This observe therefore addresses the hassle of under improvement and disempowerment among Nigerian population especially in some selected Ekiti communities with the aid of exploring the validity of Theatre for Development Methodology. The demanding situations of human empowerment, transformation, emancipation and rural development remain critical issues in Ekiti State. The paper adopts qualitative studies technique, incorporating development communication via cybernetic pedagogy, participant commentary in its facts gathering and content analysis at the same time, ethnographic research layout method of records collection is used in the BOUESTI/ selected communities in Ekiti. Theatre for Development projects. The projects x-rayed the low-level of development in these clusters which includes, the urban drift of youths the neglect and lack of support of the widows from within and without, lack of health centre and

convenient facilities (i.e. toilets) which toll the death rate of the people on the increase. The look hence unearths that Theatre for Development possesses the potency for facilitating human improvement in all ramifications if correctly carried out. This paper therefore recommends that the usage of the theatre for Development alternative which encompasses the conventional nuance of conversation, performance-oriented approach to promote dialogue, create attention and inspire participation would decorate sustainable development in the communities and the nation at large.

Keywords: Theatre, Development catalyst, grassroots empowerment, cybernetics

INTRODUCTION

Theatre was born societal and the embryo from which it has grown out is the collectively motivated performance of massive societies and its function also has no value isolation to that society, that is why August Boal (103) heavily underlines on the social function of theatre as a reflection of real life experience of man on the stage. Theatre for Development too is a new development practice that uses performance as a participatory tool to help individuals and groups share their experiences with the intent of social transformation. Theatre for Development offers a practical and theoretical exploration of the ways in which the arts can be used by communities to create social transformation on their own terms. But in recent time it has been revealed that most rural and urban dwellers in Nigeria were neglected in terms of social amenities that can be beneficial to their well-being and development. The helpless condition of these rural dwellers is so much disheartening that it attracts foreign countries. Thus, these prevailing situations and insensitivity of the relevant authority to intervene over the age have warranted a third party intervention like WHO and UNESCO. These interventions have subsequently adopted the theatre for Development as a tool for ameliorating these societal dysfunctionalities.

It is evident that from its inception in the late 1970s, Theatre for Development has achieved its aim of being both interactive and participatory in its approach in Nigeria and other African countries where it has been practiced. Theatre for Development has become an accepted popular tool and practice that gear towards the conscientization, empowerment and emancipation of the rural dwellers, the “down trodden” and “the oppressed in the society. Theatre for Development (TfD)

understood as a problem- solving performance- oriented form of art is a process used in educating and conscientizing the communities on socio-economic political, environmental and religious problems.

Over the years Tfd has remained a vital instrument in bringing the people together not minding the status, age or creed. This symbiotic experience has survived the various interplay of idea that culminated in the evolution of different genius within the progressive theatrical period in time past. The society has contributed immensely to theatre practice by providing the resource base or materials, while the product of theatre aims at reshaping, recreating and reforming the very society, the whole idea behind any theatre production is to also present to an audience a unified theatrical effect which will arouse them both emotionally and intellectually. (Idogbo 315).

Background of the Study

The utilization of theatre for Development (Tfd) as a transformative tool has gained considerable attention in the realm of socio-economic development and human empowerment. This approach stems from the belief that the arts particularly theatre can serve as a catalyst for positive change within communities. In the specific content of selected Ekiti State communities; namely Sakoro-Ekiti, Ilupeju-Ijan, Ise-orun and Oshodi in Ado Ekiti, all in Nigeria, where socio-economic challenges persist like lack of convenient (toilets) no electricity supply, no good roads; widows neglect and urban drift, the potential of Tfd to address and alleviate these issues becomes a compelling area of exploration.

Scholar such as Freire (57) and Boal (68) has emphasized the importance of participatory methodologies in community development. They argued that actually engaging communities in the development process, a more sustainable and impactful transformation can be achieved. Moreover, theatre for development aligns with the principles of dialogue and empowerment as articulated by conuergood (20) and Kotecha (54), they highlighted the potential of performance as a medium for fostering understanding within community agency, the aim of Tfd according to Willier and Feirner is to

“Increase opportunities for marginalized and oppressed group to represent themselves and the world around them as

a means of asserting their own identity and achieving cultural, social, economic and political equity (25).

However, Tfd stands for equal right for citizens irrespective of their background or cultural belief (mine). Theatre for Development integrates people at the grassroot to do it themselves by involving them in the drama. Since Tfd is the practice by which theatre is put at the service of the disadvantaged rural and urban poor. Tfd is now used to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor for the purpose of discussing and working out strategies for dealing with their social, economic and political problems. This theatre speaks to the people in their own language and idioms. It is the practice which builds the people artistic mode of expression, the people can control the dramaturgical process and provide material for the drama. Tfd functions as a medium of articulating problems of the poor by the poor and for the poor. Tfd is the best medium of preaching development to human and its environment. Its gives insight into the human mind so that in looking at man the gaze becomes an x-ray that penetrates behind the mesh and layer of the actor's skin to see the naked and humanity in him.

