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**THE PLACE OF FOLLOW-UP IN COMMUNITY BASED THEATRE: AN EVALUATION OF THE ABU FUNTUA EXPERIENCE****ABODUNRIN, Olusegun/ AKOH, Jimmy**

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Most development projects have often adopted a top-to-bottom approach in their conception and execution of programme activities. The “top-down” approach in development is predicated on the principle that recipients of development are passive and ignores the fact that they have useful knowledge and skills. This process has resulted in alienating local beneficiary communities. Thus, many projects, though laudable, have failed to bring about changes in the lives of the rural dwellers because they have not sufficiently sensitized and mobilized the masses, and often ignored the people’s indigenous and traditional wisdom and knowledge. The rural people then see such projects as an invasion of their culture and lifestyle, and refuse to meaningfully participate.

Theatre in the hands of the dominant class cannot be said to have always targeted participatory development, but influenced by Marxist thought, Bertolt Brecht attacked the dominant classical style of his era and through theatre attempted to give the people ample opportunity for critical thinking. Augusto Boal improved on Brecht when in his theatre he proposes a theatre where the people through participation become empowered leading to action and change. This has sparked off various participatory theatre practices in the world presently.

Community Theatre as a development strategy is based on the theory that people, especially underprivileged communities in rural or semi-urban areas, relate more to development programmes in which they become and are seen as active participants, rather than passive recipients of development assistance. Community Theatre thus, relocates indigenous cultures, from the periphery to the very centre of the community, and makes it an integral part of the communal planning and decision-making process. This type of development, while taking a new dimension in relation to the process earlier noted, according to Gbilekaa (1997), “Relates to the widening of the intellectual horizon, the raising of consciousness and the encouragement of dialogue and participation in issues relating to the peoples economic, political religious and social realities within their environment.” It is a development whose definition, observes Nasiri (1993):

Implies a comprehensive and qualitative growth and improvement of society ... with regard to the individual and collective life of its citizenry; and thus engenders an approach which employs all paradigms at its disposal in the process of achieving its goals. It is therefore, an approach which is committed to using theatre [in its totality] as a relevant medium and language in mobilizing people, particularly those in rural communities, towards self-reliance and development” in both a participatory and interactive manner.

The Western origin of community theatre has been traced to the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal in available literature. The success of South America’s experience has a significant impact on the development of community theatre practice in Africa. It has been implemented in Tanzania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and many other countries to facilitate community

development. Community Theater, which is also known as development theatre was very successful in the 1980s and 1990s. In Kampala there are hundreds of small-scale theater groups, such as *Bakayimbara Dramactors*, that give improvisatory performances on a range of contemporary local issues in Luganda. Popular among community theatre in Botswana is the *Laedza Batanani* Popular Theater project in, which started in 1974 and has become an annual event since then. These troupes use their drama projects to examine problems ranging from cattle theft, inflation, and unemployment to education and health.

### **Origin of Community Theatre in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria**

Over the past three decades the Drama programme of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria has theoretically and practically engaged its staff and students in the field; experimenting communication for development through drama. This experiment is a yearly tradition that has created a good relationship between the University, the neighbouring communities and other parts of the country. This practice is traceable to the establishment of the Drama programme in the University in 1975. Michael Etherton, who joined the University then, was instrumental to both the establishment of the Drama programme and the development of the community project, as he became the Head of the Drama programme. The Drama programme as it were then was and still is integrated within the Department of English at the University. This development was spurred by a practice which was already gaining prevalence within the South African region, especially Botswana, and in Zambia where theatre had quickly assumed a means of addressing community's problems; and based on Etherton's experience from such background. Etherton (2004) is unequivocal in acknowledging this fact. He affirms in an interview with Adelugba that:

I was highly influenced by the work in Botswana – partly because Botswana work had developed from the work we started in Zambia. Initial efforts in this direction or experimentation however, had been largely with University drama teachers on an unofficial basis but later extended to University students, adult educators and literacy officers, and young peasant farmers, in making plays which situate the problems of oppressed groups in a wider social analysis.

The need for a community focused theatre in A.B.U., Zaria arose out of the desire to make theatre more functional to the outside community and to also depart from the academic-centred type of theatre. The move was also to present the rural man as one capable of not only creating but also appreciating and enjoying theatre. Interestingly, it is the actual process of this experimentation that is most crucial, as it carries the thinking of the whole group forward. To a great extent, according to Oga Steve Abah, a Professor of Theatre for Development (TFD), pioneer member of the TFD in ABU, Zaria and currently the Director of the Institute for Development and Research at ABU, in Abah (1989):

The thinking behind the community orientation was to make theatre available to people outside the University Campus. This was to break from the tradition of a purely academic focus. The programme wanted to show that ordinary people can also enjoy and appreciate theatre. Secondly, the intention was to relate theatre to the realities of society and the problems as well as the aspirations of the ordinary people.

