

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND TFD PRACTICE IN NIGERIA: THE UNANDU AND KETTI EXPERIENCE

Cynthia Chinenyenwa Nwabueze  
University of Nigeria Nsukka

## Abstract

*The purpose of Theatre for Development (TfD) is to communicate effectively to bring about a change occasioned by the awareness on the part of the community of a 'need' and facilitated by theatre workers. For centuries, communication was described as the process through which information (data, message) that could be in a spoken or written form and sent through larynx, telephone or computer (channel) to a computer, robot or human being (receiver) who is expected to decode (understand, transcribe) and encode (give a feedback) which again could be written, spoken, a sign or silence and the whole process begins again. Basically, this form of communication assumes that the sender is literate and knowledgeable and the receiver is illiterate or completely ignorant. Thus, it is termed authoritative in nature and in most cases not ideal for an educative process or a development work. However, the democratic nature of TFD seeks to use the resources within the theatre framework to achieve an aim; which could be behavioural or developmental and to actualize this through active participation by the community in the play making process. This paper analyses two TFD projects carried out in two Communities: Unandu (Igbo- Etiti LGA) and Ketti (Kabusa Ward, AMAC) with a view to measuring the failure or success of the communication process used in data collection.*

## Introduction

The popular dictum "Man cannot live in isolation" has made it mandatory that life is communal. Invariably, we share our beliefs, infrastructure, pains even disasters and this sharing has brought man closer to each other. Apparently, communication is the salient tool utilized by man to adapt and familiarize with the unfamiliar environment he finds himself. Prior to what we understand today as modern communication methods that is; information technology, man had effectively devised a method of passing information to one another through visual and/ or symbolic codes. These information processes were necessary to understand the various happenings in his environment and to live peaceably with other humans. Early communication tools include the fire, leaf

branches, sounds for example drums, flutes and many more according to the traditions of the people. In life, there is no human endeavour that is devoid of communication even silence is an act of communicating that the individual wants to be left alone or is in agreement with situation.

Communication is a process where an individual or a group of people with some common tie exchange ideas that are useful to a particular cause using similar codes to encode and decode messages. For a message to be effective, the sender needs to construct his information in the most suitable way the receiver can understand. An example is a numeric input in the computer system where information is converted to binary for the computer to understand and encode (send) its reply. The situation is same with humans thus, problems begin when messages are not well structured in the acceptable mode and the receiver does not understand the message. Therefore, for a communication to be termed effective it must be sent in a manner that it does not get muddled up before getting to the receiver. To ensure this, the sender must guard the communication process. In this light, Mbachaga acknowledges the importance of effective communication when he agrees that “Meaningful communication involves getting information out to a particular audience, listening to their feedback, and responding appropriately” (75). Another characteristic of communication process is multiplicity and the top-down approach of the supposed knowledgeable to the ignorant or from a leader to a follower. Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal have kicked against this approach in their books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Theatre of the Oppressed* respectively. These Latin Americans opposed the use of the communication system which tends to be non-inclusive and propose a system that is more concerned with the process and context of the dissemination of information than message itself. For they believed that the channel through which information is passed is as important as the information itself for if a message is not properly understood, the reply would be a direct opposite of its intention. In Theatre for Development the sender-receiver role is exchanged intermittently as more importance is attached to reawakening the people to their responsibilities to their land, themselves and the governments’ responsibilities towards them. What TFD engages in is purposive communication; to initiate a change or inform using theatrical idioms found in the community for effective communication and participation.

This didactic property of theatre has over the years been employed by developmental studies scholars like Augusto Boal and Paulo Friere using it as a tool for solving societal problems. With successful experiment of ‘theatre for development’ cited in several countries like America, Zambia, Kenya

etcetera, Nigerian theatre practitioners adopted this theatre as a tool to ameliorate the society of her ills, instigating a change of the situation. It is also important to note that we are currently experiencing a downward slope in our economy; this has its resultant effect in every sector and institutions of the society. Although over the years the Nigerian GDP has increased, its effect has not shown on her masses. This brings us to the question, does an increase in GDP account for development? Experience has shown that development starts with individuals not goods or infrastructure. Development as it is known starts with a change of attitude, in time and resource management and this change is what TFD sets out to achieve. For it is believed that a behavioural change could lead to increased productivity and at the latter stages infrastructural development.

