

## **GAPS IN COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH; A STUDY OF SELECTED UNIZIK TFD PROJECTS**

**Chukwudi Michael Okoye, PhD**

Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state, Nigeria

Email: mc.okoye@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

*Suffice it to say that Theatre for Development projects has continued to contribute to ongoing discourses on the socio-economic fabric of human vis a vis communal existence. Indeed, as an ideological construct within the performing arts, Tfd possesses qualitative potentials through diverse methodological approaches to engage members of society directly in the development agenda. This, amongst others provides a spectrum for various stakeholders to engage in an intellectual as well as practical "reversal of roles" which could propel a process of conscientization and mobilization of needed action in addressing shared realities. The part, thus, played by development agents becomes imperative in bridging certain gaps before, during and after Applied theatre projects as well as in providing balanced thematic material so as stimulate development-driven responses from the host communities. The study adopts the qualitative research method: two Tfd projects provide as primary sources of data. The researchers also relied on textbooks, journals and other library sources. The study also involves participant observation of the subjects of research for objective interpretation and analysis. The study evaluates two Tfd projects carried out by 300 level students of the Department of Theatre and Film studies; namely: "Nke onye metara Oburu" and "Ugwo Oru". The study finds that the indispensability of adequate community-based research to the success of Tfd workshops in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized and as such should form a crucial component to the theory and practice of Tfd in Nigeria and beyond.*

### **Introduction**

The need to better the living standards of its citizens, it is safe to say, is a major preoccupation of every society. Communities across Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world appear to grapple with seemingly typical issues ranging from poor governance and governing policies, to unpredictable global trends and changes in weather, health and the economy. Scholars have overtime attempted to evaluate these changes with a view to conscientize and motivate members of community to take needed actions in addressing these issues as it concerns them. Augusto Boal's *Theatre for the Oppressed*, for instance draws its trajectory from the revolutionary stance of the masses against the oppressive system orchestrated by the Elite or Bourgeois in society. This concept establishes members of the audience as co-participants in the theatrical experience where social interactions are engendered to stimulate participatory activities geared towards addressing given issues affecting the community or group. Boal, cited by John Sullivan *et al*, describes the notion of the Theatre for the Oppressed as "a dramaturgical system of games and special techniques that aims at developing in oppressed citizens, the language of Theatre , which is essential in human language "(167). Boal's position expresses the need for the mobilization of communal action

and target groups in discussing and confronting the issues that affect them. Obadiwegwu further observes that:

This Boalian concept underscores the ethics and aesthetics of Community Theatre for integrated human development. It aims at stimulating a process of community awareness, problem solving and action-taking, bringing the people together, building communal cohesion, raising important issues as they affect the people, creating forums for discussion s of those enabling problems and stimulating collective action. (5)

The instrumentality of the Theatre, thus allows for a creative process that is participatory so as to engender communal input in the change effort. This effort culminates in a workshop or project, laced with physical games, Character creation and image-making exercises, improvisation and even scene construction. Theatre scholars also seem to agree that for Community-driven Theatre projects to have the needed impact, there should be a proper application and engagement of community based methodology in engendering investigative and collaborative intervention where the facilitators work in *tandem* with the community to understand given challenges, proffer solutions and also to democratize this participatory process so as to adequately empower members of the community.

### **Community Based Research and adaptation of Social learning in TFD Projects**

The Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) advocates the critical importance of proper and wide spread knowledge acquisition in the development process. Knowledge is viewed as an instrument of power and control and this strengthens the need for a leveraging and channeling of this factor in order to decentralize the power dynamic to foster inclusiveness and a sense of justice. Sullivan *et al* informs that:

as a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strength that each brings, Community-based participatory Research widens the angle of regards for public health activities, acknowledging that community networks and leaders, local knowledge of adverse social and economic consequences of environmental degradations and community beliefs and attitudes are all vital factors that directly impact the efficacy of research and community outreach . CBPR carries with it a necessary mandate to restructure the undemocratic expert-client relationship because hypothesis. Analysis and interpretation directly affect the social power dynamic. (173)

Research concepts such as the CBPR, also provide for a broader approach to the appreciation and integration of social learning systems as well as the structural inclusion of communal practices in achieving set goals. A social learning system thus, is typified by the expression of shared experiences in order to gain higher knowledge about a social phenomenon and the mobilization of concerted effort while observing historical, cultural and social factors that can increase competence and aid the learning process Wenger, Etienne. avers that:

In a social system, competence is historically and socially defined, How to understand the position of the earth for instance is something that scientific communities have established overtime. Knowing therefore is a matter of displaying competencies defined in social communities. The picture is more complex and dynamic than that however, our experiences of life and the Social standards of competence of our communities, are not necessarily, or even usually congruent. We each experience knowing in our own ways. Socially defined, competence is always in interplay with our experiences. It is this interplay that learning takes place. (226)

Scholars like Albert Bandura, and Etienne Wenger among others, propose that in most communities, the individual experiences of persons within these communities, present as a major factor in determining progress levels in the acquisition of knowledge about certain phenomena as well as the interrelationship between the individual and the social, cultural and economic factors prevalent in that community. The role of the community to development, thus, appear crucial such that they provide the enabling structures that should engender social activities needed for the change process to thrive; Wenger affirms this as a “Community of Practice” concept where learning becomes a process of active social engagement which enables new participants to understand the underlining meanings behind the actions of more experienced members of society and thus, gain needed experience themselves. Full participation is achieved by learning crucial skills, beliefs and socio-cultural practices prevalent within the given society. Cobb cited by Korthagen observes that “learning” is both a process of self-organisation and a process of enculturation that occurs while participating in cultural practices and frequently interacting with others “(103). Wenger in the same vein states that:

Being alive as human beings means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical survival to seeking the loftiest pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn. (45)

The concept holds that by the observance of the culture of practice within a community, adequate knowledge is acquired and participation is greatly enhanced; thereby the role of the observer/facilitator becomes fully functional. Thus, engagement in activity through practice immerses the facilitator deeper into the development process, ensures that there is a level of fidelity in tackling themes raised and promotes a requisite understanding and knowledge of social learning systems within the community Wenger submits that learning within the construct of community engagement:

is an interplay between social competence and personal experience. It is a dynamic, two way relationship between people and the social learning systems in which they participate. It combines personal transformation with the evolution of social structures. (227)

The role of the community appear crucial to the overall notion of development in that they provide the enabling structures that should engender social activities needed for transformative agendas to thrive. The engagement of the host community within

developmental projects allows for a proper evaluation of given perspective and as such utilize same as instructive mechanisms in underscoring the relationship between the individual and society as well as its potential in promoting participatory socio-cultural activities.

It therefore behooves of facilitators and development agents to carry out proper research in the execution of Tfd projects. Communication channels should be established and strengthened through the observation of the indigenous and traditional systems that are inherent within the host communities. This further implies that the unifying structures of norms, practices and language should be activated in evaluating communal issues. Mbachaga agrees when he says that:

Participatory performance on the one hand places priority on working with the people and using their own modes of communication to enable small communities look at their own problems with the aim of arousing and stimulating target groups to take desired steps to improve their well being. (87)

### **The Unizik Projects**

The 300 level students (2016/2017) of the Department of Theatre and Films studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, carried out two Tfd Projects in partial fulfillment of the course: Community Theatre for Department TFS 341. The students were grouped into two teams named groups 'A' and 'B'. Leaders were chosen for each group and these leaders were asked to select randomly the names of prospective communities where each group will carry out its project. The names of six locations were written on small pieces of paper by the lecturer, folded up and placed before the group. Two names emerged as follows:

Group A: *Amudo* Village, Amaenyi Awka

Group B: Awka South Local Govt. Amawbia Awka.

The student/facilitators made preliminary visits to these communities. They adopted various methods of information gathering, such as interviews, 'Flooding' and so on. They also held several production meetings within and outside their host communities. These contact periods lasted for 8 weeks. A story was eventually developed for each group; casting and rehearsals were carried out and the eventual productions held on Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> and Friday the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017. Group A produced a play titled "*Nke onye metara Oburu*" and Group B produced a play titled "*Ugwo Oru*".

#### *Story Development of Nke onye metara Oburu*

The students/facilitators in Group A created a story which seemed to throw some light on the various issues affecting people of Amudo Village, Awka. The story explored a number of themes and was enacted in the following sequence and scenes;

Scene 1. We see a man who comes out early in the morning to the village square and places some 'fetish' items along the foot path. He then makes some incantations and invokes curses on some members of the community. As he continues his activities, he is caught by some members of the community and chased off stage.

Scene 2. We observe a group of young men who visit their gang leader to discuss more drastic ways of holding the community to ransom. While smoking wraps of ‘cannabis’, each one vows to sell off parts of the communal land so that they can all travel to Malaysia like their mates in other villages. They also lament the high handedness and selfishness of the elders in the land as well as the rising incidences of Lesbianism and Homosexuality and resolve to disrupt the peace in the village until these vices are curbed.