Abah's position is further buttressed by Etherton (1982), who explains that:

Taking theatre to the people outside the university was a demonstration of the concern of the academia with the welfare of people outside the campus. Perhaps, drawn out by the frustration of scanty development being witnessed in communities or a desire to be involved as catalysts for change, ABU Zaria Drama Unit made community theatre work, an essential aspect of theatre pedagogy.

Community Theatre operates on two levels in ABU the Community Theatre which started in 1975 and the Samaru project (a later development) which started in 1980. The Samaru project (presently a second year course) is designed to prepare first year drama students for Community Theatre, which is more engaging, in the third and or the final year.

### **The Samaru Project**

The Samaru Project is a street theatre project which was designed and projected to relate to the immediate neighbourhood of the University community, Samaru – the community hosting the University – by “taking ... performances to them” (Abah and Etherton, 1985). This is a development that is hinged on the backdrop of the philosophy of the Zambian playwright and theatre activist, Kabwe Kasoma who was quoted as saying that “the idea is you take theatre to the people, instead of expecting the people to come to the theatre” (Abah, 2005). Abah further explains that “the crucial underlying intention of the Samaru Project is to raise [the] consciousness of the people through a process of research, play-making and performance”.

According to Samuel Ayedime Kafewo (2004):

The Samaru Project is the second of the two courses that involves students interacting directly with the outside community. This is done in the second year or what used to be part one of the drama programme of ABU. The other is Community Theatre in the third year, which is rather corollary to Samaru Project. At this stage, students must have of course received basic training not only in the style and techniques of performance, but also in gathering information or research.

The Samaru project involves students in creating plays about the problems of Samaru village. These problems range from sanitation, overcrowding, drug abuse, prostitution, unemployment, gossip etc. The problems in Samaru village are those one could identify in most semi urban communities. The project was tagged “Wayar da kanjuna” (mutual enlightenment). The ‘Migrant’ method of data collection is used. The plays which are eventually created from the information collected from the Samaru inhabitants are taken back to them for consumption after which there is a post-performance discussion.

Though the plays made attempts to reflect the people’s problems, the people hardly participated in the crucial stages of the creative process. They were involved only at the data collection stage and the performance and post-performance discussion not as participants put as recipients. The students prejudiced the interpretation of the data because the people were kept out of the creative process. The audience is simply made “passive recipients” of an already finished product which was at variance with the premise on which Freire and Boal’s theories were founded.

Freire (1988) had taken a swipe at the educational system in Brazil, which he considered “dehumanising” because it considered the oppressed native (colonised) unintelligible and must be taught everything (by the coloniser). A student was seen as one incapable of thinking. Freire observed the people had been reduced into passivity. Such condition provided fertile ground for the cultivation of the “culture of silence” through what he calls “banking education”. It became quite obvious that no educational system is without intended goals. A totalitarian, one-off “banking education” which only teaches the student to be a passive recipient incapable of contributing his input into the creative process was therefore unacceptable to Freire.

He opposed a situation where the student was made the unquestioning banker while the teacher or the theatre worker or the development ‘expert’ was the sole monopolist of knowledge. This type of education where there is no symbiosis that allows feedback from the student to the teacher, Disai, Gaurav (1990) suggests is “a process of instruction in the power structures of society” whose supreme aim is “to teach people how to adjust successfully to the social role they may be called on to play without questioning”. Aligning with Freire, Gumucio-Dragon (1994) posits that real education “engenders a process that instills in each individual a level of consciousness necessary to develop his or her creative potentials, to achieve independence, solidarity and justice”.

As a response to this conformist practice of education Okwori (2008) captures the limitations in the Samaru Project which he said is severally described as a migrant method in the following words:

The first year students ... go to the community, and after they finish the programme the community never saw anybody again until another first year students go again next year. And so this was beginning to pose a problem. The exercises were asking people about their problems ... not proffering solutions, and the students didn’t have the capacity, the department did not have the capacity to intervene or bring about any positive change in the lives of the community people as a result of the theatre. So people were getting fatigued ... you came last year, what did you bring? This year then you are coming to ask us of the situation, and the situation has not changed for us. So there began a lot of critique from the people.

Though the Samaru project has not produced such positive results as the Community Theatre project, the response from the Samaru inhabitants has been very impressive. They have reciprocated by asking students to perform in the annual ‘Kalankwa’ festival.

