

Encouraging Girl–Child Formal Education: The Winneba Zongo Theatre for Development (TFD) Initiative.

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ABSTRACT:- This work is a report of a community Theatre for development (TfD) project that was organized at the Winneba Zongo community in the Central Region of Ghana. The project was held in February, 2017 with the following objectives: to explore the potential of using TfD as a methodology in identifying and analysing community problems, to use theatre to mobilise the target community towards the creation of awareness on how to encourage girl child education and finally to discover and put together a theatrical piece to critically intervene in the problems of the community by working with them. The TfD flooding method and the homestead technique in gathering data from rural communities were used to gather data on the problems and issues affecting the community under study. In both techniques, the students and the whole group flooded the community where they met with the people wherever they are and held informal meeting and discussions with them. Whenever it became necessary for verification of data and information members involved lived with families in the community to pick up much information as possible through informal interviews, observation and discussions. The data collected was sifted and prioritised and a dramatic piece was created and performed in the community for the community with members of the community as actors. Participants involved in the project and the performance were mostly people from the Winneba Zongo community and some few people from outside the community who provided a workshop situation for the project. After the performance there was a post-performance discussion about issues raised in the play. The community members discussed the issues raised and community based solutions instead of waiting for outside help. This top-down participatory approach to problem identification and solution helped the community members to find some lasting solutions to the problems affecting them.

KEY WORDS:- Theatre, development, improvisation, participatory, interactive, Community, shared, experiences, people-centred, approach, discussion, awareness, creation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The desire to address the seeming imbalances in most development has emerged the top down approach methodology being used by government and developmental agencies both internationally and. There is therefore a pool of interactive and participatory forms of making sure that that kind of development must come from the people themselves. The masses, the down trodden, the grassroots people have always taken account of change in their society and adjusted their methods of doing things accordingly.

One of the major concerns in development communication studies today concerns how communication can be organised so as to increase participation, achieve self reliance, promote equity, and close communication gaps (Hedebro,1982). He was of the view that, there was a growing feeling among communication researchers that existing media systems have failed to serve the needs of development in Africa. This failure was due to mostly the undemocratic structures of the media institutions which operated in “an extremely centralised fashion with a sharp concentration of the power resources and services of the media in urban areas” (Boafo, 1985).

Theatre has been identified as one of the mediums to use towards the realisation of set objectives. The reasons advanced are that it has the potential for being a democratic medium, in which the audiences may play an active role in medium-programming, and therefore in producing and distributing messages. Theatre is not centralised like the other media and technological arts. Theatre is capable of integrating indigenous and popular systems of communication that already exist in the rural areas. Theatre has appropriate technology as all it needs is human resources which are already abundant in the villages. Theatre is capable of being more effective since it uses interpersonal channels that have been found to have more impact than the mediated channels of electronic and print media.

Over the years these needed interactions and interrogations have been taking place in various places. Theatre for Development (TfD) has become an instrument for instigating people-centred development in the field outside of academia. The future of TfD depends on the constant effect of itself in the development process because what it gains from the pool advances its academic interactions just the theories do.

TfD uses various approaches in gathering data and information in rural communities. The TfD facilitator may use all of the approaches or may use one to be able to assimilate with the community, The various approaches as in the view of (Eyoh, 1997) are as follows: The flooding method, the homestead technique, the interview method, the performance method, the official eye technique and the hierarchical method.

THE COMMUNITY PROFILE

The Winneba Zongo is a small community located in a suburb called the Abasraba, This setting can be found at Winneba in the Effutu Municipal Assembly in the central region of Ghana. It is about two kilometres away from the main Winneba junction and a few meters from the Effutu Municipal Assembly office. Muslims are mostly the main inhabitants of this community in Winneba. According to the Chief of the Winneba Zongo community, Alhaji Yahaya Waya, the Zongo community has a population of about one thousand five hundred (1500) comprising men women and children with a large percentage being women. As an Islamic community, the community has its mosque cited at the centre of the community. The Zongo community shares walls and bounded by the Effutu Municipal Assembly office at the southern part, the Winneba central market at the eastern part and the community health centre at the northern part respectively. The Winneba Zongo has a semi-compact settlement with a well apportioned streets running through the community.

