

**PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY/AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: KULGUL COMMUNITY TFD
EXPERIENCE**

Abel IDEBE

Department of English
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria
Email: idebeabel20@gsu.edu.ng
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6908-3703>

Abstract

Community/agricultural development has remained a key agenda in the development plans for both state and national governments. Beyond the national landscape, the United Nations (UN) through the sustainable development goals (SDGs) gives as its first three goals: the eradication of poverty; zero hunger; as well as good health and well-being. These goals justify the priority attention that must be given to community and agricultural development. While these goals are key in the actualization of agricultural development, what becomes an issue is to what extent practical steps that ensure sustainable agricultural development is achieved are taken, especially among rural communities that are most affected. This paper, therefore, examines the role of theatre for development (TfD) as a community-based practice for enhancing rural participation in sustainable agricultural development. It specifically uses the account of the TfD experience in Kulgul community of Billiri Local Government Area (LGA), Gombe State, as a point of departure for analysis and discussion. The study recommends greater commitment in local community empowerment through TfD to drive community action plans (CAPs) for sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Agriculture, CAPs, Kulgul community, Sustainable Development, TfD.

Introduction

Based on the vital need to provide food and related commodities, agricultural development remains at the centre of developmental agenda for local communities in Nigeria (Ufiobor 7; Nwajiuba 45; Oluwaseyi 2). Even beyond the national landscape, same can be said of continental and global agendas for development. This all-important need for agricultural development means that efforts must continuously be made to see to the growth and development of the agricultural sector. Unlike the momentous gains experienced in the developed countries of the world, Nigeria has been struggling to advance in the agricultural sector, especially in local communities. Several challenges have led to the unstable growth experienced in developing the agricultural sector in Nigeria, particularly in the local communities. The problem can be categorised into direct and indirect challenges. The direct challenges include those that directly affects farming activities such as: lack of modern technologies, lack of fertilizers, unserviceable machineries, food processing issues, education, dormant research institutes, technical and financial support issues, among others. The indirect or remote

challenges that are non-agricultural in nature but which hamper agricultural development include: poor infrastructures, lack of social amenities, insecurity, community conflicts, among others.

Amidst these challenges, agriculture remains the preoccupation of local and rural dwellers in Nigeria and thus the issue is on how to ensure that rural communities are able to surmount these challenges (Omoera "Community Radio" 256). It suffices to say that the gains of agricultural development should include visible rural community development. This is quite justifiable in the sense that the sites for agricultural production in Nigeria are mostly rural communities. However, the rural communities where we depend on providing agricultural produce have continued to grapple with challenges and setbacks such as insecurity, illiteracy, lack of social amenities like good healthcare system, quality basic education, water and good roads, etc. (Ighodalo, Jacob and Justine 650). There have been efforts made to establish different agricultural policies and programmes that to help drive rural community and agricultural development in Nigeria through various government programmes like the National Accelerated Food Programme (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and The Growth Enhancement Support (GES) Scheme.

These programmes which successive governments have established since independence are yet to achieve sustainable agricultural development. In other words, a form of development that ensures that the community for which the development is meant are able to own it, give their active participation and expect a future from it. Gumh further reveals that sustainable agricultural development ensures that community members "...remain consistent in their drive towards ensuring food production, without compromising the chances of the future generations to provide for themselves" (211). While pointing to a very key issue affecting sustainable agricultural and community development in Nigeria, Daneji claims that:

In many of the programmes, development planners assumed both the problem and solutions and forced them on the target beneficiaries whose programmes are often times at variance with the needs of the people. This often results in conflicts, wasting of scarce resources, time and energy and sad enough the affected people at the end of it all are worse off. (105-106)

The need to engender active community participation for sustainable agricultural development in communities will thus require communication approaches that propel community actions for sustainable change. Theatre for development (TfD) examined in this study, is aimed at analysing how the processes in TfD as a method of participatory development can engender active community participation for sustainable agricultural and community development. TfD in its conception and practice is intended for community development (Omoera "Theatre for Development" 45). Issues as affecting local community form the thrust of this form of theatre practice (Idebe 207). "TfD is a non-formal designed approach involving the arts/elements of theatre, with emphasis on active participation, critical consciousness and dialogue for addressing development issues" (Idebe and Alheri 83).

