

Evaluating the Challenges of Unavailability of Safe Water in Omogwu Through Theatre for Development Approach

Jibril Imam Mohammed-Kabir^[a]; Salifu Musa^{[b],*}; Yunusa Musa^[c]

^[a] PhD, Department of Theatre Arts, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria.

^[b] Department of Theatre Arts, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria.

^[c] Department of Theatre Art, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa Kogi State, Nigeria

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Rural areas in Nigeria have been faced with several social amenity's issues over of the years. One of such issues is lack of safe water for consumption. Some of the factors responsible for these problems seem to be the inability of the people to protect and maintain their water sources like rivers, lakes and the few water projects that were built for them by either individuals or the government. As a result of the aforementioned problems, the people depend on unsafe water for drinking and cooking. Thus, they are faced with certain water born-diseases. Obviously, the need to address these problems is sacrosanct. It is based on this backdrop that the study seeks to investigate the potential of Theatre for Development in addressing the issues in context using Omogwu Community, Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State as paradigm. The paper adopted oral interview technique of the qualitative research methodology to gather its data. Through this method the researchers interacted orally with relevant respondents in the target area, using a tape recorder to gather their responses and transcribed them into written document through the use of note books and pen. The results realized from the findings revealed that rural areas in Nigeria, due to certain factors have no access to safe water and they are also challenged with issues of water born-diseases. The work concludes that Theatre for Development has the potential to address the problems of access to safe water and the related consequences on the people of Omogwu, Ankpa Local Government Area

of Kogi State. Hence, it recommends that the approach should be employed to address the identified challenges for a safe water.

Key words: Consumption; Social amenity; Inability; Theatre; Development

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INTRODUCTION

Apparently, water is one of the basic, social and principal needs of man. In broad terms, water is existential to human's life as it is used for important purposes such as drinking, cooking and maintaining of human hygiene among other things. Within the context of drinking, water means a lot to the body. A number of reputable scholarly works have argued that, water helps to carry nutrients to all the cells of human body. Perhaps, it is within this context that Hiren Mandalia posits that, "water is crucial to the mechanic of the human body. The body cannot function without water, just as a car cannot run without oil and gas. In fact, all the cells and organs that make up human anatomy and physiology depend on water for proper functioning" (23). Indeed, water is very crucial to man; besides its functions as pointed out by Henry, water is used for cooking, and practicing of good hygiene, thus the need for the availability of good and clean water. Hence, the need to develop and maintain sources of water has been a global concern.

Over the years, the world has been battling with the challenges of safe water supply. The major parts of the globe where this problem exists are the developing

nations in Africa and some countries in Asia, where lack of safe water supply has over the years generated different forms of health challenges and socio-amenities' problems. Corroborating this, Mergesa Dinka submits that:

Research has shown that the majority of people without access to safe water are from developing nations. This shows that many people in the developing world especially Africa, still depend on unsafe water sources for daily water need and affected by chronic water problems and water-borne diseases. Millions of people die due to water-related diseases like cholera, diarrhoea, malaria, dengue fever and so on. In many parts of the world, water-borne diseases represent the leading cause of death. (13)

Like other developing nations, consumption of unsafe water has caused many health challenges in Nigeria, particularly at the rural areas. Many Nigeria communities till date have no access to clean water and other sources of water supply but rivers and streams. And as a result of poor hygiene and sanitation practices, these streams are on daily basis polluted and contaminated by health threatening practices such as open defecation amongst other things with serious negative impacts on the lives and wellbeing of the people. Obviously, the need to educate the people about the dangers of such practices through proper and feasible channel of communication is sacrosanct.

However, world over, theatre for development has over the years been used as a viable tool of communication. It has been argued that, "it engages people in the process from community research, through drama formation to rehearsals, performance and discussion. Through these processes, community members become abreast with the knowledge and skills to tackle their own challenges without relying on the government. . ." (Jerry Odeh and Akura Jacob, 14). This is obviously done through the help of the catalysts who visit the community, stay with them and gather data which would be analysed and dissected for viable results to the identified problems of the community. Thus, this work strives to examine the potentials of theatre for development in mobilizing Nigerians, particularly, rural dwellers against certain factors that stand as obstacles to safe water supply in the nation's rural areas using Omogwu, Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State as a paradigm.

CONCEPT OF WATER

It is important to acknowledge that what is known for certain basic characteristics with which many opinions have been built over the years. Some of these basic characteristics focus on the fact that water is a substance which is plentiful, tasteless and odourless, and which has the ability to dissolve many other substances. According to Dinka:

Water covers more than two-thirds of the earth's surface, but mostly salty and undrinkable. The available freshwater resource is only 2.7% of the available water on earth but only

10% of the available freshwater in lakes, rivers and ground water is accessible. Most of the available fresh water resources are inaccessible because they are in the hidden part of the hydrologic cycles and in glaciers, which means safe drinkable water on earth has very small proportion, 3% in the freshwater resources. (2)

It has also been said that, "there is no universally excepted definition of safe drinking water. "Safe drinking water is defined as the water that does not represent any significant risk to health over a lifetime of consumption. The safe drinking water must be delivered pure, wholesome healthful and potable. Safe water is not necessary pure, it has some impurities in it. It contains some traces of salts such as magnesium calcium, carbonates, bicarbonates and others" (Dinka 3).