As an Islamic community, the Winneba Zongo has an Islamic basic school consisting of both primary and junior high school (Ansarudeen Islamic School). The community is also blessed with a community health centre which helps in educating the community on health issues and sanitation.

II. THE PROJECT METHODOLOGY

In the views of Mda (1993), theatre for development as a tool for communication depends on the application of the peoples own popular theatre. TfD is a development process for social transformation that uses performance as a participatory tool to help individuals, groups and communication.

Salhi (1998) also stated that, theatre for development functions as a good educative instrument that uses the art of performance as participatory tools to help individuals and a group of people to share their knowledge and experiences with the intent of social transformation and development. Democracy, participation and sustainability are the vibrant elements in theatre for development since it aims at aiding people to solve their own difficulties as well as enabling people not to be only receivers of information but also senders of information.

TfD in the Winneba Zongo tackled the felt needs of the people rather than imposing development projects on them. The project sustained the interest of the people mostly because it was presented to them with the things they were familiar with which included their own people as actors, their local language and their culture (music, dance, costumes) among others.

Asiama (2010) asserted that, theatre for development functions as a coat hunger on which all the types of theatre hang. He also mentions that the theatre for development cycle passes through the processes which include, determining of the lab-site, surveying the lab-site, conducting of research, data collection and sifting or prioritisation, Story creation, Pre-test performance, Performance, Post- performance discussions, Follow- up and Evaluation.

WHY THAT COMMUNITY?

With all the educational facilities in the Winneba municipality, such as the nursing training, vocational and technical institutes, universities and all the numerous basic and senior high schools, the numbers of students that were enrolled into the tertiary level were just few and were mostly boys, in which the Winneba Zongo will not be left out. The community had a very low percentage of girls enrolled in the tertiary schools and through discussions with some of the community people, the reasons deduced tended to be poverty, lack of girls supporting their parents in the economic activities they do ,some of the girls not academically good in school and not ready to learn any trade, and above all some of the girls and parents having the mentality that a girl will be catered for by her husband when she is married and so there is no need for her to be educated. The facilitators decided to choose this community because there was a realization that the ladies in the community do not further their education but rather drop-out or quit after senior high school with while some were engaged in selling noodles and tea in the night with others moving about and not working.

A generalization to these reasons tended to be that the community lacked knowledge on the benefits of educating the girl-child to the tertiary level due to ignorance and the level of illiteracy on the parts of the

parents. It was in this context that the study sought to educate the community of Winneba Zongo on the benefits of educating a girl-child using tfd as a medium.

The Winneba Zongo project started with a search for a typical lab-site started on Monday 7th November, 2016. Searching for a lab-site was not easy, especially a suitable one to be precise because, the facilitators must take into consideration a community that will welcome their idea to help conduct an effective research. The facilitators needed a community which was accessible, ready to accept change, one which can be studied and research can be conducted regularly to bring about a positive change and be sustained. Therefore because of accessibility and ability to visit the community before and after the project, the facilitators focused on the Central Region of Ghana. The facilitators visited communities like Osamkrom, Potsin, Budu-Atta, Mampong, Mpota and finally Winneba Zongo all in the Central Region of Ghana. After several days of scouting for a laboratory-site (lab-site), the project finally decided on Winneba Zongo.

THE WINNEBA ZONGO TFD INTERVENTION.

The success of any Tfd workshop project indeed begins with the preliminary stages. This is the stage the project initiators or facilitators will discuss issues and get to understand the agenda of the project.

