

ZAMBIA OPEN UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

STUDENT NAME: YOUR NAME

COMPUTER NUMBER: XXXXX

PROGRAM: THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT

COURSE: BACHELOR DEGREE IN DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

LECTURE: MR/MRS.....

DUE DATE: YOUR DATE

ASSIGNMENT QUESTION: How far has theatre for development made a valid contribution to sustainable development in Zambia? Argue your case by citing at least two case studies, showing in some detail how this has succeeded or failed in this regard.

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre for Development, or TfD, means live performance, or theater used as a development tool -- as in international development. TfD encompasses the following in-person activities, with people or "puppets", before an audience: a spoken-word drama or comedy; a music, singing and/or dance production; a production with movement but no sound (mime) and participatory or improvisational techniques using any or all of these.

Theatre for Development can be a kind of participatory theatre, that encourages improvisation and audience members to take roles in the performance, or can be fully scripted and staged, with the audience observing. Many TfD productions are a mix of the two. "Theatre of the Oppressed", a technique created by Augusto Boal is a form of participatory theatre for development. In this paper, the role of theatre in social and economic development has been discussed.

DEFINITION OF THEATRE

Epskamp, Kees (2006:98) defined theatre as a “collaborative form of fine art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place.” The performers may communicate this experience to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music or dance. Elements of design and stagecraft are used to enhance the physicality, presence and immediacy of the experience.

Having been an important part of human culture for more than 2,500 years, theatre has evolved a wide range of different theories and practices. Some are related to political or spiritual ideologies, while others are based purely on "artistic" concerns. Some processes focus on a story, some on theatre as event, and some on theatre as catalyst for social change.

ROLE OF THEATRE IN DEVELOPMENT

Development media theory which relates to media structures and performance in developing societies provides a strong theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between theatre and development. This is because the theory encompasses what Folarin (1998) described as a great variety of socio-cultural, economic and political condition which borders on the effective

use of the media for development purpose. Specifically, the theory considers the role of the media in society as essential target at stimulating and sustaining societal development in such area as cultural, social economic, political and technological development. The theory also advocates a situation where the media (theatre as one) should accept and help in carrying out the special development task of national integration, socioeconomic modernization, promotion of illiteracy and cultural creativity (Folarin 1998).

The ‘Reflective- Projective’ theory of Broadcasting and Mass Communication by Leo Loevinger presents a similar position. The theory provides yet another basis for understanding the relationship of theatre and development. Leovinger position is that the media ‘mirrors the society’ and that while the media themselves reflects society as organized group, individual audience members project their own individual reflections into images presented. This is where the saying among theatre scholars that ‘theatre is a creator’s mirror of the whole universe’ and the popular dictum ‘the world is a stage where everyone plays his or her own part and leaves’ finds justification.

Indeed the theatre as a media of communication constantly mirrors and reflects the society. Beyond drawing its theme from the society, which varies from the historical to the present and the futuristic, it has been argued and rightly too that the shape, outlook and presentation of a country’s theatre are direct reflections of the yearning of the people. It is these attributes that bestow on the theatre the role of a vanguard, a watchdog, the barometer of the society and a major factor in nation building (Yerima 2007). Those in search of a sort of paradigm of the relationship between theatre and development should consider the whole history of modern theatre in Nigeria as dating back to the period of the Yoruba travelling theatre which the late Hubert Ogunde pioneered and which was a fused tradition of the indigenous Alarinjo masquerade itinerant performance and the church developed open air opera (Obafemi 2003).

Theatre has not been extensively used in development support work. McCarthy (2004:98) assert that , “ theatre has an important role to play. It is one of the cheapest media available, it does not rely on literacy, it can be more flexible and topical than other media, and above all the audience can participate in the play making the theatre a genuine two-way medium for communicating information.”

In line with McCathy, it can be said that, theatre can be one of the cheapest means of communicating information since it does not require the outlay of vast sums of money on tape recorders, cine cameras, screens, projectors and all the expensive gear connected with other communication media. Think of a well produced publicity poster on say a nutrition campaign with good pictures. You will agree that it costs a lot of money. The printers want to make a profit on you, the typists, the artists and all the people contributing to the production of the poster.

Now think of a play. There is no need to spend all that money on paper, ink, stencils, typists, artists and photographs. The major expense for a play will be the production of the scripts. Thereafter, you will concentrate on drilling your actors into the characters and situations you want them to portray according to the nature of the campaign.

Moreover, short one act plays do not require so much expense on time (rehearsal) and material resources, (i have personally produced such plays inside three days with raw casts during my theatre workshops in Zambia's rural areas.) Of course, I am not thinking of the Western Traditional Theatre which will need an elaborate theatre building and complicated lighting equipment, for this would be even more expensive than the communication media we have cited above. No, you will not need a building or any structures in which to stage the plays. I am thinking of a village meeting place, a market place, or even the back of a travelling lorry on the street will do. The idea is that you take theatre to the people instead of expecting people to come to the theatre.

