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METHODOLOGICAL CONVERSATIONS: EXTENDING THE FRONTIERS OF DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TFD IN THE AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY THEATRE PRACTICE

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Introduction

The Theatre for Development idea is essentially aimed at reinstating the function of the theatre as a creative tool for self-expression and articulation and as an empowering process through which people could develop a critical awareness of the environment. Accordingly, the guiding principle of TfD and what sets it apart from conventional western oriented theatre is its ability to liberate voices and engender people‟s participation thus propelling them to act upon their reality. It is this capacity to engender people to action that makes TfD a veritable development tool. Arguably, TfD as a development tool enables participatory communication which is at the heart of development as affirmed by Victor Hugo R. Banda‟s observation that theatre is a "conversation shared with society something that transforms them" (2006).

However, Banda tilts his impression of theatre towards a democratic one in which every stakeholder achieves communication through participation and dialogue thus exercising their ingenuity for societal transformation. The idea of democratic theatre implies the notion of participation of people in the process of analyzing their condition and acting upon it. As a tool for communicating development, TfD uses the language and cultural forms of the people to stimulate dialogue and engage them in a process that is not only empowering but also strengthening. Thus, TfD helps participants to engage in an exercise that they can identify with because the process is accessible and available to them.

What lay behind this experience is TfD‟s capacity to engender communication and participation which lies in the dynamism of its process-a process that progressively journeys through familiarization, data collection and analysis, playmaking and performance, post-performance discussion down to action planning, monitoring and evaluation. Learning and empowerment happen in TfD by virtue of the educative properties that participants‟ experience. While other theatrical forms emphasize the end-product, TfD emphasizes the process. This is achieved through participation in the process of TfD-a process which unfolds over a time and the purpose of which is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in development initiatives (Oakley et al. 1991: 8).

Locating the potential of TfD in the process indicates an exploration of its methodology. TfD employs a methodological paradigm that utilizes a repertoire of participatory processes or tools. By bringing together a cocktail of tools, TfD harnesses the strengths and potentials of those methods to maximum effect. This process or practice of combining methods is what has been aptly characterized by Abah (2003) as "methodological conversation".

Methodological Conversations

In describing the TfD methodological culture as a conversation, Abah underscores the imperative of a synthesis of existing approaches and methodologies in the realization of a sustainable communication and participation in development. Abah (2003) describes the details of methodological conversation as a breakdown of canonical stance among research tools; the subversion of the status quo of disciplinary research methodologies within the confines of academic walls. According to Abah, methodological conversation produces a synergy of research tools and the shedding of vestiges of the rigidity of conventional research approaches. He underpins the theory philosophically as mix-cropping, that is, a conversation of the crops on the farms. This philosophy of agriculture can be seen as TfD‟s selftranscendence to other disciplinary approaches, a situation in which the intellectual, the business man, the farmer and, the ordinary folk, all come together with different orientations to research and take action towards the realization of a common goal. It 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 (Abah, 2007). The explication of the efficacy of methodological conversation, an exercise derived from experience, can be found in the development communication campaign carried out in Lukuru community.

TfD as Methodological Conversation: the Development Communication Campaign

Going back to the subject of TfD, the methodology is characterized by the various ways it makes itself amenable to other methods. This condition characterizes the suitability of TfD for use by anyone involved with the communication of development. In TfD practice, thgre is no specific mechanism for involving people in any exercise, yet it seeks to choose tools compatible with the people‟s control and participation. These tools are vast and participatory and, therefore, hold the potentials of reversal when they seem not to be the producing the effective results required. It becomes even more efficient since the tools link people to approaches that are popular to them, thus stimulating their tools are participation in

all the stages of development activity. Most of these tools are found in the artistic and cultural forms of the people‟s expressions which make their participation possible in development efforts (Okwori, 2005:5). These are songs, storytelling, innuendos, folklores, riddles among other forms of art which empowers them to take action for change, thus transforming their situations (Okam, 2008: 150). The effectiveness of this is summed up in the statement by Okwori (2005:5) that "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".

