

Teacher Don Teach Me Nonsense: The Role of the Theatre Artiste in the Niger Delta Crisis

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Abstract

This paper investigates the veracity of claims that form the content and thematic concerns of theatrical performances emanating from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria had been bedeviled with lots of crises in the past which are associated with oil exploration and exploitation. The efforts of the theatre artistes in the region to use participatory theatre as an attention-getting and subversive instrument to force the government to address their plight of environmental degradation and poverty led to outbreak of insurgency and its attendant woes. Although the tide of the insurgency was stemmed by former President Yar'Adua's extension of Amnesty to the Niger Delta insurgents, there are still pockets of unrest in the region due to the prevalent sufferings closely associated with oil exploration. The propagandistic content of the works of the theatre artistes that only the Federal government and oil multi-nationals are culpable in the crisis and underdevelopment of the region sustains the violent protests by the people. This paper discusses how theatre practitioners from that region ignored best practices by using their plays and performances to misinform and mislead the people for personal preferences. They influenced the minds of the people negatively which led to the crisis in the region. The paper rests its operations on Theatre for Development (TfD) praxis as a sine qua non for resolving crisis in the Niger Delta and jolting the people to look inward for developmental issues. TfD is a participatory art, a powerful tool that can influence the minds and souls both negatively and positively, depending on how it is constructed. This tool has been tested on the field and has yielded good results by disproving the Niger Delta Artists' propagandas. One major finding was that the prevailing advocacy that the government and multi-nationals have completely reneged on their responsibility is a mere propaganda. The government and multi-nationals have done and are still doing a lot in alleviating the suffering of the people, though these may not have met the total expectation of the people in the region. The research concludes that the suffering of the people is not unconnected with the corrupt tendencies, avarice and misrepresentation of

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political leaders, chiefs and traditional rulers from the region. The Niger Delta problems are more of internal colonialism rather total negligence and insensitivity by the Federal government and oil multi-nationals. This paper makes suggestions on how to alleviate the suffering of the people through constant government presence, payment of compensation without delay, and through the binoculars of TjD praxis to institute a culture of internal collaboration to engender, harness and sustain development within the communities. The paper encourages and suggests how theatre artiste can embrace, adopt and propagate best practices in the participatory arts/theatre artistry.

Key Words: Theatre artiste, Niger Delta, Theatre for Development,

Introduction

The Niger Delta crisis has been on for decades and it has defied the many solutions designed to put the crisis at bay for proper development of the region. Different strata have been alleged as being responsible for the underdeveloped status of the region. For instance, the Federal government, oil multi-nationals and other government parastatals have become the culprits in the underdeveloped status of the region. Though this paper is not out to completely absolve the organizations mentioned above of blames in the underdeveloped status of the Niger Delta but to state that they are not the only ones culpable of that.

The fact remains that many theatre artiste and practitioners, in heeding the call of their profession, have presented many performances in order to reflect the problems of the Niger Delta. These problems are environmental pollution and degradation caused by oil exploration and exploitation which has unavoidably led to squalor, extreme poverty, health hazards, high cost of living, youth restiveness, kidnapping and all sorts of vices. Unfortunately, the Federal government and oil multi-nationals have been blamed and criminalized for these woes that betide the region.

Therefore, this paper elucidates how theatre practitioners from that region have ignored best practices by using their plays and performances to misinform and mislead the people for personal preferences. The performances, to a large extent, influenced the minds of the people negatively which eventually led to the crisis rocking the region until now. The paper based its methodology on Theatre for Development as a paradigm for resolving the Niger Delta crisis and returning normalcy to the region as well as jolting the people to look inward for developmental strides.

Key Words Explained

The Niger Delta is a region in Nigeria with a huge deposit of oil. Instead for the oil to translate into wealth for the people, it has become a source of woes. This is because the region has witnessed a high degree of environmental degradation and pollution in the last decades. The major sources of income and livelihood for the people is fishing and farming but unfortunately, these vocations cannot be extensively practiced due to inclement terrain, environmental pollution associated with oil exploration. This, expectedly, has led to abject poverty, bad health condition and various hardships.