Scene 3. In this scene, we observe a man who comes back home from his farm only to discover his brother sleeping with his wife. He lets out a cry to attract the neighbours and laments how his good-for-nothing brother, who would never do an honest job in his life, had the effrontery to sleep with his wife. The culprit runs away as neighbours intervene to prevent the man from beating up the apparently defiant wife.

Scene 4. In this scene, some well-meaning elders gather at the home of the ‘Otochalu Amudo’ to discuss the spate of Land grabbing incidents among other vices playing the community. As they deliberate, the scene is overrun with angry youths who demand that the Elders look into the issues plaguing the land. They accuse the elders of greed and vow to make life unbearable for the members of the community.

Scene 5. On their way to the market, three middle aged women come across two maidens in a compromising state along the foot path. The women raise alarm and beat up the girls accusing them of lesbianism.

Scene 6. We observe a young man who comes home to his mother crying. His mother discovers that he has just been raped by a fellow boy as evidenced by blood stains on the rear end of his boxer shorts. She laments, attracting other women to the scene.

Scene 7. In this last scene, the community gathers at the palace of the *Igwe* to register their complaints on the various horrible trends plaguing the community. As each group present their case, a small band of youths drag in a battered man who happens to be the “fetish” man, we saw in the first scene. Eventually, the *Igwe* calms the situation and lays down new rules to the admiration of all present. The scene ends with a cleansing ritual performed by the priestess of the communal deity on behalf of the people of the land.

### **Story Development of *Ugwo Oru***

The Group B students developed a story from their interactions with the officials at the Awka South Local Govt. Area Office. The story was woven around themes extracted from the interviews and discussions held with key officers of the Local Government. The production was enacted in the following scenes;

Scene 1. The scene opens with the activities of the Local government office where we observe two secretaries to the office of the Chairman, ‘Uloma’ and ‘Nkechinyere’ coming late to work. The scene reveals them as habitual late comers who constantly berate their more dutiful colleague, ‘Ada’ for being too “overzealous” for civil service. Uloma and Nkechinyere not only display a sense of incompetence at work but seize every opportunity to engage in sharp practices. The scene reveals episodes of gossip

peddling, make-up rubbing and other less than professional activities from the two secretaries. At an instance where their boss steps out for a meeting, Uloma and Nkechinyere quickly abandon their posts to keep nail-fixing and salon appointments. Even when secretary 'Ada' calls to inform that their boss had come back, they further insult her for not telling them early enough. Another dimension of this scene, exposes a total disregard for the 'Due process' rule in public offices. For instance, when a corrupt community leader, Mr. Josiah comes in to see the chairman, Uloma and Nkechinyere allow him to 'jump the queue' even before other people who were there before him. Their actions are further understood when the corrupt man gives them some cash before leaving.

Scene 2. In this scene, the youths in the community storm the residence of the corrupt community leader that was introduced in the first scene. They are accosted by his wife who insults them for having the effrontery to come to their house uninvited. Infuriated, the youths seize her two daughters and make away with them to the chagrin of their mother.

Scene 3. Well meaning Elders gather to discuss the many issues plaguing the community. Central to the discussion, is the activities of Mr. Josiah, who has been using the money meant for the community to enrich himself. They lament on how government projects in the area such as roads, water and electrification have been shabbily done by Josiah, plunging the community to a greater state of chaos. As they deliberate, Josiah's wife runs in to plead for the safe return of her daughters that have been kidnapped by the youths. The youths themselves storm the scene to demand the incarceration of Josiah so that the right things would be done in the land. The Elders eventually calm the situation and retrieve the kidnapped girls with a promise to look into the issue.

Scene 4. In this final scene we return to the Local Government office where the State Government has decided to reward hard working local government staff and also punish erring officers in the system. Secretaries Uloma and Nkechinyere, expectedly are served suspension letters while Ada is given a double promotion letter and cash reward for her good conduct. The scene hits its climax when Elders along with other community members drag in a half-beaten Josiah into the scene. The Chairman of the local government scolds him for diverting public funds before handing him over to the police. He however advises the members of community against the menace of Jungle justice and enjoins everyone to join hands in making the state a better place.