In the past, there have been attempts by Nigerian theatre artists to use theatre in their fight to liberate the masses from bad government policies with the plays: *Strike and Hunger* and *Bread and Bullet* Hubert Ogunde ridiculed colonialism with all its 'whims and caprices' creating an awareness in the people of the failure of the government but with little suggestion for saving the situation. Thus, TFD in Nigeria arose after the serving theatre structure could not fit into the development needs of the country. Although a borrowed form of theatre, it offers an opportunity for the community to express their fears, pain, aspirations and successes as a people using their own cultural indices such as: dance, songs/music and drama. Hagher notes "for a long time the Universities in Nigeria made no effort to de-colonize, or in the words of Amilcar Cabral "re-Africanize" their theatre. They based their models on western theatre traditions, and sought to elevate their ethnic cultures to international significance and relevance on the theoretical plane" (15). These westernized theatres help in enforcing an image which is not African and the people cannot relate to. For communication to be termed 'effective' all participants must view the information from the same plane which means that messages must be coded in a way that every participant would understand and translate into action.

The process for information gathering is as important as the information gathered so TFD emphasizes on her methodology and Hagher again lists the five stages of a comprehensive TFD process to include: Goal identification, identification of theatrical idiom, theatrical induction, rehearsal and performance with a follow-up necessary to ascertain the success of the project. Thus, this paper uses two TFD projects to discuss the success or failure of the communication process.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The colonialist introduction of drama in Nigeria was borne out of two purposes: to inculcate western ideas into a people of barbaric culture and to pass on government policies to a half literate colony. The fallout of this is that Nigerian early dramatists were thought to disregard any cultural practice as theatre or at best mould it into the acceptable western forms. However, as Ugwu states, if theatre is “the art of people acting out and giving witness to their experiences, concerns and feelings as argued by Cohen, then to deny traditional African performance its rightful place as theatre, would invariably imply denying both the African people and her culture any experience, concern and feelings” (1). Therefore, for communication to be effective it must be tailored to match the particular context of the “Nigerian experience” and carried out in the Nigerian way if indeed the message is meant for the Nigerian people.

The act of communicating itself is carried out for a purpose and theatre for development as the name implies is aimed at sensitizing people on the need to participate actively in the development of their environment. Therefore, the form of communication must emanate from the particular project at hand and by the people who are involved as facilitators and co-participants as the roles are exchanged during the process.

The essence of effective communication in TFD is captured in the words of Paulo Friere when he proclaims that “effective dialogue must lead to action” and that the quest knowledge/awareness is not sufficient enough for TFD project but knowledge which stimulates action is the crux for this paper analyses. The foundation on which effective communication should bring forth is active participation and its fall out; ownership of the project. Active participation or participatory communication as defined by Nair and White as quoted in Gana is “a two-way process of dialogue between individuals or group, thriving on the principles of information sharing towards reaching common understanding. These two-way process are not like Harold Lasswell’s model for communication but a continuous exchange of roles between the TFD workers and the people as co-workers of a particular project. Corroborating this idea, Dandaura states that:

The familiarity with the medium and content during playmaking makes participation of people possible in developmental efforts and because indigenous knowledge systems are easily handled by the people, they engender discussion and communication among them, and make them retain control over the media; ideas, decisions and solutions arrived at in the process of their own

development. When indigenous knowledge is ignored, the result of a development effort may be woeful. (17)