Other sets of tools are those favoured by the emergent development communication paradigm like the Participatory Learning and Action, Rapid Rural Appraisal, Participatory Learning Methods among others which also connects to the cultural forms of the people (Kumar, 2002).

The feature that distinguishes these forms from the conventional methods is the tradition of participation, that is, the involvement of the majority of the people in a particular development process. TfD, even though it favours the control of development process by the majority is also amenable to using conventional approaches like interviews, as the case may be, especially, at the preliminary stages. Participation in a TfD process thus cuts across the stages of participatory or action research, participatory analysis, community action plan and then follow-up and evaluation stages.

The foregoing captures the transcendental effort TfD applies for transforming the principles of participation into practice, thus the argument of the central methodological innovation that encourages all classes of people to use any tool or combine tools as appropriate for their endeavour. The point of distinction about the TfD as a methodological conversation manifests through the synergies that enters with other development communication methods and conventional approaches. It thus, represents a competent tool for communicating development needs.

The Lukuru Campaign

Lukuru is one of the Gbagyi satellite villages situated near Dutse, 20 kilometer-drive from Kaduna city in Kaduna State of Nigeria. The community is headed by a village chief known as the Sarki. Social institutions like the church, the mosque and schools are found there. The schools are a government day primary school which is still in use only on the days convenient for the teachers to be in school and a twelve-hut set of class rooms (built in line with the indigenous Hausa architecture) made with burnt bricks and zinc roof, a toilet facility, a borehole and a potentially beautiful floral garden around the class rooms. This particular school is a boarding secondary school. There is a 3-hut set of classrooms for the nursery section.

These two schools were built in 2002 and 2004 respectively by the Mothers Welfare Group (MWG, an NGO with headquarters in Kaduna which visited the area, and on the request of the community members, when given the chance, sought support from the French Embassy to build a school for the village as part of the fulfillment of their (MWGs) development agenda. A year after the schools came into being, the secondary school section was abandoned because the villagers wanted a technical school, where vocational and technical subjects will be taught to interested students who also will have time to visit the farms since the people are purely agrarian. Instead of the technical school which the community wanted, MWG provided a boarding secondary school, to help check the students yvho are said to be truants but who, nevertheless are interested in the certificates. What ensued was a conflict between the two stakeholders, who have not still found a common ground of reconciling their differences as at the time of our visit. The Lukuru community is also endowed with some deposits of solid minerals. This, the act has attracted miners to the town, the people still live in misery as evident by the look of things within the community.

The Development Communication Campaign

This was the context in Lukuru as at the time the Master of Arts students (of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria) embarked on fieldwork exercise from June 30 to July 3, 2006. The team learnt of the standoff between the community and MWG during the preliminary visit done to introduce the fieldwork exercise and secure the community‟s approval of the exercise. In order to use the school facility for the fieldwork, it was necessary to seek the permission and collaboration of MWG. The Director of the NGO requested the team to use its TfD strategy to mediate the standoff, a request which was turned down since it was not part of the team‟s agenda. (Regrettably this was a terribly missed opportunity to demonstrate the efficacy of TfD). The team‟s agenda was to demonstrate its capacity to use or apply PLA tools in the context of community research and action as a practical project requirement. The fieldwork period was therefore spent using various PLA tools to generate information and to undertake a Community Action Plan.

During the fieldwork, PLA tools: Transect, and Community or Social Map are some of the tools used at the research stage. A school teacher from the community volunteered to draw the community map after an explanation of PLA tools to the people. When he thought that he had completed the drawing with input from some members, he sat back. Thereafter, a lot of argument was generated because the others felt he had failed to capture some features of the community. Some members therefore, came forward to include the missing features. At a point, the women observed that their out-of-use grinding machines was not represented. They expressed dissatisfaction, and the problem was quickly rectified. The completion of the map was certified when all the community members present, both indigenes and settlers, all agreed that the map was a fair representation of their village.