Statement of the Problem

Inspite of the trending western ideologies and civilization that made African culture to have thrived and developed to global acceptability, different investigators have shown the poverty status of the people in Ekiti as worrisome.

Since the approaches implored to alleviate poverty or poor conditions of the people has become a mirage. This paper explores alternative approaches to human empowerment and infrastructure development using Theatre for Development which is geared towards reversing the hitherto top-down technique towards improvement which the nation has needed to grapple with since independence and to adopt the bottom-up method that is human or mass oriented. However what also calls for serious concern is in the light of the global information and technological challenges of the 21th century, among other challenges is the continued viability of predominant performance approach in facilitating the realization of the noble objectives of theatre for Development as well as sustaining its impact. The encroachment and widespread of this technology

has indeed relegated the use and function of TFD to the level of disregard. This statement corroborate the assertion of Agu, who posits that

Inspite of the well established arts traditions and practice among Nigerian societies, external influence laid foundation for infiltration and down the colonial administration and civilization gave rise to people looking for other means of social changes and development (16)

In other word, the conscientious effort to further the noble course of theatre practice especially in the 21th century has constantly been fraught by this challenges with equally eroding effect on its impacts. Hence the researcher experiment with Cybernetic Pedagogy Technique which utilize electronic facilities such as the projector, projector screen, computer and handset in order to aid good performance by the villagers exposing them (spec-actors) to some fieldworks that are in our archives reminiscing on them in order to help them internalized their condition and their roles as actors that will be at the driver seat of the drama that would be acted to bring positive change to their lives and communities.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of empowerment originated from American Community psychology but one notable proponent of the concept is Julian Rappaport (1981). However, the term gradually extends further into history and eventually linked to Marxist Sociological theory Scholars and theorists have defined the concept of empowerment to mean measures put in place to increase control and self-determinism in people/communities. According to Perkins and Zimmermann (569), empowerment as a construct theoretically connect mental health to mutual help and the struggle to create a responsive community. Empowerment can began to be understood by examining the concepts of power and powerless (Moscovitch and Drover 11). Power is defined by the Cornell Empowerment group as the “capacity of some persons and organizations to produce intended foreseen and unforeseen effects on others” (Cornell Empowerment Group 2). There are many sources of power, Galbraith identifies “personality, property/ wealth, and influential organizations as critical sources of power in the last part of the twentieth century” (13). Others have pointed out that the “class-dominated nature of our society means that a small number of people have vast

economic or political power, while the majorities have little or none (Moscovich Drorer 91)

Increasingly, “empowerment is being understood as a process of change” (Cornell Empowerment Group 2). Edelman has suggested that “in order for people to take power, they need to gain information about themselves and their environment and be willing to identify and work with others for change” (56). In a similar vein, Whitmore defines empowerment as: “an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live”. This implies that without the people standing up to face the realities of their challenges and holding the bull by horn there may not be solutions to the problems.

The concept of empowerment again could be best understood from August Boal’s seminal work, “Theatre of the oppressed”, Boal’s approach emphasizes and is interpretative of a dramatic experience “where the audience are no more mere Onlookers or spectators, but are part and parcel of the creative process “Spectators”, rather than mere recipients of finished products. They are active “Spectators” and “the Protagonist(s) of the theatrical action (224). This is also, perhaps, Boal’s conviction that the “spectator” is only turned to less than a man, voiceless and passive and urgently needed to be humanized, to restore to him his capacity for action in all its ramifications” (155). For this reason, the people, he infers, no longer needed to delegate power to any character either to act or think in their place; rather “they themselves have to assume the protagonic role, change the dramatic action, try out solutions and discuss plans for change, infact, they have to assume full responsibility for their emancipation and development; since they and only they alone can wield the empowering weapon of the theatre” (122)

Methodology of the Study

The essence of methodology to research is to systematically guide the researcher in finding appropriate approaches to research questions and to serve as model in validating the reliability of any inquiry. Therefore qualitative method was deployed and as Obadiegwu states that “qualitative method seeks a wider understanding of the entire situation, it attempts to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for actions and establish how people interpret their experiences and the world around

them (27). Hence some of the approaches of the qualitative method adopted by the researcher include but not limited to content analysis of the situation of the people, that is, the evidence of low level of socio-economic development in the lack of electricity supply, no good roads, lack of convenience (Toilets), urban drift, widow's neglect and the likes. Case study, observation, ethnography, unstructured interviews as well as participatory learning action (PLA) were used to authenticate the research. The study is on selected communities in Ekiti Theatre for Development Workshop, namely: Sakoro-Ekiti, Ilupeju-Ijan, Ise-Orun and Oshodi axis in Ado Ekiti. The researcher was a facilitator in the workshop, she got first hand information and was part of the entire process with the support of the 300 level students of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere-Ekiti Nigeria.

