

The Adults and Aged in Nigeria

Issues and Researches

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Drama and HIV/AIDS Education in

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Nigeria

O. Elegbe

Abstract

This paper discussed the concepts of drama, HIV and AIDS as well as the importance of drama in HIV and AIDS education because drama is an effective communication strategy.

Introduction

Drama is the use of dialogue in theatre and the most natural form of expression among the most diverse communities of Africa because it mirrors daily life. This is because it is so closely related to festivities, pleasure, and to the most basic religious feelings. The English word "drama" derives from the Greek word "dram" meaning "to do." Thus, a drama is a story performed or "done" by actors on stage, radio, film, television, in an open field, or even on the street. A drama, like a story, recounts a chain of events and describes a web of relationships involving a person or persons. A drama can be true, but more often is fictional.

Drama grows spontaneously in every African culture because it is the first attempt to communicate communal identity. This is done either by the dramatization of problems or through the humorous representation of events or the teaching of moral ideals. Drama in the form of theatre takes the form of storytelling also to disseminate its messages. This is a scenario which involves young people who usually sit around in a horseshoe formation, and the storyteller sits directly opposite. Sometimes, the storyteller is a wise old man who is experienced or gifted in storytelling. The audience in this "theatre" is not passive; they participate as members of choirs,

clapping or singing whenever necessary. Sometimes it involves singing, dancing or body movement. Story telling is a means of communication, information, education and character building (Wilson, 1991).

We cannot understand the communicative ability or potentials of drama without dealing with the origin of theatre as it relates to our traditional culture. The African people have their media system or mode of communication, which is more of oral than written. The traditional African people communicate through, songs, dance, drama, festivals, rituals etc.

Theatre grows spontaneously in every culture because it is the first attempt to express the identity of the community, either by the dramatization of problems or through the humorous representation of events. These expressions are shown in various elements used by the theatre to communicate its messages like in the design of their costume, dance, mask, songs, and rhythm (Babalola, 1999).

Traore (1972) comments on costume as one of the elements of communication in the theatre. According to him: "Costume in the traditional African theatre is of particular importance. The traditionalism in theatre costume corresponds to the exact reproduction of gesture and ritual accessories.

Anigala (1991) emphasized the elements of communication which are embedded in festival drama:

"Festival drama is a dramatic activity or performance which occurs within the context of a festival celebrated in African villages or in similar setting and it must portray belief, ideas and customs of an African society. Mime, music and song are part of the elements of theatre that aid communication in that they are always used to create suspense".

Babalola (1999) quoting Adedeji Joel in popular *Alarinjo* theatre of the Yorubas asserts that African theatre in its most popular form has always been a manifestation of the vitality and fidelity of its people. He advances that since the audience and its participation are a vital part of the theatrical medium, it is only desirable that the theatre form emerges from the resources located in the theatre's cultural base, prompted by the people's own theatrical propensities in order to reflect their aesthetic sensibilities. Traditional African theatre is a total theatre because it incorporates a number of artistic elements or integrates many dramatic forms to communicate its messages. The art of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting, dancing and the use of other theatrical elements are utilized to enhance the aesthetics of the performances and eventual appreciation by the audience. Hence, the continuous use of drama in disseminating HIV/AIDS messages to people in Nigeria and Africa.

The HIV and AIDS Pandemic

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is an epidemic disease that has profound social effects. Its impact differs from one society to another. In Africa, the disease has been spread heterosexually and the rapidity of its spread can be partly explained by the lack of health resources, poor general health, long periods of social unrest, inadequate information dissemination and economic disruption. The level of infection is so high in some countries in Africa that the number of deaths over the next decades will almost inevitably slow down rates of population increase; and in some particularly heavily infected areas, it will result in population decline. This disease which particularly affects people between the ages of 15 and 50 years results in large numbers of orphans, shortages of labour, the loss of expensively trained specialists which will keep increasing the burden of health and other forms of care if the disease is not stopped.