Teachers as used in this paper refer to theatre artistes who stage various performances to reflect the sordid environmental condition and suffering of the Niger Delta people. Unfortunately, some of these theatrical reflections have misled the people into taking sophisticated arms and ammunition against the Federal government and oil multi-nationals as culprits in the underdeveloped status of the region. Such negative portrayal has been the bane of the crisis in the region as the frustrated people vent their aggression against the wrong objects instead of the real enemy of the people.

Theatre for Development is a variant of Applied Theatre and a mechanism or tool geared towards engendering development in communities, especially poor communities. TfD praxis is presented here as *sine qua non* for resolving crisis in the Niger Delta for the purpose of jolting and galvanizing the people towards development driven right from within.

Data Analysis

There have been many stage performances, some scripted and some not, on the present environmental and underdeveloped condition of the Niger Delta. Some of these performances have been presented on different stages in the region, especially Rivers and Bayelsa States. Two of the performances would be analyzed in this paper. These are John Dudafa's "Mangrove in the Desert" and Tayo Isijola's "Ask the Almighty".

John Dudafa's "Mangrove in the Desert"

The play “Mangrove in the Desert” was first performed in 2001 to welcome former President Olusegun Obasanjo to Bayelsa State on his first official visit to the State. The play begins with a rancorous market scene due to high cost of food crops and goods.

The opening scene reflects some of the hardships the people encounter in their farming and fishing vocations. These hardships include environmental pollution, inclement weather and topography that have resulted in reduced farm produce, increased cost of transporting goods to the market, unwarranted police harassment and others. Many amongst the market men and women adduced several reasons for the harsh condition but when the argument became heated between sellers and buyers, Tori, one of the characters, makes the following submission:

This is my question. Who is wrong in this matter? Is it our poor civil servant brother who is not paid enough to buy garri he needs for his family? Or our poor sister who is a local farmer faced with poor harvest? If you must cure a sickness, then you must find and stop the source of that sickness. The source of our sickness is known to all of us. Or don't we know that oil exploitation is the source of our pains? As long as oil exploitation continues in this crude form, there must be poor harvest in the land. There must be hardship. There must be hunger and cries, bitter cries and of course death, untimely death. This must not remain our fate. We must review our relationship with the oil companies and Federal government or we perish forever. The time is now. Go and prepare for the protest, we must change our situation now.

All: Yes! This is the time (p. 7)

The statement above portrays unequivocally the tragedy that has befallen the Niger Delta for decades up till now. At the same time, it has succeeded in inciting the people against the Federal government and oil multi-national companies. The results of such incitement that led to demonstrations can best be imagined than experienced. Such protests, in the past and even presently, led to oil pipeline and installations vandalization, kidnapping of oil workers and attacks targeted at the Federal government and oil multi-national companies. This is to support our argument that the crisis in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by propagandist performances that influenced the minds of the people negatively. Though the performance makes some constructive statements at the later part, a good number of the audience must have been unduly influenced to believe that their common enemies are the Federal government and oil multi-nationals. This is the reason the guest of the day, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, took time to commend the cast and crew and also advised that the people should not be instigated to demonstrations and violence. According to him, no nation survives two civil wars.

Plot of Tayo Isijola's "Ask the Almighty"

The play revolves around "Youth" (a character in the dramatic monologue) who represents all the youths of the Niger Delta. Youth loses his father to bronchitis and his mother also dies shortly after.

In a bid to survive, he stays a short while with his cousin and when the cousin marries, he needs to relocate because the house is a one-room self contained apartment. Youth later secures a scholarship to study in the university. He survives through difficult times with the help he gets from the Christian Campus Fellowship and graduates with a second class upper division in History and Diplomatic Studies. After fruitless efforts to secure a white collar job, he goes to Alakiri to continue with the fishing vocation his father practised while alive but due to the impact of oil spillage, the waters are unproductive. At this point, he joins the freedom fighters to right the wrong. Youth mentions some of the activities of the freedom fighters to include oil bunkering, pipeline vandalization and kidnapping. To assuage their feelings, amnesty is granted to them which they embrace but Youth acknowledges that it has not solved their problems either. He, therefore, decides to "Ask the Almighty" if the sufferings should continue.