The above facts have indeed pointed out reasons water supply remains one of the major challenges facing man globally. Safe water they say, poses some unique qualities and it is available in small quantity; and the need for safe water are enormous. Water is used for drinking, food preparation, personal hygiene and washing. Water is strongly connected to every form of life on earth and it has been identified as one of the basic human needs. Therefore, safe water supply becomes very important to human existence. Thus, Dinka further submits that,

Water of satisfactory quality is the fundamental indicator of health and well-being of a society and hence, crucial for the development of a country. Contaminated water not only has the potential to pose immediate threat to human, but also can affect an individual productive rate. According to the WHO report, an estimated 1.1 billion people in the world drink unsafe water. Approximately 3.1% of the global annual death, 1.7 million, and 3.7% of the annual burden, disability, 54.2 million are caused by the use of unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation and hygiene. (6)

Despite the facts that unsafe water is harmful to human health and wellbeing, scholarly studies have shown that many parts of African continent are still depending on unsafe water till date and as a result, records of health related problems such as water borne-diseases which have claimed many lives are abound on the continent. This is not because the continent has no sources of water but the reason lies in the inability of the people to maintain their environment and water sources among other factors. According to Akpen Phillip, Benue state, Nigeria for instance:

Experiences two distinct seasons, the wet season and the dry season. The rainy season last from April to October with annual rainfall in the range of 1120 to 1500 mm. the dry season begins March. The climate is characterized by high temperature regime, raising from 27-38°C as mean annual. Relative humidity is between 60-80%. It has a vegetation cover of the guinea savannah type. The main river system include the river Benue and river Ala which together with their tributaries, traverse the area. The region is well present with potential for water resources development. (234)

Like Benue State, many states across Nigeria are rich in rivers and other water sources that could be maintained

and developed for sustainable safe water supply and delivery. But the problem of lack of access to safe water in the land lies in the inability of appropriate authorities to initiate projects that could enhance the socio-economic well being of the people. And at individual level, the citizenry are not helping the matter as their unhealthy and unhygienic activities could be identified as some of the factors militating against the availability of safe water particularly in many rural areas of the country.

THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Theatre for development is a genre of theatre arts and mode of communication which focusses on disseminating information to members of a particular community through elements such as the people's ingenious language and arts with the aims to influence and promote the socio-economic and political situations of the people. Oga Steve Abah posits that Theatre for Development, "interventions motivate the people so that they can dialogically question their existing reality, critically determine the root of their problems and work out strategies for solving them" (121). Obviously, every human society has problems- social, economic, cultural as well as political challenges. Usually, certain factors are responsible for the aforementioned problems in the society. One of such factors with no doubt, is inability of the people to change from wrong existing socio-cultural and religious practices which were handed over to them. Thus, theatre for development is one of the communication channels that have been used over the years to promote social change in human society. Oga buttresses that:

All over the world, where Theatre for Development (TfD) is practiced, it defines itself as an alternative practice; and the agenda it pursues always is that of change. The notion of 'amateur' (other) is quite strong in TfD's definition itself and its role. It is also significant that in its practice 'otherness' is central, to TfD's discursive strategy, first in its artistic form and secondly, in the issues and participants involved in it. However, the end point of exploration and subjugation is to keep point of equilibrium or change. It is the conduct of the journey from the point of equilibrium or change. It is the conduct of the journey from the point of disjunction to where a resolution, no matter how tenuous, may be achieved that is at the centre of the practice. (99)

Indeed, TfD usually involves a number of methods and strategies as well as artistic activities like drama, dance, song among other art forms in its efforts to express avalanche of issues facing the society. Beyond this, TfD does not only make the participants to be aware of their socio-economic challenges, but it also make them to be active participants in seeking solutions to the problems by being fully involved in the TfD stages of activities which ranges from research, design, evaluation and implementation. As such, Mahd in Jerry Odeh and Jacob Akura affirms that TfD is,

...a theatre that contributes to the process of healing, for it to confront the pain rather than deny its existence. Its audience is active participants in the performance and therefore, in creating, and distributing their own language. . . The audiences are transformed into dramatic actors and the dramatic actors are transformed into social actors. (108).

However, several scholars, though, with different lines of argument have attested to the fact that no meaningful change and development can take place without efficient application of communication approaches. Thus, over the years, potent approaches of communication have been identified; one of such is TfD approach. Many TfD's production safe a mix of "Theatre of the Oppressed" (TO), a technique created by Augusto Boal in a form of community-based theatre that recognizes the benefits of the target community participation in the communication processes instead of the aged long method of top-bottom approach. Through this, many communities and organizations have over the years provided education or propaganda channeled towards human and societal development.