### **Community Theatre**

In the Community Theatre Project, a workshop village is selected, preliminary consultations are made with the community, and then students are brought in for a period of one week or two to stay in the village together with the villagers. They eat their food, share in their everyday work, do the same chores with them, and together the community will begin to develop rapport, they will begin to break down their differences and begin to have trust. And once they have trust, they will be able to share problems and together plays will be devised based on the information collected through interaction with the community dwellers. Previously, the Community Theatre was a second year course but it is now a third year course which is an upshot from what is obtainable in the Samaru Project. The critical shift now is the process - that in engaging in the process of play creation, the people themselves are developing a sense of awareness and a sense of knowledge about their problems. This approach like Okwori noted, is meant to help the community to evolve strategies for dealing with their problems.

The Community Theatre project in ABU has been transformatory. At its earlier stage, villagers' participation was very minimal. For example, the Soba project (1977), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) Campaign in Obasanjo's regime, which was titled "Wasan Manoma" (A Farmers Play), involved the farmers only during the research and performance and post-performance discussion. The "outside-in" method which was used here did not leave any skills behind with the villagers to enable them continue with the project. The need to transcend that level manifested itself in the Maska project (1979), Bomo (1980 – 1984), Tudun Sarki (1981) in which members of the community were actually involved in the process from the research, problem identification, analysis of issues and problems, scenario-making, dramatisation, performance and post-performance discussion.

In the Bomo project for example, a group of peasant farmers from the village sat down with theatre workers from the University to discuss their problems. They also participated fully in the workshop. The villagers played very decisive roles in the plays that emerged out of the workshop. Usually, the workshop was led in such a way that it was critique-oriented.

When eventually the play was performed before the villagers, most of them joined because they had seen their friends playing their lives. At this state, theatre was actually being transferred to the rightful owners. It ceased to be the monopoly of the few within the confines of the University. They could now use theatre as a tool for informal education which teaches them to question their present realities, and to challenge those structures that had always tried to suffocate them. In trying to make the villagers to seek an alternative solution to their problems and suffering, performance-oriented focus was de-emphasised.

According to Illah (1982):

It is not just making a play and taking it to the village for performance; it is the process of making the play, the process by which all of us, peasants and students come to a form of consciousness; and it is this "form of consciousness" which spurs the people into action.

The consequence has crystallised in the formation of two base groups in Bomo – The "Kungiyar Samarin Manoman Bomo" (Bomo Youth Farmers' Club), and "So Dangi" (Love Your Neighbour). These two groups now make their own plays independent of the outside group from the University. They have also registered as Youth Development Organisations with the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA), a Non-Governmental Organisation. They engage themselves in development projects in their communities.

Community Theatre as action research is a strategy that utilizes different communication tools to provide a stimulus for thought and action. The core essence of participation process of the theatre can be found in the fact that the workshop experience is a collaboration between the workshop catalysts and the people for whom the change is desired. Okwori (2004) describes it as "a research process that tries to diminish the barrier between the researcher as a collector of information and the researched as the supplier of it". As a collaborative experience between two, it becomes an occasion for gaining and creating knowledge. This is because "both parties are engaged in a situation of learning and sharing experiences which allows for deep exploration, analysis, and discussions that help people get better understanding of issues around them and think of how to improve their lives" (Kafewo 2004).

To this end the methodology usually involves a designed process that includes the following stages: Preliminaries, Community Research, Data Analysis, Scenario building, Rehearsals, Performance and

Post-Performance discussions, and Follow Through. It is important to note however, that this design is not fixed. It can be amended depending on the circumstances and the situation of a particular workshop.

**Step One: Preliminaries-** This is a stage where students as theatre animateurs pay a visit to project communities to discuss the project, its modalities and logistics. Permission is sought from the community's relevant authorities and initial basic information about the community is collected. Once an agreement is reached with the community as regards the project, the organizational and operational arrangements should be determined by them or with them. Okwori (2004) notes that: "the preliminary stage is very important as it helps to identify available communication channels, traditions and cultural factors without which the project cannot happen or succeed". When this is done, the stage is set for the team to move into the community.

**Step Two: Community Research-** To begin the TFD exercise, it is important to objectively articulate the community's problems/issues as seen by the people themselves. By this, the people are involved in their own research rather than external forces coming to determine what their problems are. In this participatory approach, the team of participants associates freely with the community, living with them, eating with them, "sharing in their daily activities, while at the same time observing and respecting the different traditions and values" (Ahura, 1990). The main information gathering systems are discussions and sharing of experiences, observations from walking around and taking part in their performances and interviews. These are crucial processes for general acceptability and participation. Daniel and Bappa (2004) explain that, "community research could take some days depending on the duration of the project to be undertaken". They elucidate further that, "the TFD practitioners must ensure that every attempt of sentimental and emotional tendencies is avoided in terms of language, appearance and general conduct".