### **Community-based indices explored in *Nke Onyemetara Oburu* and *Ugwo Oru***

The practice of TfD in Africa appear to be quite suitable in addressing community-related issues and as such many scholars have continued to insist that for Community Theatre projects to succeed, the people for whom the project is designed must play important roles in the process. Iorapuu maintains that:

Considering all these inputs, TfD is hereby defined as a theatre approach that seeks to make possible development education and action from the perspective of the 'people' (the dominated and the brutalized majority in this context) through the use of familiar cultural and democratic forms. Development education and action here refer

to an ideological process from within that represents the aspirations of the people. It is not imposed from outside but is could be facilitated or negotiated subject to the will of the people (107).

It then follows that development agents should put into consideration, the host community; their way of life, their philosophies; their struggles and values. These observations provide the thematic materials with which the development agents work with in achieving a holistic approach to Tfd projects. The 300 level students of the Department of Theatre and Film studies, Awka developed certain themes and sub themes in the pre-production stages of their projects. The Group A students developed a story that projected a number of subject matters.

The eventual production, “*Nke Onye metara Oburu*” highlighted the issues of Fetish practices, Adultery, Lesbianism, Homosexuality and Juvenile delinquency. However, observations indicate that some of the issues raised would have benefitted from a broader depth in research. Scholars propose that Theatre for Development projects should empower the people rather weaken them. Facilitators should attempt to balance certain concepts rather than take a purely academic view to community research. Okam avers that; “(Tfd) seeks to strengthen and empower people outside of the confines of the academia so that they can use the different approaches to discuss their concerns and generate their themes. The process starts from the period of meeting with the people, to research, action and evaluation”.(134) The development agents must thus engage communication methods designed to engender qualitative participation from the host community thereby expanding the spectrum for needed action to be taken on key issues affecting them. Indeed as Okwori, cited by Okam observes, “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”. (135)

The Group B production, *Ugwo Oru* was set in a more formal locale; that is the Awka South local government office. The production highlighted issues of poor attitude to work, absenteeism, sharp practices and truancy. Thus, the themes appeared woven closely together in an attempt to evaluate the predominant practices in civil service establishments in relation with the community. The character development of the two ‘corrupt’ secretaries Uloma and Nkechinyere who come late to work and abandon their stations at the slightest instance appeared to resonate with the audience.

#### PLATE 1



Secretary Uloma signs her name against the time 7;45am whe she actually comes to work by 10;30.



Secretary Nkechinyere berates the diligent Ada for always coming to work early thereby making her look bad

The twin phenomenon of “tips for favour” and poor public relations are also identified as key components of alleged sharp practices in the local government systems in Nigeria. The Group B students highlighted this trend by including scenes of the abuse of the observation of due process where appointments are not kept on “first come, first serve” basis. The audience are introduced to issues from the opening of the play.

#### PLATE 2



Secretary Nkechinyere allows a visitor to jump the queue to the dismay of another guest with an earlier appointment.



Secretary Nkechinyere receives ‘Tips’ for allowing local politicians to see the LGA Chairman before others.

There is however an attempt by the group B production to balance the narrative. The students injected “theme songs” through the orchestra as scene-changing mechanism and also to continually remind members of audience of the need for shared responsibility in the actualization of an ideal society. One of these songs read thus,

*If our land becomes good  
We are all to gain  
If our land become bad  
We are all to loose  
Let us all join hands  
And make our Community great.*

The production also reiterates that the government of the day can be responsive in rewarding good behavior within its ranks as well as punish bad eggs so as to maintain the confidence of the masses which is crucial to peaceful co-existence and development.



PLATE 3



Secretary Ada receives commendation and promotion letters from the Governor who is represented by the LGA Chairman



The dishonest politician is humiliated before the community.



Secretary Nkechinyere receives her suspension letter.



Secretary Uloma receives her query.

Theatre for Development projects should be geared towards bringing social change to the community concerned. The concept and practice of Tfd provides a drama-based medium that seeks to utilize the indigenous communication and cultural forms of the people to drive development-driven information and education. This invariably ensures that communities especially at the grassroots level are adequately empowered and motivated to confront issues affecting them. The development of scenes and well as the thematic preoccupation of the workshop thus provides a critical platform for positive or negative reviews and response. In a post-production interview of “*Onyemetara Oburu*”, a chief of the Amudo village, Ogbuefi Peter Adunchezor reveals:

Chief Adunchezor: we are glad that the Unizik students came here and we did our best to assist them. Yes, there are issues of Land grabbing here and there and we are doing our best to address these matters. Like I told some of your students, some of these matters are already in court. For the Homosexuality thing, I really find that worrisome, Amudo is not known for such and I really don't think it can be considered a problem for our people. Yes, fetish practices are carried out everywhere, no one can deny that. It even depends on what you mean by fetish but anyway the last bit of the drama may not be realistic here. We are a very deeply religious people, almost every house you see around here are catholic families, so I doubt that

we would as a community, bring in a chief priest or priestess to solve our problems for us; very doubtful.