The next tool that was used is the well-being ranking. This helped in the assessment of the social structures of the community as reflected on the community map. Through this tool, the team was able to identify households which the members considered as important and influential. The findings are: the Sarki was rated the most important in the community because he is the father of the community. Both indigenes and settlers pay allegiance to him. Other households were rated according to influence and wealth. The least household was premised on the fact that the head of that household is a very lazy and wicked man. The community members accused Mallam Isa (head of the household) of not contributing anything to the community. They alleged that he does not participate in community services and meetings.

Trend Analysis, Focus Group Discussion in combination with drama, observations, and semi-formal interviews were used to generate information on the realities of the community. The data generated was woven into a drama and performed before the community members.

Group One (Ayaba)

Scene One

A crying pregnant woman is taken to the community clinic by her mother. The mother explains that her child is in labour. However, the local health care man tells the mother to quickly take her daughter to the city where she would get proper medical attention. Both women begin to cry. The pregnant woman complains of her inability to walk any further. While the mother tries to help her to walk, she falls down and dies.

Scene Two

This scene opens in a classroom. While serious teaching is going on by the teacher, a mother comes into the classroom and demands for her children. The teacher explains to her mat it is not yet closing time. The woman insists on going with her children. She says that the children are hers and she need them on the farm immediately. While the teacher is pleading

and explaining, she drags four of her children out of the classroom. But one of them refuses to go with her. She threatens him and leaves with the other three. The school teacher praises the boy for not leaving with his mother and further educates him about the importance of education in the life of everyone.

Scene Three

The woman takes the children to her husband and tells him that the children are ready for the farm. He in turn tells her that unfortunately, the owner of the farm land he intends to use for farming has given the land to somebody else. Thus, he tells the mother to return the children to school. She complains and later returns the children.

Scene Four

Three miners are seen sharing some money among themselves. One of them promises to give the other two the rest of the money on a later date. The two agrees and leave. On their way they see a girl standing on the road side. One tells the other that he likes the girl. The other tells him to ignore her that she is only a gold digger. After some more argument they approach the girl. She is given some money but she demands for more. After she collects more money, she promises to meet the men later.

Scene Five

The men go back to see the girl as promised. One of them tells her that she should follow them to a hotel room but she refuses, saying that she has a very bad head ache. She then leaves them standing. The two men start to quarrel. The cautious one tells the other one that they should have sent the money they have wasted on the girl to their sick mother and hungry wives at home.

Group Two (Lemu)

Scene One

A little boy comes home from the farm with an injury on one of his legs. His mother quickly takes him to the local chemist for treatment. The pharmacist advises that the boy should eat before any drug is administered. The mother takes the boy back home and there is no Tuwo (food) left in the house. She complains that the grinding machine available to the community is not functional. She had earlier intended sending her son to Gwagwada, a neighboring village for grinding, unfortunately the same boy is now hurt. She is therefore not able to prepare any meal for her family.

The boy is later given a cup of leftover pap, and the mother runs back to the chemist store with the boy. Unfortunately, the pharmacist says the boys" cause is beyond him, thus, he advises the mother to take the boy to a clinic in Pakka, some 50 kilometers away. Meanwhile, the boy"s father is informed about the situation on his way back from the farm and he and some community members go to see the boy at the chemist shop. On getting there, the boy"s father complains about the community"s dilemma, namely, of lack of hospital and good roads. He also wonders about how he is expected to get the boy to Pakka, since he has no means of transportation. Fortunately, one of the community members offers his bicycle and both father and son head for the clinic at Pakka.