**Step Three: Data Analysis-** The information gathered from the community research is then presented at an open community forum. They are extensively discussed by everyone in-terms of how the issues came about, their effects, what can be done and to what consequences. At this stage, care must be taken to avoid attitudes of blaming one party against the other. Objective dialogue that protects and assures a collective advantage is important. The practitioners' sense of diplomacy and rationale is well needed in such an open forum.

**Step Four: Scenario Building-** Having produced the raw materials for performances, it is now time to search for the story that will highlight and link the problems in a dramatic way, such that will provoke discussion and challenge people to take action. This is the point where appropriate cultural forms are identified and integrated. You should take care to allow the story evolve from the general sensibilities of the people. The scenario should be a plan of action which addresses the changing perspective of the community. You should facilitate the process of the story creation. You may use real life stories of the people in the community which illustrate the negative consequences of the conflict and how beneficial it will be if they decide to come together and work together. In doing this, always ensure that the entire community is involved.

**Step Five: Rehearsals-** In conventional theatre, performances are considered the most important focus of a theatrical activity. In community theatre, rehearsals assume greater emphasis. This is because emphasis on community theatre is on the process. The rehearsal process involves the people trying out how to play the characters and dramatize the story. As they do so, they increase their awareness and understanding of issues at stake, thereby getting conscientized, re-oriented, and empowered. Rehearsals are conducted in the open. Members of the community are encouraged

to discuss actions and ideas being tried out in a friendly manner. Different people are encouraged to play roles. This process of collective creation and articulation forges group solidarity and throw up challenges which can spur actions in the right direction. Rehearsal times should be at the convenience of the community.

**Step Six: Performance and Post Performance Discussion-** Rehearsal becomes performance once the play-making process crystallizes. Performances are an extension of the rehearsals. Like the rehearsals, they allow for the community members to intervene. The performance must contend with the noise, the haggling and the human traffic impinging upon the performance venues/sites. Exaggerated actions are useful to attract attention, generate interest and clarify issues. The body in such moments complement in actions and movements, what words are supposed to say. “It is necessary that the performers draw the audience into the play as participants, by engaging the audience regularly” (Yerima, 1990). To do this the actors constantly throw actions and debates to them, ask questions, call them as witnesses, request their support for arguments, conspire with them. Tell them what you are about to do, distinguish between you as a person and the character you are portraying, ask for their comments and opinions over an issue, reach out and act in their midst, touch them, take sides with them. When the exercise comes to an end, sit with the people and encourage them to re-examine the issue in the play and plan strategies for action.

**Step Seven: Follow Through-** It is possible that the action strategies agreed upon at the end of the community theatre experience and the issue of the play may just fritter away because of lack of will or motivation or resources to carry them through. Daniel and Bappa writing on the need of a follow through note that, “This is one very important area in which past TFD projects have serious challenge as little effort is made to return to the community to monitor the progress which has been brought about as a result of the information shared”. Mbachaga (2011) further comments that, “Measuring the depth of impact and cross checking results and change as a result of TFD interventions has been a challenge despite the accolades for the practice across the globe, constraints continue to hamper the full realization of the philosophy or even expectations of the practice bringing about change.”

It is therefore important for the team to re-visit the communities and give them encouragement and help to motivate and re-motivate them, to examine new areas of co-operation and to evaluate the impact/effect of what was done previously and what is going on at the moment. Our understanding of the role of theatre in the promotion of sustainable development will be drawn upon three consecutive Community Theatre experiments in Funtua by students of the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

### **The Funtua Field Work: Background**

As part of its academic program for the year 2004/2005 session, the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, ABU, Zaria embarked on a community theatre project in Funtua Local Government Area. The community theatre project was planned in collaboration with the National Youth Council (NYC), Funtua Branch under whose umbrella most of the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) operate.

The justification for the choice of Funtua as a field location derives from the fact that Funtua Township is about an hour's drive from Zaria. It is also an environment known hitherto for quite a number of active Community Based Organizations (CBOs) - some of which have been reported to have withered away. There is also a record of earlier work and collaboration between Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and some of the older CBOs. There also exists a vibrant branch of the

National Youth Council (NYC) with great goodwill from the Local Government Council which is evidently receptive of youth and people's participation in addressing issues concerning the environment. This information actually galvanized the team to take the project to Funtua and its environs.

### **The 2005 Experience**

A team of four members of the academic staff and 61 students set off from Zaria to Funtua. The date was Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005. On arrival at Funtua, the team which was led by Dapo Adelugba, Salihu Bappa, Steve Daniel and Martins Ayegba were well received by the people who were eager, excited and felt honoured to host students and staff of the Ahmadu Bello University. They had even waited for the team at the outskirts of the town to usher them into Funtua Township.