Theatre for Development Catalysts (i.e we the facilitators) use drama to help people air their views by making them feel the power of expression and through this expression, communicate results. Theatre for Development equips people with adequate information that helps them develop consciousness towards themselves and their immediate environment with a view to tackling development issues that is confronting them. Empowerment programme requires full participation of stakeholders to bring about the necessary change. For mutual Cooperation and enlightenment in the society, effective communication through seminars, workshops and training are the best alternatives that TfD offers for maximum emancipation and empowerment; Bhasin captures this succinctly, thus;

For building genuine partnership with people, for being part of and supporting people's struggle, for strengthening grassroots level democracies, for encouraging people, creativity, there is no alternative to face to face communication and people's media. We must learn from and strengthen these media which are built on oral tradition; at low cost and require low technology input ----- (7)

For greater development and increase in the level of socio-economic empowerment, communication forms that could be of greater benefit to the people should be used when one realizes that development is the ability of the collectivity of individuals to organizing themselves with the view to eke

out a living from nature, then the kind of information one disseminates about development programmes should be that which can be understood by that person. This can be achieved through the participation of many. It is the impoverished masses who are the majority in Ekiti Communities, their poor economic status has made it difficult for them to partake in the ownership and control of mainstream communication media. Where they have access to them, they cannot effectively utilize the information that these media contain due to their literacy level.

Against this background, it has become imperative to evolve and use the folk media sources that are of the people, for the people and by the people for total empowerment at the grassroots. The alien language, difficult messages complicated and expensive technology rather confuse the audience and at best reduce them to passive consumers who have few ways of giving feedback to express their opinion or influence the content or method of presentation. This gives credence to why the utilization of drama, storytelling, or a poetry etc. that Tfd offers as a priority for empowerment at the grassroots. Participant in Theatre for Development are aware of Problems that they did not consider before, because a standard model is challenged and the idea that there are alternative is clearly demonstrated through the research is approach in these selected communities in Ekiti State. This is in realization of the fact that “the more interaction between units, the greater the likelihood of integration and social change.

Preliminary Visit to Selected Communities

Preliminary visit to the selected communities of the intended Tfd workshop is very germane because it can from the onset determine the success or failure of the experiments, depending on how the process is followed. This involves resources persons or catalyst getting in contact with the leaders of target communities to state identity and mission of the group as well as goals of the projects and obtain permission to proceed. During this period we were able to raise a representative group of the communities to work in collaboration with the catalysts, this is important to ensure participatory representation and eventual continuity of the process.

PICTURE OF PROJECTOR



HANDSET



PICTURE OF PROJECTOR SCREEN



LAPTOP



Preliminary Visitation





Findings and Data Collection

The homestead method was deployed which gives the catalysts the ample opportunity to interact with the target communities. The researcher was able to take the participants on a quick course on the standard procedure of approaching a TDF workshop which are (1) Goal Identification (2) Theatrical Idioms, (3) Community research (4) Problem Identification (5) Data analysis (6) Performance (7) Post-Performance discussion with participants and audience (8) Follow-up which is the most plausible way through which success or failure of the experiment is assessed. 10 recipients were selected from each community for easy interaction and cooperation from the community members.

Findings

Findings revealed that the communities were faced with different challenges that are peculiar to each community; such as;

- Sakoro-Ekiti is faced with lack of convenience (i.e toilet facilities) which has affected the health of some members of the community.
- Widow's neglect and lack of support from within and without Ilupeju-Ijan
- Urban drift of the youths has collapse the economic system of Ise-Ekiti
- Lack of health centre has been the major problem of the people of Oshodi in Ado-Ekiti

Findings also revealed that drama-based intervention aimed at advancing community consciousness and mobilizing for social change can yield fruitful results and “It will also help to stimulate involvement on the part of the community and ensures the presentation of a balanced-view, a level of community consensus, a sense of involvement and participation by all beneficiaries’ Daniel and Bappa opined (20). This was exactly what the researcher did in the communities so as to have maximum results and attitudinal change to social problems.

Data Analysis

This involves analysis of data collected during the process of research. Data analysis was done with the aim of identifying issues of priority for the purpose of developing dramatic scenarios.

Scenario Development

Once data had been analysed, the next stage is to develop the drama outline which was done in line with the peculiarities of each target community.