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CHALLENGES OF SOURCES OF WATER IN OMOGWU COMMUNITY

Omogwu is one of the villages in Okenyi District, Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State. The village is surrounded by other villages like Ugboji, Amoke, Otodo, Ejiya, Okenyi Centre and Abache. The village is a very small settlement with a population of over one hundred people. The people are predominantly farmers. Like other rural areas in Kogi State and Nigeria in general, the citizens of the community have been faced by many socio-economic and political challenges. According to Usman Atabo in oral interview with the researchers, "Omogwu has many challenges. Our people depend on other villages around us for many basic amenities like school, market, hospital, and our major source of water is Inegene River" (Usman Atabo, Oral Interview).

Selected Pictures of Inegene River



Source: these Researchers, 16/03/2023



Source: these Researchers, 16/03/2023

From the pictures above, it is glaringly clear that the people themselves are caught in this web as they themselves do not practice hygiene. In the only source of water available to them, which is they bathe in it and even wash clothes. These practices contaminate the water and in the end, they still drink from this water.

Reading from the above pictures, it is clearly obvious that Omogwu has a natural source of water. The river is called Inegene River. It is situated and located beneath hills. Omogwu community on the other is situated on top of the hills. These facts have a number of consequences on Inegene River as Hassan Ochella says in an oral interview with the researchers thus, “yes, no household in our community has a pit toilet. So, we defecate in the bush around us. Similarly, usually dump our waste materials in the bush. When it is rainy season, all these dirt normally flow down to river” (Personal interview 2023). The evidences of these are seen in the pictures above. The water is contaminated by different kinds of waste materials and faeces.

Apart from Inegene River, “Omogwu community has just one water project which was built by Hon. Hassan

Omale, a former House of Representative Member that represented Ankpa, Omala and Olamabolo Local Government Areas of Kogi State 2015-2019. Although, the borehole was not properly maintained and the water dried few months of being put to use” (Usman Atabo, in an oral interview).

Omogwu Water Project



Photo Credit: This Researcher, 16/03/2023

Deducing from the above facts, Omogwu community is without doubt, is challenged with the problem of lack of safe water for consumption. It has been shown in pictures and reflected in opinions of the respondents above that the community has a natural source of water and one water project. But the natural source of water is not pure and safe for consumption due to the people’s unhealthy practices and behaviour like open defecation and indiscriminate dumping of waste materials which they say contaminate the river during rainy season.

The Current State of Omogwu Water Project



Photo Credit: This Researcher, 16/03/2023

On the other hand, the only water project in community is not functional due to lack of maintenance culture among the people. Hence, the people depend on the contaminated Inegne River for water supply. As such, Alidu Apeh agrees that “the people have suffered several water born-diseases” (Personal interview 20233).

Apparently, attitudinal change seems be one of the major ways to address the aforementioned problems. The people’s attitudes and practices such as open defecation and indiscriminate dumping of waste materials have been identified as some of the major causes of their problems. Hence, the need for them to change in this regard is sacrosanct. Theatre for Development can play a very significant role in this context. Theatre for Development both in theory and practice usually involves a number of steps-data collection, drama formation, scenario development, performance and post-performance engagements as well as follow up exercises. Apart from these, the practitioners normally make the people to be involved in the entire processes; they equally make use of the people’s language, song, and costumes among other things to communicate to them for socio-economic and political transformation. According to Jamila and Victor in Jerry and Jacob ,”as a tool that can be adaptable to facilitate diverse community based issues, TfD lends itself as a “thermostat” of change. As thermostat, it is capable of initiating sustainable change while its methods can be changed themselves in the process of initiating development” (98). In the same vein, Daniel posits that Theatre for Development is, “an avenue where community members get the opportunity to identify their own problems and issues that concern them and through discussions lay down strategies to overcome them”(56). Thus, this study strives to suggest urgent needs for TfD practitioners to engage the people of Omogwu in TfD’s activities for possible and collective fight against the issues of lack of safe water supply in the area.

CONCLUSION

The importance of water to human existence can never be over emphasized. Water is used for drinking, cooking, keeping of a healthy hygiene, and it also supports the body system. In fact, without it, one cannot survive. On the other hand, contaminated water is harmful to human health and has been identified as one of the causes of death globally over the ages. Therefore, the need for safe water supply has been a global challenge over the years. However, a number of human unhealthy activities such as open defecation and indiscriminate dumping of waste materials have been identified as the factors fighting against availability of safe water in Nigerian rural areas like Omogwu in Ankpa Local Government Area of

Kogi State. This research wherefore, has to some extent discussed the causes of lack of safe water in the area and the needs to use Theatre for Development to interrogate the challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the research makes the following recommendations:-

- i. Theatre for Development should be used to create awareness about the needs to protect and maintain the natural sources of water in Omogwu.
- ii. The natural sources of water in area should developed and community members like the vigilantes should be engaged in protecting these sources.
- iii. Government should initiate water project that could help to eradicate the problem of lack of access to safe water in Omogwu and other rural areas in Nigeria.
- iv. Individually, all efforts to promote access to safe water in Nigeria and Africa, and world in general should be encouraged.
- v. Supervising bodies that can prevent vandalization of government projects like the vandalized Omogwu Water project should be set up.

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