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Abstract

There is a serious global concern for a just and equitable society where humans can live freely without fear of molestation and harassment. This concern has culminated in experts from various fields of humanity to fashion out ways and modalities through which the people can be awakened consciously through education, sensitization and information in an effort to achieve positive change in both social and behavioural spheres. In the theatre, Community Theatre has been designed to serve the above functions. It is also important to observe in Nigeria, that the Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) has become a potent institution through which social and behavioural factors can be confronted to align with the needed and desired change in the society. This paper seeks to evaluate the relationship between Community Theatre Praxis and the Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) approach. The methodology for this study is qualitative and it relies on relevant library and documented materials for assessment, analysis and evaluation of Community Theatre Praxis in relation to the SBCC approach and application. This paper through illustrations has shown in the SBCC approach has been proven to be very effective and that this approach should be replicated all over Nigeria

Keywords: SBCC (Social and Behavioural Change Communication), Theatre for Development, Critical Overview, Evaluation and Approach

Introduction

In rural and urban communities, efforts are being made to address the people concerning certain problems and anti-social activities inhibiting the needed peace, progress, freedom and development in the society. In order to bring about a better community and society, the social realities prevalent in the social, political, economic, cultural, religious and other domains have become a major concern, calling on various professionals to proactively fashion out ways to reposition the society through persuasive means. However, it is pertinent to note that SBCC requires a synergetic understanding of the appropriate means or channels to be employed and how to be properly harnessed. At present, Community Theatre is exploited to complement the effort of Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) approach. Suffice to say that communication has been globally recognized and accepted as a key vehicle for heralding change in various societies just for this reason. The success of any desired change in the society is a function of a well-fabricated social intervention process and strategy that would be more effective and all-embracing to accommodate all the facets of the target-beneficiaries.

This paper, in highlighting the perspective of Theatre for Development in the social intervention scheme that is community-based, seeks to justify or establish the relevance of the Theatre for Development concept in the SBCC. The yardstick for this paper is for critical analysis and the conscious evaluation of Community Theatre Praxis to communicate change message in the SBCC approach. This is done with a particular focus on the extent through which the people and the society can benefit from social interventions strategy.

The utilization of various models, approaches and concepts to inform, educate and sensitize communities has caused increasing concern at a global level. However, the involvement of the Community Theatre for the aforementioned responsibilities presents a practical dimension at a community level. The Community Theatre process involves interrogating the people in the target community to find out their challenges in order to enable the improvisation of a dramatic piece where their problems are dramatically resolved. The implication is that Community Theatre is drama-based in approach, the Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) becomes significant because its approach and concept explore a holistic strategy to communicate the change message.

This paper seeks to evaluate the different methodologies inherent in the Community Theatre Praxis. Furthermore, the study shall analyse the modes of operation in Community Theatre to show they are affecting the society positively through change communication.

Empirical Framework

This paper is anchored on Augusto Boal's techniques in his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed* in developing Community Theatre. Relying on this framework, Boal asserts Theatre of the Oppressed as "a form of popular theatre, of, by, and for the people engaged in the struggle for their liberation" (82). The concept of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" in the context Community Theatre is essentially a build-up based on Paulo Freire's assertion that development should not be given but made to evolve from the communal action and reflection by the entire membership of the community (97). Augusto Boal's assertion above implies that the people in the community need to be enlightened through theatre in order to be transformed.

This paper analyses Community Theatre based on "the systematic application of interactive, theory-based and research driven communication process and strategies to address tipping points for change at the individual, community and social levels" (USAID 2). The above assertion is relevant to the concept and approach of SBCC. However, this holistic strategy in SBCC shall also be hinged on the various empirical models that require programmes-combined activities for social and behaviour change communication, representing a comprehensive approach to designing, implementing and evaluating interventions which target the multiple influences and behaviours in the society. The "problem-solving" theory in the "Theatre of the Oppressed" shall form the empirical framework in Community Theatre as applied in the SBCC approach.