Rehearsals

This is a process whereby stage presentation and dialogue was worked out through trial and error. Both the audience and the spec-actors were encouraged to critique the drama skits at this period, as comments and suggestions were proffered to help improve the performance.

Performance/Post Performance Discussions/Action Plan



The performance held at the various village squares pulled together a large number of the community members and BOUESTI students stimulated the environment with their music and dance to bring people around to the venues. In the word of Ross Kidd

“Popular theatre could help bring the community together, facilitate, participation build community spirit, raise issues, spark discussion, challenges apathy and inspire community effort. It could reflect the community to itself in a way that challenges the community to do something” (27).

Hence, resulting from the performance the following issues were raised and mentioned by the community members.

- No good road network
- No electricity supply
- No convenience (i.e Toilets)
- Lack of support for widows
- urban drift of youths for lack of employment
- No health facilities and personnel to take care of community members

After the discussion, the community observed that they would implore themselves, to do something to change their lots positively, infact the facilitators had a collaboration project with them by building one toilet in the community, they were empowered and encouraged with this laudable move by the facilitators and they said they will not wait for the government again as they had encountered several disappointments in waiting for the government to carry out its responsibilities. They said they would pull their resources together and develop themselves further because with the seminars and training conducted for them by the catalysts they've been well-equipped and well informed. What therefore came out strongly from the people's commitment is the general acceptance of their social condition arising from a sharing of knowledge leading to act towards collective empowerment for Development.

Follow-Up



There is need for follow-up to Tfd projects because follow-up activity is a vital aspect of the Tfd process that can not be overemphasized. It is through constant follow-up activities that the successes or failure of Tfd project can be gauged. it is also through such constant monitoring that the levels of developmental initiative can be discussed. 10 windows were empowered in Ilupeju-Ijan with financial support to start petty-trader and a toilet was built in Sakoro Ekiti by the catalysts. Though these experiments are on-going but there has been laudable change in the social lives of the people.

CONCLUSION

The need to “create improved Theatre for Development practices” or devise a practice that will not be boring or alienate the poor nor exclude them in such processes, as it often experienced due to the nature of existing social structures and cultural traditions is a constant motivation for review of the practice in Africa. However the deployment of communication tools such as PLA and cybernetic pedagogy proves to be a great plus for ensuring community mobilization and action to towards development. The study reveals that drama help to propel the people to become fully aware of their predicament and what they need to do in order to change their situation.

Drama as a participatory tool gives the audience ample opportunities to analyze, contribute and bring their own solutions to the problem at hand.

Findings also revealed that drama based interventions aimed at advancing community consciousness and mobilization for social change can yield fruitful results and can be a powerful tool in disseminating information as well as mobilizing community participation among rural folk especially in secluded communities where there is no access to radio or television. However, for maximum impact; the process requires a deep understanding of the people's cultural values system that makes meaning and help to define the historical realities of a people. Another crucial finding is that poverty is a strong hindrance to development in Nigeria today. Poverty among citizenry is strongly connected to misappropriation of resources which inevitably leads to bribery and corruption that have systematically been main-streamed and legitimized into the political, social and economic structures of the Nation. The resultant effect is the poor standard of living especially in the rural areas.

RECOMMENDATION

It is imperative to state that TfD provides policy makers and planners with the much needed alternative approach to providing people with information that will enable them improve their knowledge base regarding the causative factors of low socio-economic development in some selected Ekiti State communities. TfD presents an alternative research approach that provides stimulus for thought and action that breeds liberating initiatives which permeates into the whole being and to the communities

- Therefore programmes that will improve the well-being of the layout communities must be supported by strong polities and adequate provision of social amenities that will facilitate emancipation, should be put in place.
- Government needs to ensure that functioning mechanisms for quality improvement that ensure and evaluate the effectiveness of the facilities put on ground should be monitored in order to make the development of the target community not to go into relapse.
- Empowering individuals, families and communities by integrating effective interventions into the existing community structure is a strong

requirement if the transformation of the lives of the people they govern are to experience development.

- Drama and drama related programme have been used successfully to promote issues of valuable concern, it should be continuously utilized in order to persuade, inculcate and to educate or reorientate the rural folks
- There should be effective communities approach which is the Tfd approach in which there will be collective discussions and decisions on issues within the people's environment. Such participatory drama must emphasise the need for redirecting and correcting society by mobilizing and influencing reality. Theatre here becomes a tool of mass education in promoting enabling environment for transformation beginning with individuals and the generality of the public.
- Cybernetic pedagogy technique should be seen as a way to further improve Tfd approach by scholars and should be adequately used or researched into as discourse for academic purpose.

When the above are put in place, the quest towards empowering people at the grassroot will make the rural folks to be greatly encouraged to use the weapon of Tfd in ensuring development in their communities.

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