

PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY: THEATRE IN THE SERVICE OF DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the 20th century, various governments, organizations and stakeholders have suggested ways of realizing a desirable change, which is an index of development. The quest for this pursuit had led to the evolution of concepts and theories examples of which are; modernization, dependency, sustainable, participatory, and post development among others. The reality of this pursuit still proves to be unresolved for many developing nations as a result of the constraints of some of these theories especially those that conceive development according to the standard of the developed western states of the world. The way in which governments and development planners set out objectives of development without finding out the people's needs from them or involving them is however bewildering.

Development planners assume to know the needs of nations and individuals. Inadvertently, this approach to development does not bring about sustainability in the life of the project, nor does it have a lasting effect. The lacunae as argued in this *paper* have to do with the issue of people's participation and adequate strategies to incorporate them. It thus suggests that the use of popular arts is effective in addressing issues of development. The genre of this popular art in question is referred to as Theatre for Development (TFD).

THE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

Development is an issue as old as humanity itself, always seen in relation to the quest for progress. It is ostensibly so because development as a concept has to do with the process of growth or advancement through progressive stages, affecting virtually all spheres of human existence. The more recent understanding of the concept of development was ushered in by President Truman's speech in the point four of his inaugural speech.

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery... Their economic life is primitive and stagnant... (Rist 1999:71)

Truman's statement made development to acquire a transitive meaning that is, making development look like a plan of action performed by one agency upon another. Since Truman's statement, many theories have evolved, either in support of or in disagreement with his idea of development. Such examples as the paper is going to tackle are the modernization, dependency, sustainable theories and the alternative to development paradigms like participatory development and the post-development discourse.

The 1950s and 60s were dominated by modernization thinking, Wilbert Moore captures the essence of this idea when he asserts that,

Modernization is a total transformation of a traditional or premodern society into the types of technology and associated organization that characterizes the advanced, economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the world (Hulme et al. 1990:31).

Moore's view contrasts slightly with that of Cyril Black (1967) who sees modernization as the process by which historically evolved institutions are adapted to the rapidly changing functions that reflect the unprecedented increase in man's knowledge, permitting control over his environment that accompanied scientific revolution (Hulme and Turner 1990:35).

The dominant paradigm about modernization invariably points to the Western society as an example of a desirable form of advanced social, political and economic organization and therefore a model for any nation, but particularly a developing nation to emulate. Modernization does not only ignore the cultural diversity and values of different society but it also prescribes a cultural pattern for societies aspiring to develop to follow. This distorts the cultural values of the people. Yet, culture and cultural diversity can hardly be overlooked in any consideration of sustainability in development. Culture is significant for spurring the participation of the people in development precisely because it constitutes the basis of their indigenous knowledge of events around them.

Rist (1996:96) affirms the above, commenting that the economic historian who thinks that all societies behave alike and harbor the same desires is guilty of a kind of social centrism. Modernization, in a sense, advocates for the perpetual dependency of developing societies. Although the vision of modernization seems attractive, nevertheless, it smacks of naivety in relation to the accuracy of its conception, methodology and prescription because it overlooks the fact that societies are differently constituted. It is significant to note that all through this epoch, modernization has always been a subject of criticism, especially by the radical proponents of dependency theory.

Gunder Frank, a proponent of dependency theory calls attention to the fact that "historical research demonstrates that contemporary underdevelopment is in large part of the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries" (Gunder Frank, 1969:4). Similarly, Walter Rodney captures the essence of the problem when he asserts, "the underdevelopment with which the world is now occupied is a product of capitalist imperialism and colonialist exploitation. Africa and Asian societies were developing independently until they were taken over directly or indirectly by the capitalist powers" (Rodney, 1972:21-22). The thrust of the dependency theory has been that the root of underdevelopment lies in the nature of the socio-economic relation between the developing economics and the developed economics underlying which is the presumption that industrialization can be achieved by import substitution. Despite its positive perceptions, Okam (2007:53) argues that dependency cannot be considered a paradigm in the sense that Chambers used the term paradigm "to mean a coherent and mutually supporting pattern of concepts, values; methods and actions amenable to wide application" (Chambers 1998:2). According to her, its constraint lies in developing a

rigid concept that will make the poor economics get involved in the process of realizing clear 'terms of trade and association' or evolving a development path that can check the hegemonic imperialist bait already set at a prey. Besides, encouraging self-reliance as proposed by the dependency theorists depends on what individual countries can produce locally without recourse to the Western world, as in the case of China, India and of course some of the Asian countries in some instances.

Dependency has contributed to the criticism, of the conventional development model by looking at the historical phenomenon, and articulating the ways through which the developing countries can be empowered to work; yet it has failed to create a standard of development which can be controlled by the people. It is another way of telling the people to remain in their marginalized domain. Accordingly, some environment purists shifted the argument to sustainable development, itself a reaction against the dominant trends and implications of the visions of modernization.