Overview of Theatre for Development or Community Theatre

Theatre for Development or Community Theatre is a term that describes a practical process in communicating the desired change message employing song, drama and dance as modes of sensitizing, educating and empowering communities to improve their status quo. The implication in this context, as the term connotes, is set to research, analyze and solve critical issues in the community, empowering indigenous people to enhance or make change towards positive behaviours, knowledge and attitudes regarding vital social issues challenging their lives. According to Oga Steve Abah:

It is about the ability to understand the situation, the politics and cultural dynamics, the layers of meanings and the nature of relationship that exist in the community. Sometimes the ontological is important in so far as development is not simply a satisfaction of the physical needs. The psychological, the spiritual, the religious and the social must all be embedded in the process... the amateurs must read meanings, must notice trends and sense dangers and conflicts (ix).

It is from the above standpoint that Community Theatre becomes a tasking and painstaking exercise that requires commitment, dedication, devotion, resilience, doggedness, open-mindedness, firmness and good observation in order to achieve the desired goal for the target community. Theatre for Development serves as an eye-opener to the masses, to basic truth and development in the society. Partly inspired by Antonio Gramsci's interpretation of societal culture, the seminal humanist and theatre practitioner, Augusto Boal, developed a technique known as 'Theatre of the Oppressed' from his work in developing Community Theatre. In collaboration with Boal's philosophy of theatre, Paulo Freire and Bertolt Brecht also viewed the world as a subject of constant change, and that reality is not static (Nda 14). In pursuit of public sensitization and societal change, they all advocated for a theatre that would have the capacity to reveal to man his potentials as one capable of handling his own situations and turning them around to suit him and his purpose. Theatre for Development according to Nnanake Ekeke:

...engages the attention of the people through a dramatic presentation of social problems, thus making the people to see their problems as well as dramatically proffering solutions in critical ways. Community Theatre has the potentials of addressing problems affecting the society ranging from socio-political and cultural conflicts, to development problems,

including exploitation, corruption, oppression, superstition, social vices and other societal anomalies. (2022, 129)

Bertolt Brecht goes further to advocate for a theatre that has the ability to lay bare the evils of the elites, unite the poor and move them toward achieving change. Augusto Boal, on the other hand, maintains that the public must also have enlightenment for sensitization. Following from this, he advocated for a theatre that has the interest of the masses at the centre, in which the theatre can be taken to the villages – in their farms, markets, village squares and other places they can be found. Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed sees conventional theatre as "theatre of intimidation" and calls for an ideological theatre known as Community Theatre.

Theatre for Development has the necessary components to get the rural people involved in the process of finding solutions to their problems. Boal insists that the theatre is a language that can be used by any person and serves as a vehicle for public sensitization and social revolutionary. In Nigeria, Community Theatre started in the University of Zaria in 1978 as a part of the school curriculum before it extended to other universities in Nigeria and adopted as a sensitization tool by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to Ayakoroma:

The Samaru Theatre Project has Community Theatre as a forum of theatre for conscientization. It was started in 1976 at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria by a group known as ABU Collective. The group comprises of Michael Etherton and Brian Crow, Nigerian theatre artists, such as Salihu Bappa, Oga Steve Abah and Tunde Lakoju. These theatre practitioners were determined to avail their theatre skills to the peasants and workers of the Zaria region in their struggle against oppression (Kafewo et al 82; Utin, 346)

Theatre for Development is seen as a pedestal which galvanizes the oppressed into revolting and challenging the existing structures. This is because people are made to be instantly aware of the intrigues of the authority. It therefore means that Theatre for Development draws people out into a common platform, thereby enabling them to be sensitized in order to take critical decisions on issues that bother them. Nnanake Ekeke expands this purpose to include, "... awakening of consciousness of the society and its citizens... for socio-economic development" (44).

Theatre for Development is a reflection of the communal situation in the aspect of social reality. It is a veritable tool for achieving social change in various ways. Speaking on the role of Theatre for Development, Ahmed Yerima asserts that it "has become thought-provoking to the inspiring extent that it can ask the audience to reflect on issues; social and political which affect their lives" (6). It follows, therefore that Theatre for Development charts a course for overhauling the society through change advocacy in various spheres. It can as well open man to social action and his aspiration to revolutionize the society to a positive standpoint through change in actions and behaviours.