After settling on the suitability of the laboratory site, there was the need to have all stakeholders meeting in a workshop situation. The usefulness of this mid-point evaluation and sharing of ideas were the ways in which the information was brought to bear on the conduct of the project. The main strategy that was adopted for the workshop was participatory. Participatory approach because, the project intended to involve all stakeholders and their contribution and not as a means or an avenue to preach about the problems of the community. The project was to create an enabling atmosphere that will allow for the communities open involvement in sharing and discussing their own problems. By this way, the project will allow the community members to also discover ways by which they might adopt to solve their own problems.

The participatory method of community development strategy removed the emphasis from the experts but rather invested in a collective decision making. In the Winneba Zongo Tfd project, the entire process of felt needs problem identification to the final performances emphasised on the active involvement and participation of the community. The employment of the horizontal two-way approach to community development was based on the fact that collective approach that involved the whole community both outsiders and insiders which enriched the process. It also meant that the whole process was true to the people since the problems identified were from them and belonged to them. It was only right that the whole Zongo community must take active part in identifying and prioritising issues that they wanted to focus on. The numerous visits and transect walks in the Winneba Zongo community was therefore seen as the beginning of their involvement in decision-making and the planning of the project. This participatory method or approach allowed for the community to assert themselves in the several different stages of the project.

DATA COLLECTION

After a week the facilitators officially wrote a letter to the chief and his elders to seek for approval for permit me to do the project in the community on Friday 18th of November, 2016. After handing it over to them, the nod was given for the take-off and the project was introduced to the queen-mother of the community since the project was about girls. She welcomed the facilitators nicely and the following week which was Friday, 25th November, 2016 after prayers to come and meet the mothers of the community since they will be available and organized that day.

The data collection method used for the tfd project were the flooding, homestead approach, interview, the performance the official eye, the hierarchical techniques of gathering data as noted by (Eyoh1997). These techniques were not as rigid as an approach and were informal. It allowed for the project to meet people in the homesteads or homes or at any social gathering in the community. The techniques deviated from the rigid questionnaires which are very formal and often not appropriate for rural settings in terms of research. The techniques were more conversational and allowed the facilitators and the community members to share information and real life experiences. Again the techniques provided for a means of building confidence and winning the trust of the people. Experiences shared were very educative and helped to erase the notion of facilitators knowing all and are ready to provide solutions to all the problems of the community. The formal session of the research was when the facilitators had to meet the Zongo Chiefs and the community elders and council of elders, who constituted the policy making body in the Zongo community. It was at this meeting that permission from the elders the community and their blessings sought to announce the presence of the team and their intentions. The facilitators also applied the focus group discussion method to help in the research. This research technique involved the facilitator having discussions with the community members, not individually but in a group.

During the research, the facilitators came into contact with many people including a Muslim brother who helped throughout the project called Rahyan Tijani. He was made to understand everything pertaining to

the project and he was willing to help throughout the project. He helped in explaining things that were difficult to understand to the community members during the focus group discussion. The facilitators also met citizens in the community, the youth (boys and girls), the mothers and fathers for discussion on the problem at hand.

After the discussions, the responses were, some parents do not have money to cater for their wards education, some of the girls are also not interested in schooling, some also see it to be a waste of time since they will end up getting married and their husbands will take care of them, some of the girls and their parents were passionate about allowing their girls further their education although they were not be financially sound. This was where the facilitators realized that indeed creating awareness on the importance of educating the girl child in Winneba Zongo was really a felt need.



Fig. 1. A focused group discussion with the Youth (girls). Source: AYD concepts

PRIORITISATION OF DATA, SCENARIO BUILDING AND IMPROVISATION

This stage of the project involved many complex activities which included sifting of data, prioritising, analysis, role play and continuing data gathering. It was not appropriate to include all the data gathered on the field to make the drama. The facilitators therefore with the community members had to pick out the major issues around which to make the drama through improvisation. The members of the community were allowed to assert their freedom in choosing the felt needs affecting their lives. In making a story out of the issues, participants told stories of fictional characters that may bore some resemblance to some real life characters in the community. The stories were created in such a way that the characters brought to focus the problems in community. Participants after creating the story did improvisation and role-played to bring the story to life so as to make issues concrete. This stage of the project allowed for reflection and analysis in the creative process of writing the community's story through action and creativity.