At its heart is the issue of environmental sustainability as well as economic process. This course was spurred by the danger posed by existing development approaches on the environment. The World Commission on Environment and Development commissioned a study under the chairperson of Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland in 1987. In a report titled 'Our Common Future'. It stresses the issues of development and environment and concludes that 'sustainable development' is that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Morris 2002:8). Thus, the report reaffirms the need for a new era of economic growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and economically sustainable. Environmentalists have criticized the term 'sustainable development', which they describe as an 'oxymoron'; they argue that policies based around the issues of growth and insistent depletion, of natural resources cannot yield sustainability (Wikipedia: 2005). This is so because resources produced by the process of inorganic nature - e.g. crude oil, petroleum products-are used faster than they are naturally produced, in the process yielding further depletion of the environment.

The commission's report states that poverty is not only an evil in itself, but sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life. In this regard, Rist raises the question as to how the needs are to be identified. Who will decide that one good or service rather than another belongs to. the category of current needs of humanity? How could one ever hope to know the needs of die future generation? (Rist 1999:81-82)

The fact of the matter is that no human being, that is, no natural being, will claim to know the needs of other better than themselves. It is, therefore, imperative to involve the people in locating those needs that affect their lives. The people should also be part of the analysis of those needs in order to determine those that require immediate attention. What this calls attention to is the need for all humanity to get involved in the conception, design and implementation of development, irrespective of whether it centers on economic, social or ecological objectives.. An important question is; if ultimately the aims of 'development' are fulfilled what would be it latter outcomes? Is it possible to envisage positive changes in the environment in relation to the future of development as a process and practice? These questions seem to be contextual in relation to the framework for sustainable development. What will be the fate of development and the world in the presence of this entire

phenomenon? How do we sustain the improvement we have today to avoid its unexpected consequences?

Development's greatest problem is in the area of implementation, which is because of the top-down approach it employs. The hierarchical process makes the thinking, design and operation of development programmes lies in the hands of the people at the apex while the actuality is that those who live a particular way of life are in the best position to understand their problems and detect opportunities for their development. They are best placed to be the analysts, researchers and assessors of any course of development and its intervention process. This is to say that participation in the development process is necessary.

Participation thus is the index of the emergent development paradigm known as participatory development. It is about people's participation in development activities, which should become a continuous process with no visible end to it. Participatory development should be a process except for the intervention of the development workers who should withdraw as soon as the people can maintain the development process on the basis of their own initiatives (Burkey 1998:70). It should not be about meeting people's needs but about helping to create an environment where people can effectively identify and address their own needs. The thrust of the participatory paradigm is decentralization and empowerment. These enable local people to explore the diverse complexities of their own condition and to adapt to rapid change.

Participatory development encourages traditional self-help, when people are central in the development process; they use familiar popular approaches and invent technologies that will help them. This is a feature that the conventional theories do not possess, and because of this, participatory development is seen as an alternative approach. A critical issue is how the practitioners of this system have achieved this aim. Are people still marginalized, manipulated or seen as equal stake holders in their own affairs? People's participation in development revolves around their indigenous knowledge and values, creating opportunities and invention according to their capability. This goes in line with the thinking of neo-traditionalism, otherwise referred to as post-development that development should be people-centered.

Post-development is a discourse that questions modernization, (D)evelopment, and globalization and as well propagates traditional cultures. The central position of the postdevelopment discourse is anchored on the existing forms of relations-diversity, adaptability and cultural values of other people, as seen in the different theories of development. It seeks to highlight through its main arguments, the dangers and contradictions underlying the framework of development discourse as whole. Esteva, for instance points to the idea that "the metaphor of development gave global hegemony to purely western genealogy of history, robbing people of different cultures the opportunity to define the forms of their social life (Sachs 1992:2). Similarly, Sachs (1992:4) remarks that the development school "has eliminated the innumerable values of human beings and has turned the world into a place deprived of adventure and surprises, the 'other' has vanished with development.

Reaffirming Sachs' position, Rahnema assesses the position of development for the two thirds of people on earth and concludes that it is "a reminder of what they are not ...a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to others' experiences and dreams" (Sachs 1992:10). These scholars tend to argue for the locality and the power of the ordinary people - the wretched of the earth in Frantz Fanon's terms. The discourse seeks a direct link to address local problems, resting their argument on

the fact that modern society is declining in indigenous knowledge. In view of this, Sachs (1992:102) asserts that, whichever way one looks at it “homogenizing of the world is in full swing. A global monoculture spreads like an oil stick over the entire planet”, thus establishing menu once tasted the fragile mind would never seek to reverse no matter what he sees as disadvantageous. The ideology of post-development is not to exaggerate local capability or destroy the conventional development course but to highlight the importance of recognition of diversity and adaptability among people, thus including people in the mainstream of participation in development projects according to their existing norms. It also seeks to encourage indigenous knowledge, as a means of breeding self-reliance, sustainability and construction of an endogenous economy. However they have not tried to fashion out how the repairs of damage caused by modern production can be corrected in the developing world, since the local innovations presently cannot confront these issues.