The Theatre for Development or Community Theatre process involves interrogating the people in the target community to find out their challenges in order to enable the improvisation of a dramatic piece where their problems are woven into an improvised play and the solutions are dramatically proffered. According to Boh Aondawase, "this idea (of Community Theatre) is anchored on the theory of 'problem-solving' which sees problem-solving as dialogue... that enables people to identify their problems and suggest solutions, after a critical analysis" (104). To also justify the position of dramatic implication of Theatre for Development, Nnanake Ekeke asserts that "theatre and performance should not be viewed from the perspective of fantasy but on the viability of exposing and developing the socio-economic aspect of nationhood" (44). The above assertion by Nnanake Ekeke presents Theatre for Development or Community Theatre as a non-confrontational platform to sensitize and effect behavioural change

Overview of SBCC

Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) is:

... primarily a brand of communication that has long existed in the social and behavioural disciplines; in the social sciences and humanities. It is also a field of study that is strongly anchored on theories of human behaviour and the philosophies of human existence with the aim of bringing about transformation in the ecological system through nature. Behaviour change specifically has attracted the concern of economists and advertisers.

Economists are concerned about human needs and wants as determined by human behaviour (Iyorza 3).

It is pertinent to note that the social constructs that dictate human behaviour in the society have affected individuals in the society in both negative and positive ways. The negative behaviours in the society have further constituted anti-social behaviours in the areas of robbery, prostitution, drugs addiction, killing, child abuse, human trafficking and other social vices. These inherent attitudes in the society have made the society and the environment more uncomfortable for peace-loving individuals. It is from the foregoing that Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) becomes significant: Its module and concept explore a holistic strategy to communicate the message of change effectively to the human society. Making use of communication to catalyze social and behavioural change is not as simple as it may seem to be, because it requires a programme design, time, energy and resources into designing an intervention strategy that goes beyond basic outreach and information campaigns. Suffice to say that there are certain factors that influence behaviour: personal knowledge, media, habits, routines, social factors, communication, socio-cultural norms, self-efficiency, environmental factors religious and family. All these factors are properly considered in the SBCC strategy for a comprehensive achievement in change communication. Noar, opines that:

The emergence of information technology tools such as the internet, wireless technology, and personal digital assistants have expanded the range of theory-based strategies available for effective behaviour change in health care and community settings. Behavioural interventions should be sensitive to audience and contextual factors, and recognize that most behaviour change is incremental and that maintenance of change usually requires continued and focused efforts (15).

It therefore follows that change communication through SBCC approach requires the utilization of multiple strategies to achieve multiple goals in the change intervention process. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), SBCC is “the systematic application of interactive, theory based and research driven communication process and strategies to address tipping points for change at the individual, community and social levels” (2). A tipping point here means the dynamics of social change, where trends rapidly evolve into permanent changes. This can be driven by a naturally occurring event or a strong determinant change – such as political will that provides the final push to ‘tip over’ barrier to change (USAID 2). There are three key characteristics in the SBCC process, interpreted as C-Change:

SBCC is an interactive, researched, planned and strategic process aimed at changing social conditions and individual behaviours.

SBCC applies comprehensive models to find an effective tipping point for change by examining individual knowledge, motivation and other BCC concepts and social cultural gender norms, skills, physical access and legislation that contribute to an enabling environment.

SBCC operates through three main strategies namely advocacy, social mobilization and behaviour change communication (Iyorza 13).

From the above, it should be noted that the entire process in the SBCC is hinged on well-designed approaches, guided by theories and principles for effective application to get the expected outcome.

Evaluation of Theatre for Development Praxis in SBCC

The Theatre for Development Praxis, as explained in this paper, is a concept with a theatrical nomenclature that allows people to look at themselves in a more critical way and prompt themselves to be proactive and be transformed positively. It is a form of theatre that combines research, entertainment and education. It is often approached from two angles: performance-based and workshop-based. SBCC on the other hand, as a brand of change communication, operates through three (3) main strategies: **advocacy, social mobilization and behavioural change communication**. SBCC applies comprehensive model to find an effective tipping point for change by examining individual knowledge,

motivation and other behavioural change communication (BCC) concepts as well as social, cultural and gender norms, skills, physical access and legislation that contribute to enabling the environment.