Thus, it can be derived from the above that when TFD is carried out without an active participation by the people it does not achieve its desired goal. To sensitize and awaken the consciousness of the people of a particular society as regards their immediate problems, TFD utilizes their local idioms, songs, language, and belief system to create a scenario which will be enacted by the people themselves, thus making them ‘spect-actors’ as they enact this reality and at the same time watch it. As espoused by Kidd and Etherton as quoted in Mda “It is only by living and creating with the community that a genuine theatre language evolves although, this new theatre continues to use the same age-old proverbs and dances, these forms are not imposed on the people by outside forces who think that is how African theatre should be. Rather, the people themselves decide to use cultural forms they have at their disposal” (10). Furthermore, participatory communication is very vital in TFD, because with that the society will not be able find the performance appealing to their reality. Therefore, communication media used in TFD performance should be designed in such a way that the community will be able to see their reality unfolding through drama in their full glare, thus spurring them to participate.

The expected fall out of effective communication in TFD is “action” which can be seen as a deliberate attempt by the people to change the status-quo not demonstrations or war but by submitting themselves to the development of their environment. This step is programmed by a continuous follow up by the TFD workers in the community to ensure that the agreement reached by the pair: TFD workers and the people are carried out. The major setback of TFD projects in Nigeria is follow- up; a beautiful project is carried out in an environment and development strategies are mapped out and there is no one to supervise or ensure that they are achieved. However, the process follow-up is financially involving and as most TFD projects are carried out by theatre students with little sponsor by the university, follow-up has been elusive therefore remaining on the paper.

### **Theatre for Development: The Unandu Experience**

University of Nigeria, Nsukka observes TFD as part of the Theatre Arts curriculum. The course is meant to introduce the students to the use of the theatre as a tool for development. It was in this light that the 2015/2016 community theatre program took students and staff to the Unandu: a community in Igbo- Eze local government area of Enugu state in Nigeria. The project lasted for a week and the facilitators camped there for a week. The

problems identified in the community were drug abuse, cultism and poor attitude towards the health centre and school. From information gathered, the Unandu youths were violent and an affront with them which signalled riffle pump actions. There have been recorded cases of disagreements between Unandu and her neighbouring Ichi community and during elections where pump action rifles were displayed by the youths. Although, the major issue found in the community was that of violence and cultism so for security reasons, the TFD facilitators had to act with tact; choosing the less challenging vice which is the insufficient use of the primary health care centre and education.

### **Methodology**

For any TFD project to be successfully executed, the host community must accept the facilitators whole heartedly. This is basically done by visiting the community leaders or the king if they have one. Therefore, at the beginning of the project a courtesy call was paid to the Eze (king) and council members to familiarize with them to garner support for the project. This was the first thing executed by the facilitators.

### **Data Collection**

The homestead approach was used for gathering data on the Unandu community is the homestead approach. According to Hagher, the homestead approach “involves resource personnel staying with villagers as guests; sharing their experiences, eating and dialoguing with them” (32). He explains that “the brief sojourn enables the people accept facilitators as the one who has come to solve their problems and enable resource personnel an opportunity to match theory with practice” (32). The facilitators in the Unandu project were camped at the Primary Health Care Centre in the community for a week and armed security was provided by the youths and vigilante of the community. Unfortunately, the Health Centre is at the extreme of community so, each day the facilitators moved into the villages for interaction and data collection after which they come back for group meetings, documentation and analysis of data.

### **Day 1**

Arrival: The first day marked the arrival of the facilitators and they were heartily received by the youth leaders and community elders.

### **Day 2**

The facilitators divided themselves into groups, thus, going from one village to another collating data. Thus the plenary session commenced, they discussed with the community and they noted the data collected. The data gathered during the need assessment exercise indicated the following problems:

1. Inaccessible roads
2. Poor educations for indigenes
3. Poor health infrastructures
4. Drug abuse
5. Cultism

Moreover, the facilitator's encountered some challenges while interacting with the villagers and during the process of data collation. This was as a result of some certain factors, which all centre on poor communication etiquette and security reasons.