Some will like to ask these scholars what they have suggested in view of the development contradictions so far counted. Should people forget about development? How can we forge ahead to regain our lost status? To summarize the situation of the concept of development from the foregoing, the structure of development is increasingly anchored on the hegemonic politics of the affluent western world as e^mplified by modernization. The idea has been fabricated to promote a position that subjugates culture, cultural and traditional authorities. Even alternative development paradigms tend to have its fluctuating moments, at one moment in theory they tend to encourage local capabilities and reasoning, but seem to jeopardize such reasoning by setting a standard that seem to perpetuate intervention and subjection.

By way of responding to the foregoing, we might as well start with the Chinese poem that says
Go to the people, live among them. Learn from them, love them,
start with what you know. Built on what they have. But for the best leaders
when their task is done, the people will remark; we have done it ourselves.

The essence of the poem above is participation, a position which should involve people and recognize their local cultural originality. The importance of the people’s involvement in identifying their own ‘basic needs’ can hardly be overstressed because it is strategic to the process of carrying on with the action plan for sustainability in development. This, according to the objective of this study can be resolved with the use of theatre. This paper argues that theatre is effective in tackling the problem of participation in development because it draws on the performance tradition of the local communities.

Theatre is any performance which employs elements like dance, drama, song, dialogue, costume and other artistic elements to communicate its message. It functions in a way that it educates, and excites at the same time. According to Rascon Banda, theatre is a magic communication in which all people, actors and spectators, children and adults, men and women receive something^ that transforms them. In his view, “theatre reflects man’s existential anguish and unravels the human condition” (Banda 2006:1). The essential quality of theatre stems from its visual and aural immediacy and out of which the actor and audience achieve’ the communion that they seek in every performance. The traditional African theatre, as demonstrated in festivals and ceremonies, exemplified this. These festivals and ceremonies address socio-political and economic issues. In addition, because the African theatre derives

from the common heritages of the community, it functions as an important vehicle for the transmission of age-old values and as a medium for socialization. In all of this, the strength of the African indigenous performing arts lies in its participatory nature that allows all members of the community to feature in its processes and thus enabling them to participate in important socio-political processes that affect them as members of the community. Therefore, one can argue that traditional African societies have always owned art forms which speak to their issues. Osofisan captures the essence of this practice when he remarks that:

As far as we know, every human society has always been conscious of the need to nurture its youths, promote group solidarity among its members, mobilize citizens and, from time to time, harness their energies towards some communal project. In order to realize this goal, therefore, it invents a number of strategies; among them theatrical arts are always prominent (Osofisan 2004:1).

It is a matter of significance that Theatre for Development practice has carried forwards the strengths and original qualities of traditional popular theatre, the practice which places ordinary people central to the arguments of the dramatic action. People now take centre stage, making their own analyses otherwise seen as sensitization from a radical perspective. By this art of sensitization, conscientisation and empowerment, theatre shifts from entertainment art alone to include educational art, which starts to address the issues of change.

THEATRE IN THE SERVICE OF DEVELOPMENT

TFD is concerned with the processes through which people learn, developing the people's critical awareness with a view to transforming their situation, to empower them to take action for change through drama, songs, and folklores among other forms of art. The strength of TFD as deployed in the area of development is that, as entertainment and education, it uses people's artistic forms of expression and involves the participation of the people, thus making it a worthy tool for realizing participatory development.

According to Abah(2005:101) "In the TFD practice the people are the protagonist generating the themes and infusing the drama with conflicts from their daily lives" He advanced that "TFD become an instrument for instigating people-centered development outside the field of academics" It is a stimulus for participatory development in a community, since it is oriented towards development. It handles topical issues, not just performance for the sake of art. It is theatre as a tool of research, action and evaluation. Abah (2003:122) affirms this, when he states that TFD has become a strong research as well as development communication tool, a practice that has grass root appeal and applicability because it taps its philosophy and material from the life and values of the people using it

The aim of TFD is to involve people in development through dialogic and participatory methods. As Abah rightly states, TFD lays claim to engendering development, not in statistical listing of structures erected in villages but in the liberation of the potentials in individuals to understand and be able to change structures for the enhancement of the quality of their lives. (Harding 2002:100). Reiterating what Abah says, Zakes Mda (1993:20) remarks that popular theatre is a practice whereby the people initiate and develop the theatrical explorations of their problems and so engage in a continuous process of self-education. This idea of popular is inclined in Brecht's definition of 'Popular' - a situation whereby the people

are not only involved in the process of development but eventually take it over, forcing it, deciding it" points to how popular theatre helps in engendering development (Willet, 1978:108). While Boal (1979:122) simply puts it as people assuming the protagonistic role- being active beings in the theatrical circumstances that transform their lives.