Before going into the field proper, there was preliminary work in terms of visits and advocacy. This was in tandem with Abah's reflection on advocacy. Abah (2005) sees advocacy as, "the stage at which the community and the workshop organizers discuss issues and get to understand the workshop agenda...and also to seek official support from the different relevant bodies... and approval from the community for the event to take place."

Accordingly, the first obligation of this group was to familiarize with the environment, the people and the authorities in the area (this is not to say that there has not been other pre-workshop arrangements). This gives the participants the opportunity to acknowledge the position of the community leaders which is to make convenient the path and prepare a way for participants to meet with the community people. The TFD work in Funtua would not have been complete without the various courtesy and strategic visits to the institutions and other traditional, political and religious structures of the locality prior and just before the commencement of entry to the various places in and around Funtua. This was and is important not only in the area of seeking permission and reaffirming such permissions earlier granted, but also in seeking support from the traditional and government authorities. After these preliminaries, then came the real field work. We shall attempt to put into perspective the project in stages.

### **Researching the Issues of Funtua Community**

For easy access and coverage of the participant communities, the team was divided into six (6) groups. These groups were a mixture of Hausa and non-Hausa speaking students with members of the CBOs from communities as guides. The groups were sent to various parts of the community (Bariberi, Ungwan-wanzame, Tudun-Wada, Dikke, Jabiri Motor Park and Bisije – which is coined from the acronym; BCGA) all within and outside Funtua township. The groups went in different directions with the guidance of members of the CBOs to interact with the larger community. This took the form of informal discussions, untailored interviews or casual observation through transect-walk and other interactions with the members of the community. Having traversed through the designated areas, the groups then converged later in the evening for a plenary session to report and compare notes from the various locations. It is important to note that the plenary session was in conjunction with members of the CBOs. This activity formed the first point of presentation of raw data that was subjected to serious interrogations. The data gathered gave insights into the socio-cultural geography of Funtua and its people and it became the pivot upon which the entire project stood.

### **Key Findings in Funtua Community**

Research through interpersonal and group interviews, informal discussions and individual observation into Funtua community proved to be very useful. Amongst several others, issues



relating to the environment were dominant from the various groups: drainage problem, improper disposal of polythene waste, desertification, tree felling, health care, collective responsibility, and so on. These were mentioned as pressing environmental problems of the community. Another important aspect of the research findings was, the participation of women in the process. They were very excited and eager to lend their voices towards the growth of their community. All the issues were interrogated (with community representatives) which gave in-depth understanding. At this level of discussions, very important discoveries were made about environmental hazards and their negative effects to people and the environment.

### **Scenario Development and Rehearsals**

After the analysis of the issues from the field, the team divided into six groups with each group focusing on an issue identified and interrogated. Significantly there was full participation by the members of the clubs and association, who did not only take over the thinking role but were also responsible for the structural organization and the technicalities. The rehearsals helped in the further understanding of the issues because people began to think deeply on how to resolve these problems arising from their new awareness. This also encouraged participation by the way people sat together, thought together and made drama.

### **Performance and Intervention**

After the process of scenario development, the community performance followed. This involved students as well as members of the CBOs. In community theatre practice, the performance is actually intended to be a process. It is not a finished product. This is because, it is actually open to further discussions, corrections, additions or may even steer up a new argument altogether. Since the information and data came from different smaller communities with their representatives, the performances were taken to the various communities. Each of the communities identified with the issues of environment and responded in many ways like clapping and cheering, disagreeing with an action, or even shouting across to the actors and correcting them on the spot. The issues were provocative and indeed spurred them to arguments, questions and debates among themselves. There was ample feedback on the issues raised in the plays during the post-performance discussions.

### **The Funtua 2006 Experience**

The fact that Community Theatre is associated not just with identifying issues and dramatizing them, but promoting sustainable development through follow-ups is very important. Kafewo (2004) observes that, "One unique advantage of Community Theatre over conventional Theatre is that, apart from immediate feedback, there is always a chance for what is called a follow up or follow through... to assess the impact."

The importance of this exercise is enormous. It is often times difficult if not unnecessary to bring back the entire audience for a performance in a Conventional Theatre to do any form of follow-up action. Since community Theatre is issue oriented and directly tied to the dominant concerns of the members of a given community, there is always a chance to go back and look at how far the issues raised and solutions proffered have been effective or otherwise and to plan new strategies. Though, the 2005 team re-visited Funtua again in July, 2018 for a rapid appraisal of the May experience, they never had up to eight hours of discussion in all the communities put together. This is the ideology behind the choice of Funtua as field location for the 2006 Community Theatre experiment.