1. Dressing: being a remote community, the facilitators were too flamboyant in their dressing, thus this debarred them from getting adequate information because the villagers looked inferior to the facilitators, they thus deemed it fit not to pay attention to them
2. Accent/Language: some of the facilitators did not take into cognizance the importance of dialect as an apt tool for communication in TFD. Thus this also affected their interaction with the villagers who became disinterested in the process.
3. Women were restricted: Women in the community were restricted from speaking and this posed a great challenge to data collection.
4. Security: the facilitators aware of the security challenges in the community were cautioned not to probe too hard to get information so as not to risk an affront with the people. Therefore, questions were simply ignored and places avoided.

### **Day 3**

Rehearsal began with the given scenario

#### **The Scenario**

After data collection, the facilitators analysed them and selected a four-man team to create a scenario for the project. It consisted of simple plot with three movement or actions:

The first movement captures a woman who picks palm nuts, then her only son saunters in from school earlier than the normal time upon interrogation he reveals that most of the teachers are not in school and the ones available are not even teaching. As he speaks, his pregnant sister starts

crying; because her boyfriend jilts her. Her mother then beckons on her to assist in picking the nut, she refuses saying that her waist is paining her. Her mother suggests that she should go to the village native doctor Uju for check-up, but she refuses and insists that she prefers the primary health centre. Action shifts to the palace of the king and his chiefs, who deliberates on a government proposal which centres on the development of the society. One of the elders suggests that they embezzle the money while others insist that the money must be spent on development projects. The last shows the pregnant girl groaning in pains as people rush her to the health centre but faces the challenges of getting her there in good time. The play stops and questions are asked.

### **Theatre for Development: The Ketti Experience**

The Ketti community is located in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) in Kabusa Ward, a town not far from the metropolis yet the difference in her level of development was gaping. The researcher participated as a student-researcher in a TFD project in the community in 2008 and went back in 2011 as a follow up to the previous project. During the course of the initial TFD project, the following problems were cited: inaccessible road, lack of electricity (no electric poles in sight), poor hygiene, indifference to the primary health care centre, poor accommodation for health workers, communal clash and power tussle. However, the project was narrowed down to health issue so as to attract the attention of the National Primary Health Care and Development Agency.

Basically, the TFD project was to stimulate a desire for proper hygiene and a shift to modern health practices as the people particularly pregnant women and children were dying from patronizing traditional medicines. The project was carried out in six months Nov- May 2012.

### **Methodology**

As noted above, the project was done in two phases within the space of three years. The first phase was handled as a student-researcher and the second phase as a National Youth Corp member. Therefore, because of the gap in years there were two initial visits to both the chairman of the local government (which had changed in 2011) and the King (recognized) and his council chiefs and community leaders. These visits enabled the team to relate with the community, ask questions and take pictures.

## **Data Collection**

There were three approaches used for the collection of data; the homestead approach, the official and the interview. As stated above, as student facilitators in 2008, we were camped at the community primary school for a week as we interacted with the people: helping them at their farms, streams and cleaning the environment. However, for this paper the approach to be mentioned is that which was applied by the facilitators as a build up to the data already collected. Due to lack of accommodation problems, time constraints and the fact that facilitators were workers who volunteered a part of their time to engage in the TFD, the official eye and interview method were considered best. A major factor influencing the decision was that members of the team were health workers in National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA); the parent organization in charge of health in Nigeria. So, information on the health challenges was taken from the official records and from community leaders. However, it was found that information given by the community leaders was either wrong or misleading and the team had to ascertain correct information from their body language.

### **Day 1**

On this day, the community was educated on the matters concerning hygiene, family planning and nutrition by the NPHCDA staff and members were given the opportunity to ask questions which were jotted down to be addressed by the Ward Development Committee (WDC) that would be a fall out from the TFD process.

### **Day 2**

Twenty members were elected from the nine wards of the community and they were formally inaugurated as WDC members to oversee to the care of the community and to act as a mediator between the community and the government. These WDC members were made up of semi-literates and so needed to be trained on how to carry out their functions. Consequently, a two-day WDC Planning Learning and Action (PLA) were organized for them.