More than exhibiting the aesthetical value of theatre arts and forms, it employs performance that provokes collective community discussion for development. Asante and Yirenkyi remark that "...it is an approach of using theatre to enhance development in the real world" (595). Boh claims further that the distinguishing feature of theatre for development and other genres is the active participation of people in creating their own culture rather than depending on outsiders. It creates messages that reflect the reality of the people as viewed by them. This involves analysis of issues that lead to change of attitudes through self-examination, situation analysis by the people themselves and not persuasion or order from above or outsiders. Through theatre for development, people are enabled to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions and then plan, act and evaluate issues affecting them (22). The intention here is to get rural dwellers to operate within a communication pattern and frame that assures active involvement. It is expected that rural dwellers exploring the Tfd communication approach will be able to become more stimulated and motivated to dialogue the issues that has been brought forward through drama/theatre processes for deliberation and resolution.

As a community focused process, Tfd projects manifest in different forms but ensure that a clearly worked-out process is taken to engage the community. Ayegba states that in many ways and at several sites the practice manifests basic attributes. These include but not exclusive of research and data collection, data analysis and prioritization, story creation and improvisation, rehearsals, community performance, evaluation-post performance discussions sometimes leading to community action plans (CAP) and follow-ups (294). These stages mentioned above may vary from one Tfd project to the other depending on the peculiarity of the project, howbeit, the basic principles in terms of the process still remains similar for all Tfd experiences. Mohammed and Ihidero remark further that:

As a tool that can easily be adaptable to facilitate diverse community-based issues and needs Tfd lends itself as a 'thermostat' of change. As a thermostat, it is capable of initiating sustainable change while its methods can be changed themselves in the process of initiating development...the potentialities of Tfd have been tested in theatre-in-education, drama-in-education, voters' education and electioneering, reproductive health, communication agriculture and extension services, among other safe spaces. Diverse mixed methods have been used to facilitate the development of theatre. (98)

The ultimate goal is to see that springing from the Tfd experiences are community actions which have been democratically arrived at by community members and for which they will be determined to collectively address (Omoera "Theatre for Development" 48; Idebe and Boyi 378; Ikyagh 366; Asante 28). It is in this sense that Tfd become a veritable tool for advancing sustainable agricultural development. This study uses an account of the Tfd experience done in Kulgul community of Billiri Local Government Area, Gombe State to exemplify the role of Tfd in facilitating sustainable agricultural and community development. The project was facilitated by the 400 level students of English Department, Gombe State University, Gombe, and coordinated by

the course lecturer, Dr. Abel Idebe and his team. It was carried out from November 2021 to February 2022.

Entering Kulgul Community

To begin, selected students visited the community leaders with a letter of introduction on what their aim was. The community fully welcomed the idea and were ready to receive the students. Afterwards a follow-up visit was done together with the lead lecturer Dr. Abel Idebe where different logistics and preparations were discussed.



Departmental Students and Community Leaders in Kulgul

The students and coordinating lecturers arrived the community on the 29th of November, 2021. They were ushered to the Dakachi's (head) of the community palace by Ahmadu Matata who is the town crier. He was blowing a flute named 'Lanse' also known as 'Busa' in Hausa language announcing our arrival to the community. The community head in the person of Mr. Danladi Magaji Musa said the community members are very excited to have us around and that they are very ready to work with us. After the courtesy call, the students did a transect walk around the community to familiarize themselves with members and places around it. They were guided by Miss Hassana Nakuru, one of the women organisation leaders.

A Brief History of Kulgul Community

Based on our findings, the Kulgul community was founded in 19th century in the year 1881 by a warrior called Orin (Lau Tando), a Tangale by ethnicity. He descended from Kumana, Tanglan (Kufai) of Kulkulun Kilang. After he had settled there, he went back to Kumana and invited his friend (Fotena), the friend came along with his wife and settled in Kulgul. Orin and Fotena were all farmers and at the same time hunters. The major ethnicity in the community is Tangale of Tanglan, there are also other minor ethnic groups like Fulani and Wurkun. The major religion practiced there is Christianity but there are few Muslims and Traditionalists. The community is known for its farming occupation. By their claim, they can feed the whole Tangale land but lack the necessary support.

In terms of community development, the community built a dispensary in 1993, this dispensary was later taken over by the government and made a Primary Health Care Centre (PHCC). However, they lack the required facilities and manpower which is seriously affecting them as a community. Western education was brought through the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) to the community. This body built two classrooms and an office; the school was commissioned in 1948 which was then referred to as Kulgul Transfer School. Another classroom was built by the missionary in 1951. The government later took over the school after the Nigerian Civil War. In 2007 the community got a junior secondary school. Apart from the petty trades and small-scale businesses around, the community is mainly agrarian.