The following stanza reflects the devastating effect of oil exploration on land and water in the Niger Delta. This is emphasized in less subtle words in the body of the monologue thus:

We suffer from severe environmental degradations with adverse community impact, all from the exploration of the black gold (p.2). The extent of this damage which results in the destruction of land and water is further exacerbated by government neglect. This is seen in the lack of basic amenities as expressed by Youth thus: exploration activities have also deprived us of the sea. The fishes, prawns, crabs and cray-fishes have all deserted the waters we suffer from oil spillage, acid rain.

The water we drink is largely contaminated. No good roads, no sufficient primary health care facilities (p.4).

Youth: Meanwhile, the black gold generates 90% of the nation's 95% annual budget, whereas over 70% of our population lives below poverty line. (p.2)

These poetic lines are lifted directly from the script of "Ask the Almighty" to give the audience a factual description of the situation. The above statistics has been adduced to by researchers and different organizations as factual.

For instance, Amnesty International asserted that, “70% of the six million people in the Niger Delta live on less than 1 dollar per day” (2006). Other researchers that corroborate this are NNPC (2006), Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences (2011) and Eze (2011).

The statements of political leaders such as G. G. Darah, Rotimi Amechi, Edwin Clark and others on how money realized from the Niger Delta has been utilized to develop other parts of the country, especially Abuja, to the detriment of the region also ignited the chaotic response of the Niger Delta youths. The inability to make the government address their political, social and economic problems led to ferocious outburst by the youth in order to force the government to attend to their problems. The government reacted to the militancy by drafting security operatives - the Joint Task Force- to the Niger Delta to forestall a total breakdown of law and order. Consequently, the problem escalated, leading to destruction of oil pipelines, kidnapping and many other vices.

Fifth Stanza:

We consulted the deities

Matched them in muftis

Causing adversities

Stirring instability

And increased hostility (p. 6).

The youths became freedom fighters (p. 5) but are referred to as cultists, hooligans on page 5 of the dramatic monologue. Youth describes the activities of the freedom fighters in the following words:

We were proficient in guerrilla tactics and jungle combat; trained for mob attack and counter attacks; tutored on the principles of self-restraint and sincerity of purpose.

We were out to kill and we were ready to die until there is a redress concerning the deplorable condition of our region (p.5). It is clear from the above lines that the freedom fighters see their cause as one worth dying for. Thus, they do not relent in their struggle even in the face of danger to their lives. Their determination eventually pays off as in the end, the government takes action:

What we clamored for was attention, but kidnapping became endemic at different levels, and in several parts of the country. When this became a national threat that is unbearable, government made us a proposal (p.5).

The proposal the government extended to the youths is the amnesty programme which was extended to all Niger Delta militants by President Yar'Adua in 2009. The amnesty was designed to make the militants sheath their swords, submit their weapons in exchange for monthly salaries and vocational training.

The amnesty brought about some tranquility but "Youth" asks, "shall this continue till eternity? Ask the Almighty" (p. 6). The monologue ends with the last question. The playwright must have done this to draw attention to the fact that the amnesty only addressed issues relating to the militants without giving attention to those who were not militants. Amnesty failed to address other issues as they relate to the Niger Delta region. Many, whose environment has been devastated by oil spillage and gas flaring, those who became poor due to the destruction of sea-life and land were not covered by the amnesty. There was also no provision for those who lost their bread winners to the crisis.

The dramatic monologue "Ask the Almighty" is a short but all encompassing play that gives attention to all that relates to the Niger Delta issue. The theatric an has been able to achieve this because he has first-hand information dealing with all the issues raised since he has lived and performed different plays in the length and breadth of the region for more than a decade. A recount of the activities of the militant above shows that they believe that their problems are connected to the neglect the region suffered from the hands of the Federal government and oil multi-nationals. No wonder then that their aggression was directed towards the duo of Federal government and oil multi-nationals. This is largely due to the incitements from performances such as "Ask the Almighty" and "Mangrove in the Desert".