Scene Two

The community members gather and discuss about alternatives and solutions to the problems of their community. One community member asks why the miners who are making so much money from the resources of the community cannot assist the community by providing them with a grinding machine. A miner amongst them asks how the women were faring before the advent of the grinding machine. The women all turn on him, and some of them angrily state that they have already enjoyed life with a grinding machine. Thus, doing without it is retrogressive to the community.

Scene Three

The director of the mining company, is therefore, summoned. He promises to help but insists that the community members must also contribute their own quota to the development of their community. Meanwhile, the sick boy and his father returns from Pakka and there is still no food in the house to eat.

Group Three (Gwaiva)

Scene One

The first scene is about a family whose child is very sick and needs medical attention. The parents take him to the clinic but the doctor could not help because there are no drugs and other materials to treat the child. He asks them to hurriedly take the child to a hospital in the city. They set out for the city but because of the bad, narrow roads and distance, they could not reach the hospital on time and the child dies.

Scene Two

The second enactment is on the need for good roads. Two friends go to the farm and one is bitten by a snake. The one bitten is helped by the other to the clinic; however, on reaching there, the doctor tells them that he has no medicine for snake bite. The villagers are advised to go to the hospital in the city.

Scene Three

The third enactment centers on the women's basic need which is the grinding machine. The community's major foods are grains and they often need to grind it before cooking it. Three women, one with a child on her back, are seem discussing issues of concern in their various families. They complain about the grinding machine that has been down for so long, with no one to repair it. A little girl that has walked some distance to the grinding place comes in with a bucket of grains for grinding. The women tell her that the machine has broken down, so she will have to walk further to another village in order to grind her grain. The little girl begins to cry because she is already too tired to walk further.

Scene Four

A father wakes up in the morning calling upon his male children, to get ready for farm work. Some of the children protests that they want go to school. The father tells them that the secondary school is not open so they cannot further their education. He tells them the he prays the school opens because he also wants them to go to school.

Scene Five

The last enactment is about the mining activity that takes place in the community. A man goes to meet the miners for his share of the mining job he did for them. Meanwhile, his wife is seen behind him shouting as she follows him. She complains that she needs money to prepare the day's meal. The main in turn asks her to go home but she refuses. On reaching the miners hut, they tell him to come another day. He is therefore left to contend with his wife.

The respective drama groups that performed used their local songs, innuendoes and sometimes dance, to explicate meanings. The effect was that the performances generated a lot of reaction from the villagers in the venue. One of the performances by the Lemu group demonstrated how the miners and CETCO (the company in charge of mining services in Lukuru) workers make money from the community yet they do not help in any way towards the development of the community. The miners insisted that they must be given a chance to perform what they called "THE MINERS' DRAMA" even though they were involved in the three previous group performances. What emerged from their performance was a demonstration of how they were able to impact on the lives of their family positively and that of their friends through hard work thus urging the community members to also work hard. The performance also showed how despite their hard work, the miners were paid little wages, while the community and CETCO take the larger parts. This particular point was thought

provoking and even raised sympathy especially when they showed their wrinkled and hard corned palms.

The Miner's Drama

Scene One

A man and his wife rush an old woman to the hospital. The doctor demands for 50 thousand naira before an operation will be performed on the old woman. The man promises to go and get the money

Scene Two

The man goes to his friend and tells him about his sick mother, and his dilemma of not having money. The friend tells him to try their job once more. The man explains that yes he was an armed robber but he has stopped for a very long time. His friend insists that, if he really intends to save his mother, then he must perform on more operation. He later agrees. They start to make contacts with fellow armed robbers. While that is going on, a miner who happens to be the man"s friend comes in and overhears them. He advises the man and promises to give him the required money and more. The miner explains that he is not a thief but a hardworking man who makes his money legally.

Scene Three

The man rushes back to the hospital with the money given to him by his good friend. The doctor carries out the surgery on his mother and she recuperates. The man celebrates and thanks his good friend for his help. The good friend also promises to introduce the man to the mining business. The miners discuss how they receive little for their hard work while some people expect to eat where they did not sow.