On 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2006, the 300 level students of Theatre and Performing Arts Department went back to Funtua for their Community Theatre experiment. The essence of this project was to follow up on

the efforts by the previous (2005) team. This in itself is an attempt to bridge the gap that has always existed in the sustenance of action plans and execution of such plans. In this instance, the same leaders of the team had the opportunity to take the students back to Funtua. Six 400 level students that were part of the 2005 experiment also formed part of the 2006 team of 74 students. This easily provided the background and the link.

The contacts that had already been made with the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and the gatekeepers of Funtua Local Government Area made it easier for the 2006 team to carry out its research within a short period of time. Prior to the date of departure, the team suggested earlier dates that were not convenient for the Community Based Organizations (CBOs); they had to wait till the CBOs were ready for them. This is because they are the real catalysts in community development and as well, the hinges on which the team could carry out the research. It is on this premise that Buratai (2004) posits that:

...the consolidation of the Community Theatre project can be measured through its ability to incorporate, utilize and project existing social and cultural infrastructure such as a base group; where one exist already, or the creation of one where none has existed on ground and which subsequently remains the pivot for community self-development.

Upon entry into Funtua by the 2006 team, they visited the District Head - Hakim Funtua, Alhaji Sambo Idris Sambo and the Sarkin Adon Katsina at Bakori. The District Head was happy to see the ABU team again. He could identify some of the lecturers and some members of the previous team that voluntarily joined the current team. The visit to the Chairman of Funtua Local Government Council was a memorable one as opinion leaders, youths, elders and other stakeholders were all present at the local government secretariat to celebrate democracy day with their honourable Chairman. They all exhibited warm reception and promised to give their full support towards the actualization of the project. Interaction with the Chairman resulted into the discovery of progress from the last team's work. He pointed with excitement at some of the trees planted the previous year that have grown into maturity.

### **Key Findings of the 2006 Funtua Experience**

The Students were divided into six groups and the same communities where the 2005 team carried out their research were allocated to the groups respectively. Each group had their first contact with the communities on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 2006. The team made use of the journalistic approach during interviews with groups and individuals in the community because they were conscious of their presence in the community so, any attempt to hide their identity or not coming out straight may betray the trust built with the previous team. Thus, they were more direct with questions than being indirect. Just like the 2005 team, environmental issues were the general agenda of each group. Results from the findings proved that the community dwellers really embraced the idea of self-help projects to safeguard their environments. Since the skills and techniques of the theatre had been transferred to the people, they preferred to do a drama presentation for the A.B.U team to watch. They took over the shaping and reshaping of the scenario and guarded the process jealously. During the rehearsals, the members of the community found it very easy to relate with the students because they were now conscious of the fact that the team from A.B.U really had their interest at heart. This actually enhanced sincere dialogue. The CBOs participated fully in the play.

During a joint plenary session with representatives of the different CBOs, the Funtua Local Government Chairman was present. He pledged his total commitment to the project and begged the

ABU team to visit again in 2007. He was not actually assured of another round of Community Theatre intervention. However, the ABU team promised to donate 300 trees to the communities to mark 'World Environmental Day'.

1<sup>st</sup> of June 2006 was the day of departure. CBOs from Bariberi community visited the ABU team at their place of abode (Funtua Motel). They went with a request- that the team should revisit them. The team promised to revisit them. At about 12:00pm, the team left Funtua Motel for Jabiri where work was in progress. They were constructing drainages in reaction to the previous day's performance. The female members of the group engaged the children in the picking of polythene bags. The people constructing the drainages were at the same time acting a play for pleasure. They were singing motivational songs while working. The A.B.U team joined in the activities for about an hour before returning to Zaria.

### **The Funtua 2007 Experience**

A major constraint upon Community Theatre practice in the academia is that of achieving the seventh stage which is the follow-up stage. It is always considered a herculean task. The reason for this acknowledged by both Abah and Okwori is due largely to its curricular nature; the fact that it is based within the academia, and has to operate within the parameters of curriculum and the time it takes. Because of its unstable nature, the availability of students continuously engaging in constant or periodic Community Theatre practice becomes erratic at best; since "students come in" says Abah (2005), "you are working with them; and they go, you have a new set. And you must start all over with that set ... [and] you must begin with the very rudimentary rubrics with the new set ... So the progress you can make with a community is very limited". Obviously, this is a very big challenge to the practice.

Consequently, explains Okwori (2008):

We do not have any means of intervening, we do not have any means of follow-up, because once the class that did the project has graduated from that class, it is not possible to ask them to go back to the same community and follow-up anymore, because they have already earned their grades and so on.