In slight contrast, the Public Relations Officer of the Awka South Local Government, Hon. Austin Nwafor, representing the Chairman speaks of the group B production as follows:

Hon. A. Nwafor: The truth is that what we have witnessed here today gladdens our heart. We interacted with the students during their preliminary visits and rehearsals. Indeed, we need to applaud them. They interviewed me thoroughly to ascertain the issues we encounter here in the Local Government. We talked about corruption in this system and other issues such as Absenteeism and Truancy. From the interactions, I found out that they were also taught very well. On behalf of the Awka South L.G.A and the Chairman, when I am representing, I want to say that we have learnt tremendously from this project. Every staff here has learnt from this project. The state government is aware of some of the issues raised here today and we would continue to collaborate with your department until the right things are done.

#### PLATE 4



Hon. Austin Nwafor representing the Awka South LGA Chairman commenting after the production



Cross section of lecturers and students of the department of Theatre and film studies, NAU during the production.

#### Conclusion

Theatre for Development projects indeed should engage methods and approaches that are people-centered and development-driven such that the process provides a learning experience that is balanced and interrelated from the perspective of the development agents and the host communities. The engagement of scenario development strategies that are horizontal and culture friendly decentralizes the development process and empowers the communities to assume more control in addressing their needs. Chambers cited by Onogu Williams observes that:

Knowledgeable rural people are disregarded, despised and demoralized by urban commercial and professional values, interests and power. For them to be better able to participate control and benefit requires reversals among these; one first step is for outsider-

professionals, the bearers of modern scientific knowledge, to step down off their pedestals and sit down, listen and learn. (70)

Facilitators should however endeavour not to sacrifice content at the altar of theatrical entertainment. There should be an attempt at in-depth research into the subject of the project so as to engender outcomes that would add value to the community. Okam insists that “TfD transcends the traditional domains of a mere dramatic act for entertainment functioning analytically as a catalyst for aiding the people to realize their economic, social, political and religious roles in the society. The fact is that TfD is not just a performance in the tradition of art for art’s sake but a cultural tool for research and action” (214).

Development agents and facilitators should thus, bring these factors to bear in order to propel cohesive communal action in addressing issues affecting them.

### **Work Cited**

- Haneda, Mari. “Classrooms as Communities of Practice: A Re-evaluation”. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 Ohio: www.jstor.org Accessed 02-09-2018: 807-817.
- Iorapuu, Tor. “When TfD is not TfD: Assessing Theatre for Development Evidence in Nigeria”. *MUKABALA, Journal of Performing Arts and culture*. Vol. 1 No. 1 Zaria: Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University. 2008: 104-122.
- Korthagen, Fred A. J. “Situated learning and the pedagogy of teacher education: Towards an integrative view of teacher behavior and teacher learning” *Teaching and Teacher Education Journal*, Vol. 26. Amsterdam: Elsevier ltd. 2009: 98-106.
- Mbachaga, D. J. “Drama and safer Sex Education among Secondary School Teenagers in Benue State”, *Nigeria Theatre Journal*, Vol. 10, No.1, Jos: SONTA. 2010: 83-95.
- Obadiogwu, C. “Educational Theatre and Qualitative Inquiry: The Unizik Experience.” *AMA Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4, 2009: 27-46.
- Okam, Chinyere .L. “Methodological Conversations: Extending the frontiers of Development through TfD in the ABU Theatre practice”. *MUKABALA, Journal of Performing Arts and Culture*. Vol. 1 No.1. Zaria: Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University. 2008: 133-146.
- Onugu, Williams.S. “Folk media and Rural development in Nigeria: Implication for development theatre”. *Nigerian theatre Journal*, Vol. 10 No. 1 Jos: SONTA 2010: 65 – 72.
- Sullivan, John., Petronella, Sharon, Brooks, Edward and Murillo, Maria. “Theatre of the Oppressed and Environmental Justice in Communities: A transformational Therapy for the Body politic” *Journal of Health Psychology*. Vol. 13, No2. Texas: SAGE Publications, 2008: 166-179.
- Wenger, Etienne. “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems”. *Organisation Articles*, Vol. 7. No. 2, London: SAGE Publication, 2000: 225-246.