At the end of the performances, there was an analysis of the problems and the major issues generated, namely, the need for grinding machine, lack of hospital and problem of school. The community members were divided into groups to discuss the identified problems. The analysis/discussions of the problem of the school generated the following information; all day farm work, school teachers not resident in the community, no jobs, and no accessible road to enable teachers to come to work. As for the grinding machine, the women want it in order to save them time, energy and resources spent going to Gwagwada to grind, while for health they desired a clinic/hospital.

Using the Community Action Planning (CAP) process, the community members resolved to tax members and seek extra financial support from the councilor representing their community. The monies raised will then be used to erect a clinic. We asked for their permission to show all that we did to MWG in order assist in reconciling the two parties- MWG and Lukuru. This idea was well applauded by the community members except for Mallam Tanko who, though a member of the community is (at that time) on the payroll of MWG, as a points man. However, in the long run, he realized the pain the community is passing through and gave us his consent. (Mallam Tanko is a catechist and one of the few primary schools educated men in the community. This privileged him to work closely with outsiders coming into the community for easy communication).

The Lukuru people were so mindful and sometimes resentful of what to utter. This resentment was broken by the alluring strength of the tools applied. These tools enabled the women and the children have a voice and making contributions in generating the specific themes that were discussed. The methodological approach used made the people not only to generate their own issues but also to analyze and thus plan towards the realization of their desired goal. They saw how far they could be involved in handling their problems. This conversational exercise broke the cold war between the community members and the miners

who have been habouring grudges against each other. The community now realizes that things are not really going smooth for the miners. The miners also suffer the same pains they suffer; most often they use leaves and herbs to treat the poison of snake bites since there is no hospital. At times they spend all the money they earned in treating sickness they could have prevented with early detection. The community members on their part see the importance of hard work. Both parties see the need to join hands to get the development they require. At this point, our team left the community.

A major breakthrough in the campaign is interplay between TfD and PLA. This is regarding how the synthesis of these two methods was used to elicit information from the members of the community and also engage them in the research, assessment and in evolving a way to further the pursuit of their desires. While PLA generates participation through writing and observations; e.g. the use of social/community map, and transect, TfD engages the people"s participation through the performative angle, operating from within the play and cultural matrix of the people of the people (Abah 2003; 128). The performances demonstrated how drama could, in this instance, be described as a methodological way of explicating critical issues in a subtle but meaningful manner to arouse critical consciousness in the people.

Three months later, this writer had a chat with some members of MWG including the Director, Katherine Barrera who then acknowledged going to open a hospital in the community to replace the school, since it is now the desire of the community to have a hospital. The question now is what is the feasibility of sustaining this vision by the community? Will the community be able to utilize the empowerment they achieved through the exercise that they were engaged in?

Follow-Up Stage in Lukuru

As the potentials of methodological conversation have been shown in extending frontiers in development communication through TfD, let us consider another side of the story which may not really be the focus of this article but is characteristic of TfD practice-the trait of self-criticism. This story is a way of asking if the experiential process enacted has really affected the people"s thinking. If not, what should be done?

On the 11th of September 2007 more than one year after the fieldwork, the present writer went on an evaluation trip to Lukuru to see how the community had utilized the PLA fieldwork we did with them. The village has really changed compared to the time we went for the fieldwork; now there was grass everywhere. It was not harvest time so the labourers had gone to the mining sites outside the community; except for handful of blasters and CETCO workers (CETCO is the company in charge of the mining services in Lukuru). There was no evidence of a clinic/hospital nor was there any sign of a grinding machine. Most of the villagers had gone to their farms; only the aged and little children were seen around. Luckily, this writer met Mallam Tanko a man who worked closely with us during our fieldwork in the community. He quickly took her to the mining site where she met about 10 people, 4 of whom identified her as having worked with them. In a chat, the writer asked why they had not done anything to provide a grinding machine to the community and the hospital. The response she got was that the community leader and the people were not serious. According to one of the miners by name Ibrahim Abbas,