Kabwe Kasoma (1974:98) notes that, "Plays can help the audience understand the other man's point of view, which is essential for social development. For example, in the film "REACHING RURAL FAMILIES", we see that a family planning worker plays the role of an ignorant mother, while the mother takes on the role of the family planning worker. The mother in her new role has to think like the family planning worker, while the latter does the opposite." In this way the two people will understand each other's point of view, and this is essential in communication campaigns for social development where attitude change is vital.

The same effect can be gained from a play, especially if we use audience participation. I envisage plays where the audience is allowed to participate in the action by going up onto the

acting area It may be tactical to plant some players among the audience to break the group shyness before the audience at large can freely take part in the drama.

And you should expect this since you are engaged in street or market theatre. People on the streets or market places should not be expected to be well behaved theatrically, i.e. applauding just when they have to mostly out of courtesy and not because they have enjoyed the joke or the poetry in the line.

Plastow, (2004: 23) argues that, “*Probably the most important advantage theatre has as a communication media in development projects is the fact that it does not rely upon literacy.*” Let us go back to the poster campaign. Even after all these expenses, you are not certain that your poster will be read by as many people as you would like. The number of readers, of course, will depend upon the degree of literacy in the target community, as well as the effectiveness of your poster display. How does theatre overcome all these problems?

Think of a little sick child who doesn't want to take his pill unless you coat it with a little sugar. The sweetened pill has the same effect, i.e. restoration of maximum health to the child. Theatre for development can be thought of in the same way. People get the message laughing as they see themselves and life satirized on the acting area. For this reason the play must be based upon the experiences of the target audience. Then provided you make sure that the message has reached home in a very enjoyable manner, the theatre can overcome all the problems of cost and literacy associated with other media.

One can use traditional folk lore in plays, but one must be careful. It is generally believed that folk lore tends to consolidate and stabilise the traditional beliefs that may in turn inhibit attitude change. This need not be so if the play shows how traditional beliefs may inhibit attitude change, and carefully attacks those traditional elements that people would like to do away with. An example of a traditional belief which inhibits change for the better is the belief that if pregnant women ate eggs they would bear children without hair. And often, among the Bemba for example, eggs are food for the father, and not the children and the mother. A story could be written and dramatised using folk lore to undermine this belief for a nutrition campaign. But plays do not have to be only about traditional beliefs.

Another case study is in a play called “Distortion” as presented by Kasoma (1974) A play can satirise a topical issue or problem current within the community, e.g. the news by radio of a possible cholera outbreak, and the danger zones within the city; i.e. places without proper sanitation. And supposing one or two people, or even children, have recently died in the Butungwa Compound of our little play "DISTORTION". Then a well written play depicting the dangers of lack of toilet facilities and general cleanliness would open up the eyes of the residents of Buntungwa compound, and they will only be too willing to do something about the terrible disease of cholera.

If you cannot write an original play based on the community, a good transposition of a Western play like Bertold Brecht's "THE GOOD PERSON OF SCHWE-CHUAN" will do. But even here you must not think transposition is any easier. You have to understand the theatre culture of Brecht and his play, and translate this into the suitable theatre culture of your target audience. This means that you transpose the idiom as used by Brecht into the local idiom as used by your target audience. You can, therefore, see that you need to be an expert at transpositions or else you easily lose the original flavour of the play and your message may not come out as clearly as you want it to. I can assure you it is much easier to write an original play than to attempt a transposition (Kabwe Kasoma, 1974).

The most important thing is that the message of the play must be clear. This means that you should not couch your play in such a language and style that it will need a lot of intellectualisation before your audience starts understanding what you are trying to say. The symbolic play and the intellectualized play have no place here. The play must communicate easily. There is no room for theatre of illusion where the audience is made to believe it is only a play meant merely for their entertainment and that it should have nothing to do with their lives later on. This is the kind of play normally seen in various Western Play Houses. I am advocating here a theatre of commitment. And this "COMMITMENT" is "SOCIAL CHANGE". In the theatre of commitment, you want to involve the people you are aiming to change. You want them to dislike certain things and to like certain other things that you think will change their lives for the better. Their emotional involvement in the play is essential.

CONCLUSION

Theatre for Development aims to offer an alternative approach and medium by which theatre can be of direct service to the marginalized urban and rural peasant masses. The TFD approach which is gaining slow ascendancy in Africa, in countries such as, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and Tanzania emphasizes collectivism and participation. It stresses community and inter-personal participation in self realization and uses existing and familiar performance forms in the various communities such as songs, dances, music, storytelling, puppetry and mime to either validate those cultural forms or serve as an adequate instrument to bring about social change in those communities.

So far, an attempt has been made to establish theatre's attempts to contribute to development. Our view is that theatre, in any society, should be considered a simple activity concerned with people trying to understand their world. We similarly posited that it is an activity of consciousness designed to influence minds, and to either change or maintain their perception of the world. This is why we strongly hold that a government can only ignore the potency of the theatre in promoting development especially at the grass-root level at its own peril. We must be quick to observe, however, that, from the African perspective, and more specifically from the Zambian perspective.

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