During the research, several problems and concerns were revealed and raised about the community. As facilitators, we noted these issues down for a consensus to be reached per the most pressing problem that needs to be addressed urgently. Some of the problems revealed in the research process are stated below:

- Some of the husbands and boys in the community are unemployed in which some of the fathers in the community engage in lotto staking as well as the boys and some of the boys engage themselves in super bet and internet fraud.
- Girls drop-out from school due to lack of finance
- Girl child education not taken seriously because there is a perception that she will end up getting married and will be catered for by her husband.
- Ladies marrying early and divorcing at an early stage due to selfish reasons like travelling abroad, marrying a wealthy man to get rich to support the family with the consent of their (ladies) parents.

After the discussions, as facilitators, from the responses we had during the discussions with the various groups especially the elders who constitute of the fathers in the community, the mothers, the youth, boys and girls, the facilitators understood that some of the parents in the community were ignorant when it came to the

importance of educating the girl child. Therefore there was the need to encourage girl-child education in Winneba Zongo community through a TFD intervention.

The story created must affect the minds of the people and provoke their thoughts to take action and provide answers to their problems after watching the performance. The story was created based on the outcome of the research taking into consideration the data collected and also the additions from the community members raised pertaining to the theme. The story was based on the theme of the project, the characters to be used, the talent to be portrayed, the target audience, the story line and the language, the spectacle and properties to enhance the play, the words that were to be used to move the play and the setting, space and the necessary elements that were needed like sound, costume and properties. The story was not really scripted because it was based on improvisation, therefore scenarios were created as a guide for the rehearsals through to the performance.

SYNOPSIS OF THE DRAMA

Jamila, a Senior High School (SHS) graduate does not see the importance of furthering her education to the tertiary since she will be catered for by her husband when she gets married although her mum was not in support of that decision. Ayisha, who is also about to complete SHS is bent on furthering her education although she is not from a wealthy family because she wants to be a lawyer in future. In the long run, Jamila gets married and her husband is arrested and jailed which made her come back to her parents who are also old and not rich. Ayisha is sponsored by a rich man in the community to further her education.

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Alhaji 2 Sure..... Father to Jamila
Alhaji Tanko..... A building contractor
Hajia Abiba..... Mother to Jamila
Hajia Meikupa..... A Trader
Ayisha..... Daughter to Auntie Meimuna and Baba Ayisha
Jamila..... Wife to Don Abu and Daughter to Hajia Abiba
Don Abu..... Husband to Jamila
CID..... An Officer at the Criminal Investigation Department
Auntie Meimuna..... Mother to Ayisha
Baba Ayisha..... Father to Ayisha

SCENES DESCRIPTION

SCENARIO 1

Hajia Abiba, calls her daughter Jamila to assist her in her porridge business since that is the only business she does to keep her in school. Jamila refuses to assist her mother and says that she does not want to be in school neither will she learn a trade. This incidence happens when her school mates were buying from the parents.

SCENARIO 2

Ayisha, who sells before and after school reports to her parents that she could not sell anything that morning.

SCENARIO 3

Jamila who have dropped out of school, informs the parents about her intention of getting married. Her mother does not agree but her father (Alhaji 2 Sure) agrees with her daughter.

SCENARIO 4

Hajia Meimuna and Baba Ayisha plans on how to further Ayisha's education since they are not financially sound. Ayisha whose ambition was to be a judge never supported the idea of learning a trade by her parents. Baba Ayisha and the wife agrees on seeking assistance from some community members.