> I am a blaster with CETCO Nigeria Limited, see Ma,
> (referring to me) you cannot start mining in a community
> unless the federal government approves that, but before that,
> the Sarki must also approve, and this is where he will list out
> the problems of the community to the company who will
> then pick the necessary areas they can intervene. He

(Sarki) should give his proposal. Whatever is the outcome of
the resources we mine here is divided into 3: the laborers
take a part; the other 2 parts community. They should start
with it and we can then come in to support them.

After a long chat with the miners, we walked to the very scene where we did our PLA/TfD and by the time many of the villagers had returned from their farms. We started discussion and appraisal of what we did the last time. To the amazement of this writer, the villagers, from some of their responses, did not take the views of the ABU participants seriously; to them it was just „a book thing‟ (academic endeavor). Some of the people said that they had not been able to do anything because they were very poor. Others attributed the delay in producing a good result for the community to the lack of external sponsors. At this point, the writer reminded them of the problem they have with MWG and asked what they do with the money they realized as revenue from the mining company. Their response was that the money had been taken to the District Head who then handed it over to the Sa Gbagyi. The writer then volunteered to go and meet the Sa Gbagyi but they objected and told the writer that the Sa Gbagyi handed back the money to the community, but it was so small to do anything.

The Lukuru story underscores a demonstration of poer and a situation of the limit of ability and strength. There is not yet a collaborative decision on the part of the NGO and the people to decide what they want. It is possible that there is an "unsaid" problem in the community‟s reluctance to better their life? The writer asserts that there is a clandestine undertone in this scene. This could be as a result of the lack of political power on the part of the locals but which was seminal to their development.

On the part of the community, it is obvious that their perception of themselves ia that of incapacitation, they do not see in themselves the ability to bring out their needed development. The possible cause. However, is lack of conscientisation or sensitization about the seeming self-defeatism which has yoked them. Base on the realities on ground, the community did not show evidence that it could face the requirements of the development it desired.

The role of Theatre for Development is to ensure the engendering of communication and participation which ideologically rationalize the originality and sustainability of a development process. It is a process that entails ownership and leadership by people which involves their effective participation in a project, links them up with allied experience by developing and building on their existing capacities. It is obvious that the position of Lukuru community in the project described in the foregoing is framed by their poverty and powerlessness.

Going by this fact, it TfD is to fulfill its claim of social transformation and community development, practitioners have to apply extended methodologies as propounded by Oga Steve Abah. These include using a variety of tools in all processes of a particular programme/project and involving every stakeholder either through their direct participation or by proxy.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it has been demonstrated that the potentials of PLA/TfD are to incorporate the people in every stage of their development to investigate their generative themes. In fact, the Lukuru story illustrates how to use the various approaches to guide the people in realizing their capabilities and to empower them for transformative development.

It is obvious that the use of TfD and PLA alone might wedge strong input but enlisting the people in another allied experience is a sure way to stir the capacity for development. This could be done through the use of other development communication tools available as

suggested by the concept of methodological conversation. The yoking together of these approaches boost participation and communication which are necessary for development.

The paper contends that non-involvement of all stakeholders, especially the Sarki, CETCO owners and management, the ward‟s councilor and MWG in the whole process is one of the loopholes identified in the workshop. The involvement of the relevant stakeholder‟s, argues the paper, could be realized through the use of participatory video and radio which have the potentials of relating other people‟s views and feelings to other stakeholders even when they are far away from each other.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, it is the submission of this article that methodological conversation can extend the frontiers of development when used appropriately and in all processes of development. Similarly, it is also the submission here that the Ahmadu Bello University‟s leading role in evolving innovative approaches will be a catalytic influence on community development sustainability, especially when the right tools are chosen and properly applied.

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