Major Reason for Niger Delta Underdeveloped Status

The Niger Delta underdeveloped status is largely due to the avarice, insensitivity and greediness of their traditional rulers, chiefs and political leaders who denude or deprive their people of infrastructural and economic development. They perpetrate this through the embezzlement of money meant for developmental projects in their local communities. This is evident in the interview conducted on the field at Korokoro-Ita Community of Rivers State by this researcher. The youths interviewed mentioned categorically that they are aware of the scheming and manipulations of their rulers who would instigate them against the oil companies and when the money comes in, they would pretend as if they have received nothing.

This is also reflected in stage performances by some theatre artistes from that region. An example is Ben Ejiogor's "Floods against the Crown" where the PRO of Cisco Company revealed that the traditional ruler of the community has collected the money meant for provision of social amenities to the community. Daniel Kpodoh's "The Struggle" also exposes how King Ama embezzles money meant for the development of the community.

Published plays such as "*Iyene: A Dance Drama*" by Arnold Udoka underscores the fact that the leaders of the Niger Delta are the cause of their underdeveloped status. In the play, the traditional ruler and the members of the council of elders sell their people into the hands of the white businessmen for personal aggrandizement. Also, Barclays Ayakoroma's *A Chance to Survive* accuses the Niger Delta leaders and traditional rulers for the woes and underdevelopment of the region. The play revolves around His Royal Highness (Dr.) Kurokaki who receives twenty million Naira as compensation from an oil company but refuses to utilize the money for the development of his community. The play highlights the complicity of Niger Delta leaders and traditional rulers in the ill-treatment of their people. One also wonders on what the quantum of money, in the name of monthly allocations, credited to the coffers of the state governments of the region is spent. These instances and a handful more go to show that the problem of the region is more of internal slavery than external colonialism.

KOROKORO-ITA COMMUNITY (Tai Local Government, RiverState)

Korokoro-Ita was a major base for oil exploration and exploitation in the past and presently as it housed a major oil refinery back then. The establishment of refinery in the village has messed up their lands which have become contaminated and not good enough for farming. Therefore, a major means of sustenance is snatched away. The untold hardship this has brought on the people was boldly written on their faces.

TfD Performance at Korokoro-Ita Community, RiversState

i. Inspiration for the Performance

The inspiration is to find out the truth about the extent of environmental damage caused by oil exploration and the effect on the people. Some theatrical performances (examples are Tayo Isijola's "Ask the Almighty" and John Dudafa's "Mangrove in the Desert") have exaggerated the ecological damages occasioned by oil exploration in the Niger Delta out of proportion and this attempt hopes to ascertain the truth and differentiate this from propaganda through the TfD canons.

ii. Planning:

Due to the volatile nature of the community, the researcher engaged the service of a member of the community who lives in Port Harcourt to contact a member of the community who lives in the community to help arrange our visit. This worked out perfectly well because the man, Baribari, was able to contact those we needed to contact for permission to visit the community.

iii. Visitation:

The pre-intervention scheme in Korokoro-Ita took place on 22nd May, 2014. It took so long to arrange for a visit to the village due to the insecure nature of the village and palpable fear situation in Ogoniland as a whole. Therefore, getting someone to link the researcher to a member of the community in order to arrange for the research intervention was very difficult. At the end, we secured a nod to visit the community.

iv. Research Phase

There are still insecurity and unrest in Ogoniland which make the people to be apprehensive when they see strange faces in their community. This may not be unconnected with their present environmental situation. They do not seem to trust anybody. Sad to say that in Ogoniland, there is no potable water for drinking, cooking and bathing. This is because any attempt to dig a well is an attempt to come in contact with unrefined oil mixed with water. At the entrance of the village, there is a big water reservoir, but we later gathered that it has been empty for over four years. The thinking was that the government or an oil company provided that for regular supply of water. However, for about four years now, water has not been brought to the village.

v. Prioritization of Data:

The problems bedeviling Korokoro-Ita Community are numerous. These range from poverty, governmental neglect of the people of the area, insensitivity of the oil companies to the plight of the people, unavailability of clean water for drinking and household chores to shortage of land for farming. The problem of unclean water is as a result of the contamination of their streams with oil. The condition of the people is so serious that they prepare immature and unfermented cassava for consumption. The most unfortunate of all this is that the people believe that it is the gods that are responsible for their pitiable and pathetic condition. The research prioritized the issue of potable water and preparing unripe and unfermented cassava for consumption due to its negative impact on the health of the people.