SBCC is an interactive and strategic process aimed at changing social conditions and individual behaviours. Theatre for Development in the same vein refers to a process whereby a theatrical performance is basically used to research, analyze and solve critical issues in the community, empowering indigenous people to enhance or make change towards positive behaviours, knowledge and attitudes regarding social issues affecting their lives. The modalities in both SBCC and Theatre for Development involve Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – employing facilitators as in the case of Theatre for Development and engaging focus team in the case of SBCC to analyze the situation and design a process to achieve change. In SBCC, there are multiple channels through which the change message can be communicated to the target audience whereas in Theatre for Development, community people are made to identify and analyze their situations, perform the improvised play and conduct discussions (under the guidance of facilitators) to achieve the desired change.

In Theatre for Development, outsiders (facilitators) fundamentally are not allowed to interfere with the values of the community or impose their reality on the people but to encourage and enable them to express their own ideas. SBCC on the other hand considers all aspects of the society, segment the audience, focus on the target audience and create interventions and materials as relevant, to communicate change.

Evaluating the Contributions of Theatre for Development in Nigeria's SBCC Projects

Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) approaches involves Advocacy, social (community) Mobilization and Behaviour Change Communication. Each level of these approaches is relevant based on socio-demographic, geographic, behavioural or psychographic differences among the members of the target audience. In most cases the Advocacy approach may not yield the desired change from the audience, mostly in rural communities, thus making Social (community) Mobilization an option. This is where Theatre for Development becomes relevant in the change communication process.

In an attempt to curb the menace of polio disease that was ravaging the Northern region of Nigeria through the sensitization for immunization, the BBC Media Action Nigeria in collaboration with Population Media Center (PMC) and United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) adopted an advocacy approach in reducing the people through radio drama titled: *Madubi Drama*. This radio drama was recorded and broadcast to the people on the need for them to be immunized against polio. This message channel could be classified as the Advocacy approach in the SBCC approach. The challenges in this channel were: the language and content of the broadcast drama in relation to the huge illiterate population who felt marginalized; the radio coverage area; the cost; and accessibility of the people to radio.

The failure of Advocacy approach in SBCC project can best be supplemented with Social (community) Mobilization. In the case of sourcing for appropriate communication channel that would impact more on the Northern people, the UNICEF Nigeria sought for a better and result-oriented approach of reaching the local target beneficiaries. The Social (community) Mobilization approach with Theatre for Development or Community Theatre (as the channel) was then conceived, and thus the emergence of *Madubi Live*. In *Madubi Live* the stage was brought to the doorstep (community) of the target audience, anchored on Participatory Communication Theory – where the community people partook live in the drama production with session for questions and answers. This community theatre gave the people a sense of pride, ownership and responsibility. Commenting on the uniqueness of *Madubi Live* (Community Theatre) from the radio drama version, Mr. NasiruMu'azulsah, the Producer of *Madubi Live*, submits:

The development of *Madubi Live* is a marked improvement from the initial *Madubi Drama*. This is because, where one is strictly radio drama, the other is stage performance. Also, the initial one was strictly radio drama without a discussion, but *Madubi Live* has discussion element with live audience. The radio drama is produced and distributed to partner stations for broadcast, while *Madubi Live* is adapted to suit the issues of the location with regards to polio and routine immunization (Fahsanu 12).

Theatre for Development has proven to be more effective channel in SBCC than other channels available. According to Adie and Shamagana:

The conventional media (radio, television and newspaper) in their traditional forms have at various points in development communication history been criticized for their inability to effectively galvanize local people towards achieving sustainable development. This necessitated strategic retooling of these media to better accommodate local people's participation in development interventions (Fahsanu 2).

The lesson from the *Madubi Live* as a programme in the mold of Theatre for Development has proved the efficacy of this channel in relation to the entire SBCC process. The inability of involving Theatre for Development in SBCC project can be a major setback in change communication intervention. This is mostly when it has to do with the remote part of the society. Pertinent to say that the understanding of the targeted audience enables the project's facilitators to choose a proper channel as **tipping point to tip over** the social and behaviour change messages. Tailoring the SBCC strategy to the needs and values involving the people in the rural community requires Social (community) Mobilization approach and by extension Theatre for Development or Community Theatre channel. For example, for several decades, Nigeria experienced dented image and upheavals in its political, economic and social spheres.