The Ahmadu Bello University Funtua experiment was an attempt to break this jinx. After establishing a cordial working rapport with the members of Funtua community and its various hierarchies during the 2005 and 2006 Community Theatre experiments, the experience matured into a convenient, rigid bilateral relationship. The Funtua branch of National Youth Council hosted members of the 2005 and 2006 ABU Community Theatre team on World Environmental Day in June 2006. A rapid appraisal of the 2006 Community Theatre experiment was carried out and the ABU contingents donated 300 trees in fulfilment of their promise during the experiment. Seeing that the community members were excited about this new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things, the ABU team felt that it was not time to say goodbye. This is because, in talking about the issues of change and building people's consciousness and orientation, it needs sufficient time and also needs commitment. The ABU team was therefore, once more, encouraged to put on their thinking caps. This effort gave rise to the plans for a 2007 Funtua Community Theatre experiment.

On Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, the (same) team of four members of the academic staff and 86 students set off from Zaria to Funtua. Out of the 74 students, 12 were members of the 2005 and 2006 team

members. The 6 members of the 2005 team had just graduated but they joined the 2007 team based on invitation from the members of the academic staff.

Prior to the team's date of departure from Zaria, they had a lecture with Prof. Adene; a visiting Professor of veterinary and surgical medicine from the University of Ibadan and also Dr. Wakawa, a lecturer of Community Medicine in A.B.U. The lecture was centered on tree planting for conservation of energy and against desertification. Prof. Adene, through a slide presentation, groomed the team on climate change which is a dominant issue of great concern globally.

After advocacy visits to the District Head, elders and other stake holders in Funtua, the team joined the representatives of the National Youth Council and several CBO members at Karopi. The Funtua branch's National Youth Council Chairman presented 1000 trees that were donated by one Alhaji Isah Funtua an indigene of Funtua and Philanthropist. The CBOs, through the National Youth Council Chairman proposed that there should be a central performance this time around and everyone agreed. June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007 was World Environmental Day and trees were available to be planted. The CBOs, Youths and the ABU team cashed-in-on the opportunity and visited the six communities where the 2005 and 2006 experiments were carried out. Trees were planted in the communities. It was good to know that the communities had embraced community self-help projects. The ABU team disclosed to them that the target Community for the 2007 project is Bariberi based on their proposal in 2006. There was an agreement that rehearsal for the joint performance should take place that night and the night after so that it can be showed openly on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June. The rehearsal held that night followed by a plenary session by the ABU team. The next day; 6<sup>th</sup> of June, the ABU team visited Bariberi community. Bariberi is a rural community located four (4) kilometers away from Funtua along Sokoto road. They are predominantly farmers and very hospitable.

### **Key Findings of the 2007 Funtua Experience**

Bariberi has 10 registered CBOs that are geared towards ensuring communal development through self-help activities. They are; Bariberi Fadama Foundation, Fadama Gabbass, Fadama Yamma, Magangame Fadama, Tukurubi, Rafin Dole, Mudedi, Ihunkadadi, Bariberi Foundation. Their sole aim is to improve the lives of members and by implication the community as a whole by engaging in grassroots projects that can bring about change and physical development in their communities. The community based groups come together by harmonizing both human and material resources in constructing concrete open well, rehabilitation of roads, construction of drainages and culverts, construction of slaughter slabs and engaging in communal farming (Gayya). They have a very large tomato farm where every member of the community goes to pick tomatoes and vegetables for domestic use when the need arises.

Out of the issues identified, health, and environmental protection stood out. The community members created the scenarios at a faster rate than before. This enhanced sincere dialogue and their willingness to participate whole heartedly in the project. There was no form of knowledge gap between the ABU team and the community members. The university agenda (climate change) was not pushed into the front burner at the expense of more critical challenges facing the community.

Abah (2005) captures vividly the need for target groups to prioritize their own issues in the process of change when he says that change in Theatre for Development "is such that emanates endogenously rather than exogenously; such that builds from within rather than from outside". He is not, however excluding or writing off the outside in this discourse of theatre for development, but only maintains that the outside must be sought from within.

On the first day, the rehearsal hardly stuck to any rigid set of scenario because they kept on having something new different from the previous. Villagers came in to replace characters and to give their own perspective of the issues. It had to be so because the reality is theirs and the theatre is theirs. They were now using it to analyse their situation. After a rigorous rehearsal the next day (7<sup>th</sup> of June), the scenarios were ready for presentation the day after. On the night of 7<sup>th</sup> June, the Chairman of Funtua Local Government was present during rehearsal for the joint performance. He promised to make available 3000 trees to be distributed for planting the next day during the joint performance. The Funtua National Youth Council Chairman; Alhaji Bello had already made arrangements for secondary school students to be present during the presentation. He suggested that a tree planting campaign should be launched as part of the project.

### **Performance and Intervention**

The ABU team went to Bariberi at about 7am on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June. The symbiotic exchange of ideas between the community and the ABU team during the rehearsals gave birth to a 30 minutes' performance which drew a good presence of actors and audience from within the community. The post-performance discussions took almost one hour because the community members could see their own issues being dramatized before them by themselves. The ABU team departed for Funtua Township Stadium at about 9.30am for the launching of the tree planting project and the central performance.