### **Day 3**

PLA began with each participant grouped in fours sitting together on a round table. Collectively they were asked to draw a map of the community indicating important buildings and landmarks. After the exercise, members went for a “health walk” to confirm the landmarks highlighted in the map and to effect corrections if need be. During the walk, one could see human excreta

littered and indiscriminate dumping of refuse along the pathway leading to the stream (a significant source of water for the community). This information was useful in helping members couch the scenario play. After the walk, WDC members and TFD members returns to the PHC to couch a scenario that aptly described the situation of the community.

### **Play Scenario**

From the data collected, the facilitators were able to couch a play bordering on the health issues in Ketti. The scenario built was as follows:

A man and his two wives are seen discussing when his son runs in to inform them that a snake has bitten his daughter when as she went to defecate at the back of the house. There is confusion as everybody runs out of the scene to help the girl. Meanwhile, they take her to the PHC and are told to pay a token fee for the hospital card while all other expenses would be taken care of by the hospital. The man refuses and takes his child to the village doctor who assures them that she would be fine after taking his concoction. Then an argument ensues amongst the people on which option that of the traditional medicine or the modern. Along the line, the situation of the PHC is discussed

### **Challenges**

1. Tradition: Women are not allowed to speak about community affairs to strangers especially the male folk. Thus, getting information from them to achieve a balanced report required obtaining permission from their husbands.
2. Language Barrier: None of the development workers could understand the native language (Gbagyi) of the people so a community member was co-opted to act as an interpreter/translator and this made the whole process cumbersome
3. Politics: The internal politics of the people (the tussle for kingship) also played a major role in delaying the whole process as the people did not want to pitch tent with either of them.

### **Achievements**

1. The project was able to bridge the hostility between the health workers and the community members by inaugurating and training a Ward Health Development Committee (WDC) members who pledge to encourage health workers by providing accommodation for them with the

community as the National Primary Health Development Agency sent two Midwives to aid in Maternal and Child Health.

2. During the course of the project, mosquito nets and some hospital equipment were donated to the centre.
3. The community members agreed to pool resources together to help the health centre grow in her medical services.

### **Conclusion**

From the above experiences, it should be noted that for TFD to succeed facilitators must encourage participation in the communication process. The facilitators of the Unandu experience were afraid to associate and interact freely with the community members due to their history of violence thereby hampering the effect of creating their 'reality' together with the facilitators and this is the stage where the conscious awakening in the people is formed. In the Ketti experience, the long gaps in the projects hindered the communication process as facilitators had to work with new faces and data which were either lost or obsolete.

### **Recommendation**

TFD should be structured as a two-semester practical course in the University curriculum. The first semester should be used for data collection process and performance while the second semester should be used as a follow-up of the first as against the practice today where two different projects are used for each semester.

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## Appendices



Fig. 1 Bad road leading to Unandu



Fig. 2 Play Performance in Unandu



Fig.3 WDC participants in Map in Ketti

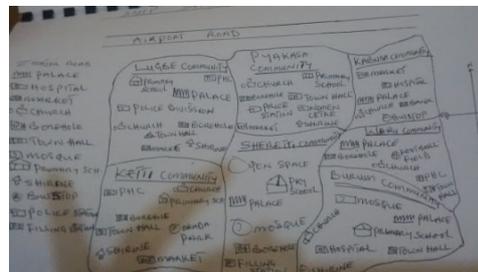


Fig. 4 A Map of the Communities in Kabusa



Fig 5 A Health Walk by Participants in Ketti

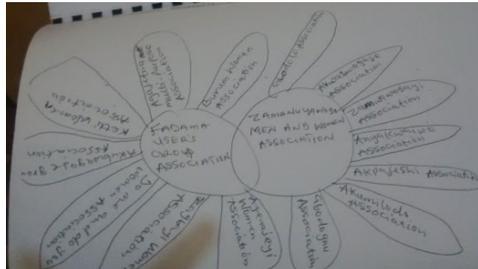


Fig 6: An Organisational Map of Kabusa