Community Findings

The students were divided into different groups, with each group assigned to visit different areas. The areas visited include: Tulwampe, Fabaure, Pobariki, Lakul-kal, Bare and Bassa. The students were assisted by some youth members of the community to carry out the research. The following are the main findings from the community: *Lack of water*: There was mass complain about insufficient and bad water supply. Despite the community members efforts to salvage the situation, they were discouraged by the incompetence of their political leaders. The lack of water as complained by a number of them is seriously affecting their community life as a whole. *Lack of Fertilizers*: The farmers complained about the high cost of fertilizers which restricts what they plant. They said that they are able to produce bumper harvest but they lack the necessary support. *Road accidents*: Another general complain was the frequent occurrence of accident due to reckless driving on the main road. Jauro John of Tulwampe commented on this situation, he said 'the road is as sharp as knife'. This was further proven by the testimonies of other community members who said gravels are sometimes removed from the casualties of the accidents.

Poor healthcare facilities: The community members also complained of poor and inadequate healthcare facilities such as insufficient beds, medication and most importantly the absence of health personnel. One of the respondents said there was one time that in a particular hospital, patients were attended by a cleaner who receives instructions on how to administer medication through phone call. The community members complained about how they are always referred to Kashere or Billiri for further medical attention over minor cases. Although, one of the hospitals was the efforts of the community members formerly known as a dispensary, it was not even made any better even after the government took over the welfare of the hospital. The community leader Mr. Danladi Magaji noted that the consistent issues emanating from healthy living has severely affected their productivity especially in their farming. *Lack of educational facilities and resource persons*: They complained about inadequate school teachers and instructional materials. One of the groups reported that a whole school had only three teachers while in another school, a single text book is used for three different classes, primary three, four and five.

Other issues that were reported include: negligence of the community members towards entrepreneurship, this was traced to lack of adequate awareness. Cases of

abuse of drug and local beer among farmers and some youth, were reported. Open defecation was also reported and this could be traced to the negligence towards building toilets. All of these issues formed for the community a comprehensive detailing of the issues that affect them and their productivity, especially in the area of their main preoccupation which is farming.

Community Rehearsals and Story Creation

Having gathered data on the issues affecting the community, the students alongside members of the community who assisted them decide to create a drama that will touch on the key issues that the community have identified. Secondary school students and those who came around (mainly youths) during rehearsals also picked interest in playing roles and giving their suggestions. The drama after different suggestions came up with the following scenes: The first scene presents a pregnant woman whose husband is a farmer and was arriving from his farmland looking frustrated and drunk at the same time. He was so drunk to the extent that he could not help her even when she was passing through labour, she was rather helped by her neighbours and other women who heard her wailing for help while. The second scene presents a hospital with inadequate facilities and a nurse who finds it difficult to take care of many patients at the same time; this is because she is the only one in the hospital. As she was trying to attend to the pregnant woman, some men brought in some accident victims who on their way from their farm had road accident and were seriously bleeding. The nurse was very confused and with no doctor around she quickly told them to go to the local government headquarters in Billiri or Kashere in Akko LGA.

The third scene presents some community members at the local beer parlour discussing how best they can supplement and better their farming activities. They were talking to themselves about the high cost of fertilizer, lack of buyers of their produce and the need to be security conscious. The fourth scene presents a mother and children, she wakes them up from sleep to go to school, and others go to fetch water while others go to farm. The children complained of how dirty the water is while those going to farm complained of how their planting is not so productive due to lack of fertilizer, those going to school complained of inadequate teaching facilities and other challenges they face at school. The fifth scene which is the last, presents a teacher teaching primary five, four, and three students at the same time, due to lack of enough teachers and inadequate teaching materials. In the course of the scenario building/rehearsals, the excitement of community members to play roles showed that the issues been talked about were those they relate with and that truly capture the issues as they affect them.

Community Performance and Post-Performance Discussions

Before the commencement of the performance which was titled ‘Yadkiwa Tam Kong’ meaning desire for change in Tangale language, some group of community dancers with some students in participation gave some cultural display. The masters of ceremonies (MC) in the person of Abiuda handled the microphone to make sure the programme is well organised. The performance took place in the open field within the primary school playground. It was well attended to by members and leaders of the

community, despite the fact that there was a sad incident of a teacher who died the previous day out of illness. Outside the traditional dance performance, the primary school pupils presented a song and some recitations. The next was the main performance which the participating community members and student facilitators have prepared.