Local Government Officials, Elders, Opinion Leaders, other Stakeholders and Students were in attendance. The central drama was staged during the launching and their highlights were on two cardinal issues, first was that of environment, involving the benefit of tree planting and was linked to the second issue of health as regards cleanliness, personal hygiene, community sanitation and sensitizing the community on the need to accept the idea of immunization as a positive thing. The drama brought out the consequences of not taking children for immunization. The then Executive Chairman of Funtua Local Government; Alhaji Mutari Dandutse and the Funtua National Youth Council Chairman; Alhaji Bello were present for the launching. They led the tree planting exercise and distributed the 3000 trees to CBOs to take to their various communities for planting. The ABU team departed for Zaria at about 1pm.

### **Potential(s) and Achievements**

The achievements recorded from the Funtua field experience can be assessed in the light of the 2006 and 2007 session of students that went back to Funtua to follow up on the work by the previous team. This in itself was an attempt to bridge the gap that has always existed in the sustenance of action plans and execution of such plans. In this instance, the same leaders of the team had the opportunity to take the students back to Funtua. This easily provided the background and the link.

Beyond the general awareness generated by the community theatre project on environment and self-help projects through CBOs, a lot of activities were planned and are being implemented:

1. The tree planting campaign, which is a response to the issue of desertification and tree felling discussed during the data analysis, has been taken forward with the assistance of the local Government and other well-meaning Nigerians concerned with the issues of desertification. The community people during the follow up exercise showed members of the team the number of plants physically planted and are being nurtured. Spaces have been identified for the planting of more trees which were been solicited for and strong plans are

also underway towards the participation of the people and governments of Funtua L.G.A in subsequent celebration of the World Environment Day.

2. There is also an amplification of the voices of the CBOs. More CBOs were involved in community self-help projects popularly called 'aikin gaya' in the area of construction and maintenance of drainages.
3. As a follow up to the Funtua experiment, The NYC also is negotiating with a group in Kano to involve people in collection of polythene waste and to recycle. This is to begin to inculcate even in the young minds that unmanaged and careless disposal of polythene is hazardous and should be attacked.
4. Improved relationship and networking amongst CBOs: More recognition, credibility and value gained by the CBOs especially from the local government authorities. The entire process served as a morale booster for them as clubs came back to life. Some of the clubs that have long died resurrected at this point. There was glaring revival of some of the dominant clubs and associations.

### **Limitations and Problems**

This practice is largely experimental and has its various problems:

1. The first is lack of commitment to the course by some of the students. Some of the students simply could not cope with the idea of working with the people at the grassroots. Some are even sentimental and only manage to work in the field since they must do it to earn marks. This limits the potentials of the experiment. Here one can say that there is a low level of acceptance and satisfaction from the student practitioners. To this effect, during one of the sessions for the evaluation, some of the students were of the opinion that only committed and convinced students should participate in the project. The course should not therefore be made compulsory.
2. There is no doubt also that the experiment was almost hijacked by the politicians who saw the project as an opportunity to garner popularity and appreciation from the community people in the name of bringing the presence of Ahmadu Bello University (the outside world) to them. There was a lot of interference from the agents of the Local Government Authorities who were almost dictating to the students where to go to and who to speak with. The students were however, fore warned and threaded with caution and so were able to use several techniques or triangulations to get their information. Much of the information was confirmed or refuted or clarified during the rehearsals by the people.

In spite of the various problems encountered on the field, there were a number of success stories from the students who have learnt and benefited from the community and from the community people who have also come to appreciate the whole experiment and also identified that they could actually collaborate with the people at the ivory towers and bring development to their communities.

### **Conclusion**

This paper submits that beyond the entertainment values of theatre, theatre can be used to investigate, address, challenge and impact on environmental issues. The obvious gap in the design of most Community Theatre projects to date is the inability of the organisers to include the follow-

up mechanism to gauge the impact of the Community Theatre workshop after some months or years. Community Theatre, being an interactive learning process, should encourage a conscious or unconscious symbiotic exchange of ideas between the community and the facilitators during and after the workshop.

Repeated references to the Kamiriithu experience in Kenya serve to remind practitioners from the academia to constantly review and improve on what is being done, the progress being made, the gaps and things/issues that need to change in order to promote efficiency and effectiveness of the practice. Students at the undergraduate levels should not be denied the privilege to follow up on their Community Theatre experiments. They should be encouraged to carry on and even make careers out of Community Theatre. The Funtua experiment is an attempt to bridge the gap between theories and the practice of Community Theatre from the academia.

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