The portions of the land that are free of oil contamination are very small and cannot go round among the people. Therefore, farmers do not allow cassava, their main agricultural product to mature before they harvest and process, without proper fermentation, for consumption. The implication of this is that the starch content is high with its attendant health risk on those who consume it (Wikipedia and www.inspetion.gc.ca).

vi. Rehearsal Phase:

Few people that were chosen began rehearsal with us immediately after the town hall meeting. The people were chosen from among those who attended town hall meeting. The performance was perfected in rehearsals that took place trice as a result of the enthusiasm of the people

vii. The performance

The drama skit in Korokoro-Ita was titled “Blame Not God”. The Intervention drama took place on the 24th May 2014. The local game adopted in Korokoro-Ita was the draft game. Two or more people were playing draft while some people were watching the game. At a point, a sick man who has just been discharged from the hospital accompanied by his first wife walks into the scene and greets the people. As they leave, the people gossip that the sickness is caused by the second wife who they say is a witch. The doctor who also walks into the gossip decides to ask them if they feel the cause of the man’s sickness is supernatural. Almost all the people raised their hands.

The doctor then decides to enlighten them that the cause of the sickness is due to the kind of water the man drinks. He mentions the implications of drinking water diluted with oil as well as the danger inherent in processing and eating immature cassava. Then the people realize the cause of their incessant sickness and decide to do something about it. They all agreed that they will allow their cassava to mature before they harvest them and that they will allow the grinded cassava to ferment properly before they dry it for consumption. They also resolved to help themselves in the area of potable water.

They agreed that they will arrange the youths to help in checking for possible portions of land where wells can be dug even if it is far off. As a long time measure, they agreed to see the king to help them appeal to the government and multi-nationals to see how they can fulfill their promises to provide potable water for the community.

The people believed that the traditional rulers were culpable in the underdeveloped status of the region and therefore warned that they should desist from such act of misrepresenting and embezzling money allocated for the development of the region in order not to incur the wrath of the youths.

viii. Audience Response

Interviews

After the presentation, some youths and elders were interviewed on what they felt about the drama skit and the action the people agreed to take. Their responses are as follow:

Chief Michael D. Nkpunee (Chief Nkpunee is next to the Traditional ruler of Korokoro-Ita Community)

The government has abandoned us and the multi-nationals have seen that the government does not care, so they failed in recognizing our problems. As you have seen for yourself, there is no water to drink at all not to talk of taking bath or for cooking. The suffering is just too much. But thank you for coming with this theatre that opens our eyes and has educated our people to realize the danger in preparing immature cassava for consumption. You have also discussed how our youths can search for lands where we can get water and dig wells for us. We will see how they can help us to solve the problem while we wait for the government and multi-nationals to redeem their promises.



Fig.1: The researcher with Chief Michael D. Nkpunee of Korokoro-Ita Community of Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State. **Youth Leader** (Mr. Samuel Gbinee)

It is very obvious from what you have seen that the government has neglected us and has failed in all attempts to rescue us and our people from total ruination. The boys went to Creeks to vandalize pipelines due to neglect from the government and if care is not taken, they will still go back to the Creeks, if our problems are not urgently addressed, amnesty notwithstanding. Is it not unfortunate to hear that the government is protecting and covering up the multi-nationals from redeeming their promises to the people? Let me tell you, the boys will not take it lightly.

We are really suffering and we shall take action at the appropriate time. On behalf of my people, I would like to thank you, both the young and the old have been engaged and very happy since you came. Since you promised to come back, we expect you keep to that promise. Or do you want to behave like the government and multi-nationals who do not keep their promises? We will be here to welcome you. Insha Allah.