Cultural Display during Community Performance

The audience watched with rapt attention and were quite responsive and reactive while the drama played out. At the end of the play, one of the community members who featured in the play asked the audience what could be the solutions to their problems in the community and different persons responded suggesting different ways to address the challenges of the community. The first person advised the community on how they can avoid drinking dirty water by boiling it and allowing it to get cold before drinking. The second person advised the community to engage in entrepreneurship in order to reduce the rate of idleness among the community members especially the youth. The third person advised the community people most especially the youths who are on social media platforms to take pictures of the challenges they have such as lack of drinkable water, lack of fertilizer, bad road condition, and so on, it might reach someone or bodies who can render help. He also noted that they can help the community employ the use of social media to sell their farm products.

One of the women leaders, Ms Hassana Nakuru, stood up to express her profound gratitude to the lecturer and students for the impactful visit to the community. She stated that ‘of course these are all our challenges but with your coming i believe that we are ready for change’. Mr. Allan who is the headmaster of the primary school also said ‘indeed there is need for better and improved school instructional materials, our children are not finding easy at all even though we are all managing to get the best’. He also talked about the community needing support in terms of selling their agricultural goods as well as the frequent accident that occurred due to rough driving on the road which needs to be worked on.

The lead lecturer, Dr. Abel Idebe stood up and addressed the community; he made known his gratitude to the Dakachi (head) of the community and his leadership for accepting the students' request to carry out their field work in the community. The lecturer commended all participants particularly those who have been making efforts towards community development. The lecturer equally expressed his profound gratitude to all those who worked with the students and contributed to the success of the performances. The Dakachi of Kulgul was the last speaker at the event. He expressed his joy towards the coming of students to their community and said this is something that has never happened before in the community and that it has seriously motivated them. Flowing from the community research and performance/post-performance discussions, the community members drew up a community action plans (CAPs).

Community Action Plans

The community action plans were as follows: the community should find ways to contribute to buy fertilizers in bulk and sell for subsidised rates for community farmers. Community members should venture into small/medium scale entrepreneurship that can complement their farming occupation. The community should form the habit of boiling the water or use safeguards to purify their drinkable water. The community should mobilise to get boreholes in the community. Community youths should place bumps and stones on the roads in order to reduce over speeding. Parents should not be discouraged by the negligence of the government towards their educational development. They should tirelessly sponsor the education of their children no matter the cost. The youths of the community should utilise the social media platform to promote the agricultural produce of their local community as well as amplify their challenges, as it may attract the attention of relevant bodies or agencies willing to render help.

Follow-Up

After about three months, the lecturer and some students revisited the community to appraise how far they are able to address some of the issues raised from the initial programme done in the community. Although this time around, the head of the community was not on seat, we met with some of the community elders and youth who were very pleased to welcome us. They once again expressed how very pleased they were to see how committed we are to the course of advancing their community. They showed us some development which they have been able to achieve within two months. The first was the creating of speed breaks along the main road. They also said after the visit, the community has decided to pull resources monthly to target the needs of agriculture especially in the area of purchasing fertilizers, as well as addressing issues on health, water and education. They told us that they have started regular provision of water purifier for the water which the children are drinking in the school.

They also mentioned that through the awareness created by social media they are currently working with one of the undergraduate students who participated in the project to get help from a non-governmental organisation who are into agricultural

empowerment for youth and women living in rural communities. There were also plans from the community to have a borehole each in two different locations of the community. From the above recounting of Kulgul TfD experience one will expressly note the conjugality that theatre possesses with community development. Abah rightly states that: there is a mutual connection of benefits between theatre and development. Theatre tells development stories. Beyond telling stories, theatre interrogates development. In its agenda of changing perspectives, it also sets agenda for development. And it is a vehicle through which communities perform their own issues and experiences, which are developmental in nature (25). More than exploring drama and theatre to tell and perform the stories, TfD leaves the community with an experience. One that ignites and pushes their resolve to toe paths of social transformation and development that fundamentally springs from within.

Conclusion

The study examined the deployment of TfD in agricultural development/community development, using Kulgul in Billiri LGA of Gombe State, as a reference point. It uses the case study to give an understanding on the vital role of TfD in propelling and advancing comprehensive approach to empowering local communities to secure their occupational futures and means of livelihood. More than examining the issues from just the narrow view of targeting how their agricultural needs can be met alone, it broadly looks at other socio-economic and cultural factors which equally have consequences on their agricultural productivity. This holistic method of addressing the issues of rural community agricultural development provides some fresh perspectives which TfD as a tool for researching communities offers. The Kulgul community having had the opportunity to address other related key social issues such as health, water, entrepreneurship, youth, transport, security, education and leadership that directly or indirectly affect their agrarian culture/development, have enabled them actualise pathways to sustainable community social change. It has also triggered collaborations and interventions, all of which are very critical for sustainable agricultural/community development.

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