SCENARIO 5

Hajia Meikupa, tells the couple (Baba Ayisha and wife) to marry of their daughter since her place in her husband's home is the kitchen.

SCENARIO 6

Alhaji Tanko pledges to take care of Ayisha's tertiary education without any condition. The couple are excited and they go home to break the news to their daughter.

SCENARIO 7

Don Abu, the husband of Jamila is arrested of impregnating someone and also being a fraudster.

PLAY MAKING AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

The popular theatre methodology is a tool for mobilisation and organisation for sustainable development. It seeks to establish dialogue, through the horizontal approach with the marginalised and disempowered as discussed by Abah, (1997). He further confirmed that, the task of the in-coming group or outsiders is to create avenues for tearing down the potential barriers. This could be facilitated by recognising the existing contradictions and structures that perpetuate dominant especially at the rural level, while at the same seeking to go beyond these very structures. Abah, (1997) believed that, in most rural communities where domination has naturalised itself into the mores and values of the society, it is always difficult to identify the power lines where everybody is kith and kin.

After the story was created, the facilitators scheduled with the cast the time which will be favourable for the rehearsals because the project is to be done by the people therefore it should not be imposed on them. About three weeks was used to rehearse the play because the facilitators wanted the message that will be sent across to really register in the play. The cast had to rehearse very well to perfect all the actions since they were not professional theatre practitioners. In order to perfect the process and for more seriousness, before every rehearsal, a concentration exercise was performed.



Fig. 2. Performing a concentration exercise. Source: AYD concepts



Fig 3. Drama Rehearsals. Source: AYD concepts



Fig. 4. Rehearsals. Jamila's mum asking her to help in her trade. Source: AYD concepts



Fig. 5. Rehearsals. Ayisha and her parents deliberating on how they will finance her education. Source: AYD concepts

PRE-TEST PERFORMANCE

The pre-test performance was done, a day to the actual performance for final corrections and addition and the community members who were around. The essence of the pre-test performance was to help facilitator's correct mistakes in the delivery of the actors and improve upon the characterization, exits and entries. Facilitators ensured that the project was devoid of personal sentiments, cultural and social interruptions and anything that was seemed offensive in the community.



Fig, 6, Jamila's father rebukes her for not helping her mother in her trade. Source AYD concepts.



Fig.7, Ayisha's father in a state of confusion on how to finance his daughter's education. Source AYD concepts.



Fig.8. Ayisha and her parents thinking about how to finance her education. Source:AYD concepts.



Fig.9. Ayisha's parents asking Hajia Meikupa's for a loan to further their daughter's education. Source: AYD concepts.



Fig. 10. Alhaji Tanko's offering to support Ayisha's parents to further her education. Source: AYD concepts.

THE PERFORMANCE

The actual Tfd performance was on Friday 10th February, 2017. Before the actual performance, a clean-up exercise was undertaken to clean the whole community. The clean up was done with the help of the members of the community, Zoomlion Ghana Company to publicize the project and add up to the existing practices in the community (sanitation). The clean-up exercise was done as early at 6:30am and after that the set-up for the program was done. Mounting of canopies, arranging of chairs and fixing of sound to be tested were all put into place. The action created an awareness to the community members on the project although it was announced to them a day before and at the Jumma prayers on that day.



Fig.11. The Clean up exercise. Source: AYD concepts



Fig, 12. Jara dance performance. Source: AYD concepts



Fig. 13. Alhaji 2 Sure trying to defend his daughter on the issue of her not going to school, Source: AYD Concepts.



Fig. 14 MmaAyisha and her husband deliberating on how to get money for their daughter to go to school. Source: AYD Concepts.

III. POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

Immediately after the performance, the masters of ceremony (MCs) initiated the discussions. This is a very critical stage in Tfd, giving the audience equal opportunities and democratic platforms especially to the community members to ask questions and add on to the drama they have witnessed. This stage in the tfd process reveals whether the message was well delivered through post performance discussions. It could be deduced that the drama was really felt by the community people as some of the concerns that was raised were all geared towards the themes in the drama. The passion that accompanied the discussions really showed that actions portrayed in the drama were really something that was happening in the community.

Some of the concerns raised were, parents should have positive attitudes in educating their wards and stop buying cloths and attending unnecessary occasions. Children were also advised by some parents in the community to help their parents in whatever economic activities they engaged themselves. The rich people in the community should help parents in investing in educating the girls in the community. If Girls are educated, they will serve multi-purposely in the case of educating children and also serving as mentors in the community and the nation at large.

The chief of the community and his elders also gave their words of advice and inspiration to parents and youth in the community and later the chairperson's closing remarks.

Abdul Rahman Tijani said the vote of thanks and added on that, they should be reminded that Ghana is a mixed religious country where we can say that it is forbidden to educate a girl child but it is rather necessity which was followed by the closing prayer to draw the curtains down to end the program.



Fig. 15 A parent in the community asking question after the performance. Source: AYD concepts



Fig.17. A Sub Imam giving a word of advice to parents on their wards education. Source AYD concepts.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-ups are usually done by facilitators to help them know whether the message that was put across in the drama has been understood very well by the community members taken into consideration the appraisal during the post-performance discussion.

On the same day after the performance, the facilitators met the chief and his elders and expressed sincere gratitude towards them and some of the community members through a focus group discussion. The chiefs and their elders also thanked the facilitators for putting up a project like that which has enlightened them on the importance of educating their girl-child in the community.

EVALUATION

An post-evaluation days after the project proved that the message the facilitators put across in the drama was understood and has caused a positive change in the community considering the perception they had towards educating their female wards and the perception they now have as to now knowing the importance of educating their female wards and some citing us as examples to their children.

CHALLENGES

In every project, challenges are bound to be challenges to be experienced by organizers or facilitators. Challenges strengthen you to take bold and wise steps for the betterment of the project.

As facilitators we faced some challenges in the execution of the project. The first was the language barrier. Most of the people could speak Fante and Twi but opted to speak Hausa which is their official language and fluent in, making the project to opt for a translator.

Getting the assemblyman of the area to help the project get some tools for the clean-up exercise was another challenge. The Assemblyman found it difficult to approach the District assembly for the tools. He gave several assurances but failed to get the tools. This attitude forced the project facilitators to at short notice run around to hire tools for a successful execution of the clean up exercise.

Involving the community members and especially the target audience to participate and act in the drama became a challenge. They initially thought that the project wanted to take advantage of them but after explaining the reason for being there, they reluctantly agreed to be part of the process of creating the drama and choosing a rehearsal ground which was easily accessible by them for the project.

Another challenge the project encountered was securing another resource person when the resource person had called about three hours to time that she has to attend a meeting somewhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Theatre for development helps communities and facilitators to pursue so that giving back to the society which is the aim of education and the main focus of theatre will help transform the society positively. They should also be eloquent and take bold steps to achieve the success of their project but not only depend on people as depending on outside people may be disappointing.

All stakeholders in rural community development for behavioural change should come together to discuss how best to improve on the impact of all development agents sharing ideas to enhance the integrated development approach to address the problem of rural community development.

It is recommended that theatre is used to practicalise community issues and problems so that all the members in the community will be able come together to discuss issues affecting the people. There should also be the spirit of volunteerism, whereby a lot of cost is cut down as the people in participating will give off their potentials willingly. Again this spirit of participation and volunteerism will promote the culture of maintenance where there is communal ownership.

The performers who were part of the project as researchers and actors must be encouraged to form a standing theatre group to champion the cause of the community. Interested individuals and groups should also be encouraged to support this initiative.

Frequent workshops should be organised by the tfd practitioners to various Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) involved in community development in participatory community development, using tfd methodology.

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