Barabari Namene (He was our chaperon at Korokoro-Ita Community. He facilitated our visit to the community.) I am happy today. I am very happy. Thank you very much. We have learnt a lot from the play and we promise to do what we agreed on by searching for a piece of land free of oil to dig well. But let me tell you, we are young men, but we know what is going on here. The government is trying, but our leaders have sold out. They collected money on several occasions without doing anything meaningful here. We have taken action against them in the past but the government came to their rescue by providing them security. Well, one hopes they change for the better.



Fig 2: The researcher with Barabari Namene of Korokoro-Ita Community of Tai Local Government Area of RiversState.

Barigbue Benjamin

I thank you for your time and you are a friendly person. Let me tell you, our leaders failed us. They complained the government is not doing anything. The multi-nationals are useless but they are building houses. For instance, our youth leader has two big houses and three vehicles within how many years.

We were suffering together few years ago. Now he does not interact with us anymore. It is very bad but let me thank you for coming. We shall do all that the drama suggested.



Fig 3: The researcher with Barigbue Benjamin, a youth in Korokoro-Ita Community, Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Prince Numene Gberegbara

Oga, make I no lie to you, the thing wey our leaders dey do no good. Den go collect money take am build house, take am buy cars and marry new wives and den go talk say dem never settle dem. I pray sey make God help us and if him help no quick come, we go fight for our freedom. But I pray make that one no happen because the youths go scatter everywhere.



Fig 4: The researcher with Prince Numene Gberegbara of Korokoro-Ita community. Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State



Fig 5: The doctor clarifying issues with the audience during the Intervention Drama Skit at Korokoro-Ita (24/05/2014)



Fig 6: Sketches of Drama Skit Intervention at Korokoro-Ita in Tai L.G.A., RiversState (24/05/2014)

ix. The Pre-Intervention

The pre-intervention drama took place on the 24th May, 2014. To arrange for the pre-intervention meeting, the researcher met with Chief Micheal D. Nkpunee. He is the next in rank to the Traditional Ruler of Korokoro-Ita Community. The King happens to be the Chairman of the Royal Council of Rivers State, therefore, it was difficult to see him. During the interview, the Chief passed the bulk to the government and multi-national companies who failed to play their parts. He also mentioned that I needed to see the Youth President of the village before I could move around freely, though with a chaperon, to carry out the research. Some youths interviewed had a contrary opinion from their elders and chiefs. The youths argued that the elders are fond of cheating them whenever they receive compensation or emolument from the multi-national companies. Two of the youths mentioned that the youth president who used to be one of them has abandoned them as he has cars and has built two mansions.

After taking permission from the Youth Leader, the pre-intervention/interaction with the village was arranged for the 23rd May, 2014 in front of Chief Micheal D. Nkpunee's house. The meeting started around 3 pm with the Chief in attendance. He greeted the people and explained to them the reason for our visit. The researcher also explained to the people the reason for coming and what he expected from them. The people, in turn, narrated their ordeals and some of these are that oil has taken their land away from them as they have very small portion of land to farm. They complained that oil has taken over all the lands and rendered it useless for farming. They also complained that there is no good water for bathing, cooking, or even drinking. Some also mentioned that due to poverty and hunger, they needed to uproot their cassava plants before they mature and process it for eating. The belief of the people is that they are facing the problems because that is what God wants for them while some believe that their leaders have not done enough to help them. Others feel without causing mayhem, the government and oil company will not visit their problems.

These are the three major problems gathered from our discussion and we informed them of presenting a drama that will catalogue these problems. Of very serious concern was the palpable fear and unrest in that part of the region. This was extensively discussed as they feel that it is normal for them to protect their territory, now that they know their enemies. They believe that their enemies were the Federal Government, the multi-national companies and their own traditional and political leaders in the community. We informed them of what we planned for the next day, which is arranging a drama that will catalogue the problems mentioned by way of looking for solutions inwardly to such problems. To this end, we quickly picked some of them that we felt could be actors among them and arranged to meet later at 7 pm at the house of our Chaperon for casting and rehearsals. They were enthusiastic about this and we saw this in the way they quickly got their lines and characterization.

x. Post Intervention

The researcher visited the village on 13th December, 2014 and found out that the youths have succeeded in locating a land they felt could be used for digging well to procure potable water. They only complained that some money would be needed to carry out the digging. The researcher discussed with Chief Micheal D. Nkpunee and the Youth president on how to help the youths to realize this. Both complained that the youths failed to carry them along and that since I have intervened now, they were ready to give the needed support. They promised that before my next visit, they would have dug more than two wells.