In an effort to design SBCC approach to tackle the challenges, the Nigerian government considered it fit to rebrand Nigeria and Nigerians with "**Good People, Great Nation**" slogan. The "**Good People, Great Nation**" was composed by Dora Akunyili and the phrase was chosen to be the slogan for the designed change. In March 2009 after the slogan and logo were launched as a rebranding project, the then Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan challenged Nigerians not to perceive the campaign project as another exercise in sloganeering but should be perceived as a genuine attempt at making every Nigerian to embrace renewed commitment to the recreation of Nigeria's image. The four-worded slogan: **Good People, Great Nation** was intended to convey the deep message to reposition the integrity of the Nigerian people within and in the international circle – for citizens to be good so as not to be bad products and image for the country.

In as much as some people have lost confidence in the integrity of being Nigerians due to bad government, economic hardship, insurgency, corruption, unemployment, kidnapping, rape, incessant industrial actions and other societal vices, there is hope of greatness if only the behaviour of its citizens from the local level to the federal level is on the right path. In the situation that the people are blaming the leadership of the country for the poor image; and the leadership in turn comes up with a mere slogan to be aired as a slogan on radio and television stations for them to change their behaviours has been perceived as an empty slogan without commensurate action. The "Good People, Great Nation", however, becomes an advocacy project in the mold of SBCC and the success of the project is quite contestable and questionable.

Since the launch of this rebranding project in 2009, the desired impact seems not to be achieved, because beside the reach of the slogan to the rural people who may not have access to radio and television media, language barrier may be another challenge. As a result, the people in the rural communities and some urban communities considered the rebranding project as a mere government slogan. The point here is that the rebranding project would have been more successful if the Social (community) Mobilization approach through the Community Theatre channel was adopted to complement the slogan of advocacy in this SBCC-proned sensitization project. However, it is necessary that governments and organizations that are targeting social and behaviour change in the society should seek professional advice by consulting SBCC practitioners for professional inputs to guarantee efficiency and success in various SBCC projects implementation.

Recommendations

It is believed that the analytical presentation of the Theatre for Development Praxis with participatory drama has the capacity at a community level to effectively sensitize, inform and educate the people through their direct involvement, and therefore should be recommended to be used by theatre practitioners for these purposes. It is recommended that a wider SBCC approach with its comprehensive strategies should be employed for a deeper and more realistic result since it has proved to be a brand of communication comprising all fields in social sciences and humanities. Theatre-based organizations and professionals should utilize Theatre for Development in SBCC projects and relate them as deemed fit in order to maximize their social responsibilities in changing the society positively.

The holistic strategies in the SBCC approach should be injected into the Theatre for Development template to further strengthen the sensitization process for a more productive outcome. This entails the overhauling of the performance-based strategy to embrace other communication channels that can be exploited to create more impact on the people at the community level. These approaches are highly stressful activities in time, energy and finance. It is therefore recommended that governments, non-governmental organizations, business organizations and financially endowed individuals who are interested in changing the society should be involved by partnering with the professionals in the social intervention process to achieve the needed societal change.

Summary

This paper analyzed and critically evaluated the Theatre for Development Praxis based on its concept and application and its relationship in the context of the SBCC approach. It took an analytical and critical look at the link, contributions and differences in their strategies in the social intervention process. This paper has been able to define the relationship between Community Theatre and the SBCC approach for a synergetic approach in their applications to sensitize, inform, educate as well as to communicate message for social and behavioural change. In this regard, the Theatre for Development Praxis provides an ample platform in partnership with the SBCC approach in the process of arriving at behavioural change at the community level and the wider society.

Conclusion

It is the submission of this paper that the theoretical basis of the social responsibility inherent in these two approaches, on the ground of their relevance for social interventions, can be effectively and efficiently harmonized in a symbiotic manner to be employed in community sensitization, education, information as well as in behavioural change. It is however imperative for the theatre practitioners to incorporate Theatre for Development boldly and deliberately into the SBCC in order to facilitate and enable the discharge of these societal interventions.

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