The two issues that arise from the above are; the people taking over the whole process, and the other is the use of indigenous performative forms. In other words, the issues of participation and culture which are elemental to the discourse of development, is lacking in the core conventional development paradigm- modernization. What this calls for is the necessity for looking into the whole process of the role of theatre in the service of development, as listed by Ndumbe Eyoh (1986), Daniel et al. (2004), Abah (2005), among other practitioners, and how TFD realizes these elements for development sustainability.

THE THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The first step in TFD is the familiarization stage; a project does not happen in a vacuum. It is always necessitated by a cause and situated in a community whether of individuals with the same interest or living within the same geographical boundaries. Therefore, for any TFD project to be implemented, the process begins with familiarization, the importance of which is to get to know the people, their dos- and don'ts as well as other issues that will engender friendship and cooperation. This leads to community research- a process of data collection. The essence of this feature of the *TFD* is to generate the thematic concerns of the people. The people will be investigators in generating their meaningful thematic concern freely. The objective is to enable a good atmosphere to prevail since the research is a vital component of the TFD process.

Implicit in the above is the fact that any TFD process can combine three or more streaks of research, which include homesteading, flooding method, focus group discussion, more importantly synergy with other approaches to engender the people's participation in research such examples as approach as PLA methodology. The next step following research in the TFD process is analysis, which is done with, the people or by them. It is the stage whereby the information collected is prioritized for play making on those issues to be done. Analyses are made with the community members, who are in a position to decide what they need since they are the ones that will live with whatever outcome that emerges -underdevelopment or development.

The next stages are the stages of scenario building, play making and rehearsal. At this stage, the people take over the process of building stories with their problems as identified, and making plays. This could be done together with development aid from outside or the outside animateur. After this stage comes the performance stage.

This period of the performance is also a period of further research. The themes generated through the earlier stages are woven into a play and performed to the people by some of them, allowing any intervention. Since people see their realities onstage, they have the freedom to intervene and restructure the stories in a way suitable to their condition-what Augusto Boal refers to as spect-actors. This makes theatre a weapon and it is the people who should wield it (Boal 1979:122). Other important stages in TFD are the action plan stage, the evaluation and follow-up stages, all involving the participation of the people, this is because

TFD is built on the theoretical underpinnings of subverting the culture of silence, thus, ensuring that no class of people will be left out nor the action will be carried for people.

It is appropriate to say that theatre of the TFD genre engenders the participation of all the beneficiaries of the development project in all facets, examples: in planning, and in the implementation stage allowing room for external donors to partner with people. One must acknowledge the fact that it is cost and time intensive. However, the seeming loophole will to a significant extent project the course of sustainability-the concept that incorporates and recognizes the interconnectedness of the environment, the economic, societal and cultural factors that people take to enhance the quality of their own and their family members' lives. It includes the collective effort that the people undertake to enhance the long term livability of their region. AAID (2000) sees development sustainability as the continuation of benefits after major assistance from the donor has been completed, thus reducing subsequent social problems such as dependence of the stakeholders on external donors and their resources. The indication that conventional development paradigms do not have a structure for sustainability in the sense that they do not create room for grassroots participation and do not recognize cultural diversity and the capability of individual nations. These are ostensibly significant for any development project to be sustainable. Apart from these elements, other paradigms have criticized this convention even without producing the right course for development to follow; though they uphold high values that necessitate the progress of any nation.

From the discussion on dependency, and participatory development theories, the significant feature is participation of the people, from the point of the post-development idea the framework is culture and participation. This is how the paper presents TFD which is dialogic and participatory and which also uses the cultural forms of the people as capable of engendering development sustainability. Nevertheless, since no methodology is sacrosanct, this approach can flounder if the users will not find adequate measures to engage the people. Freire was against this when he asserts that the liberation of the oppressed is the liberation of the people, not things, pointing out that while no man liberates himself by his own effort alone, he cannot also be liberated by the efforts of others. Two issues come up here: on the one hand, there is a need for revolutionary leadership to operate through dialogue with the people and on the other hand the necessity for the oppressed to intervene critically in the situation that surrounds them. Summazing the foregoing it will not be misleading to argue that TFD through the theories that inform it and the process of operation can engender participation which is imperative for engendering development sustainability.

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