Fig 7: A cross section of the audience at Korokoro-Ita in Tai L.G.A., RiversState. 24/4/2014 (Intervention Phase)



Fig 8: A cross section of the audience at Korokoro-Ita in Tai L.G.A., RiversState. 24/4/2014 (Intervention Phase)

Paradigm Shift for Solving Niger Delta Underdevelopment

Considering the TfD intervention in Korokoro-Ita communities of RiversState, it is obvious that the TfD programme makes it possible for the affected section of the population/community to identify their problems objectively, willingly and truthfully. It also makes it possible to dramatize the problems in order to see how they practically affect the lives of the affected population. In other words, the interventions make the problem to achieve social reality – here, how gas flaring and oil spill have affected the people practically.

The involvement of the affected population in the performance indicates that the problems are actually with them and that they are not remotely or distantly connected with them. It is equally at this stage that the people are able to work out acceptable and practicable solutions to their problems with the help of the facilitators. At the end of the drama skit, Korokoro-Ita Community agreed to dig wells in order to get water for drinking and household chores. Judging from how the interventions played out, it helps the community to realize that they have an important role to play in their own development and that they need to take practical steps to liberate themselves from the shackles of underdevelopment and environmental degradation.

Considering the above, it is expedient that the Niger Delta people discontinue heaping the whole blame of Niger delta underdevelopment on the Federal government and oil multi-nationals. As clearly shown in this research, the avarice, and corruptive tendency of the traditional rulers and political leaders, among other issues, deepened, and aggravated the poverty level and suffering of the people of the region. The avarice, misrepresentation, and insensitive attitude of the traditional rulers, chiefs, and political leaders have been the crux of the people's woes and underdevelopment. Therefore, the people should, if need be, start the revolt from within against the culprits before externalizing the issue.

Another issue is that the Niger Delta people should embrace the Theatre for Development praxis and mechanism in order to engage development driven from within. The popular saying that "heavens help those who help themselves" is appropriate here. There are menial assistance that local communities in the region can engage in to help themselves, just as we had in Korokoro-Ita community, in order to nip some problems in the bud before they assume chronic dimensions. In essence, attention should shift from transferring aggression against the Federal government and oil multi-nationals to how the people can be jolted to engage in self-help and development that is driven from within.

Conclusion

It has been established that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is grappling with lots of problems that include environmental degradation, poverty, and underdevelopment. It has also been established that one of the remote causes of the crisis that led to the insurgency was the role played by theatre artistes. Some of them over-exaggerated the issue and fed the people with mere propaganda which must have incited the youths against the oil multi-nationals and the Federal government. Therefore, they cannot be absolved of blames as regards the wanton loss of lives and properties recorded in the region. It has also been argued the traditional rulers and political leaders are equally culpable in the insurgency and its attendant woes.

In some cases, they directly instigated the youths to protest against the government and oil companies while in other cases, they embezzled money meant for the development of their communities. It is obvious, therefore, that the people are suffering from internal slavery and misrepresentation by their local chiefs, elders and political leaders. One major achievement of the Yaradua's administration was the granting of amnesty to repentant militants. The amnesty programme tackled the insurgency head-on but this has not translated into a developed region for the Niger Delta. As of now, the region is still faced with lots of problems, basically underdevelopment problems. Unfortunately, the people look up to the government and multi-national companies for solutions to their problems instead of looking inwardly to drive their own development. The success recorded included generating workable and relevant knowledge for the community and adding to peace advocacy. The Tfd performance at Korokoro-Ita community of RiversState shows the efficacy and popularity of the theatre genre, hence, it is expedient that government should collaborate with such enterprise for the purpose of restoring peace, normalcy and attracting development to the Niger Delta region.

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