The first AIDS case was reported in Nigeria in 1986 and the epidemic has rapidly grown since then. The adult HIV prevalence has increased from 1.8% in 1991 through 4.5% in 1996 to 4.6% in 2008. The epidemic has now extended beyond the commonly classified high-risk groups to the general population of Nigeria. Some parts of the country are worse affected than others. Nevertheless, all the states in Nigeria have general population epidemic of over 1%. The infection cuts across both urban and rural areas, males and females and all age groups. (NARHS, 2003) Hence, it becomes imperative for the government, civil societies and community based organizations to develop various strategies like drama to educate the people on how to prevent themselves from being infected by the virus. There are various strategies like music, radio gingle, television promos, posters, billboards, handbills fezcaps and others. However dramatic education in HIV/AIDS prevention has a dual advantage in that it give room for immediate feedback of messages received.

According to Crow (1983:52) "The ordering of a dramatic story in a particular way directs the audience's attention to certain issues and areas of experience rather than others, and by analyzing the structure of the plot we are helped towards an understanding of the dramatist's overall meaning(s). Hence, drama is one of the strategies that has been used for educating the people about HIV/AIDS issues. One of the strategies of using drama to educate people about HIV/AIDS is the concept of theatre for development or community theatre approaches. Educating through theatre for development (TFD) according to Solanke (2000) is the style of theatre used for self-development by the people as a 'correct' means of disseminating information and solving problems, especially when it is a problem that the people have to solve by themselves.

TFD always creates a forum for questions and answers plus challenges and reasons. Theatre for development is a different kind of theatre in which all people must become

participants. The rural dwellers will take decisions not from having seen a play brought to them, but from a play presentation in which they are all participants. TFD in its approach of carrying the audience along does create decisions instantly for them to take in the process of cleaning dirt off the roads of their lives with their own hands. They (the audience) are ready to be re-oriented, empowered and developed. The beauty of TFD is taking advantage of the local culture to communicate messages of benefit to the community. This is because to the community information sourced from them and passed back to them in their own language, with their own people serving as the message bearers /the actors, is real and thus will be consumed and fully digested. In TFD, the whole community becomes the stage and are involved in the communication process. The people in the community, the actors and all the setting and "properties" (props) are already available within the community set up. (Solanke, 2000). Looking at drama through a TFD perspective Atai (1999:4) defines it thus:

Theatre for development is based on theatre for helping human beings "unfold" or "roll out" or "lay out" themselves in the process of encountering nature or the objective outer world; once this "marching" or "stepping forward" begins, Theatre for Development is also for "marching forward" our communities, societies, civilization and history.

Abah (1990:17) from another perspective examines the concept of TFD in relation to the concept of theatre for integrated development (TIDE). He defined TIDE as the practice by which theatre is put at the service of the disadvantaged, rural and urban poor for the purpose of discussing and working out strategies for dealing with their socio-economic conditions. "The ethics and aesthetics of TIDE focuses on the need for the human person in the development process to participate in

shaping his own reality. Hence, this type of theatre communicates to the people at the community in their own language, idiom and helps to build the people's artistic modes of expression into the process of discussion and performances.

This kind of theatre practice may be variously referred to as Theatre for Development (TFD), Theatre for Integrated Rural Development (THIRD), Community Theatre for Integrated Rural Development (CTHIRD), Community Theatre, Popular Theatre, Theatre of the Poor. They all refer to the same practice even though some of these nomenclatures have their limitations. Nevertheless, all the concepts refer to Popular or People's Theatre.

According to Gumucio-Dragon (2001) "theatre of the poor" or what is known as popular or community theatre "is a tool for communicating in a more direct and interpersonal way with the underprivileged sectors of society, to bring them the notion that only by means of their own participation can their lives change and society become more democratic." Hence, Gbilekaa (1990:27) defines "community theatre for development" as popular theatre aimed at stimulating a process of community or group problem solving and actions." The community theatre for development helps the community to find out their problems and design appropriate strategies for solving them.

Boal (1985) supported the participatory nature of the community theatre. He emphasized that "the audience is not just a mere audience but also, actors and creators of drama. It does not comprise mere recipients of a finished product but those who are a part and parcel of the creative process. Hence, community theatre involves professional dramatists helping the local communities to develop their own theatre groups to act plays about their own problems and how to solve them. The participation of the community involves them in the acting out of plays and participating in carrying out research into the specific problems of the community, which will be used as

scenarios for the plays. The relationship between the audience and the actors in community theatre is informal. There is contact with the audience before the performance and during the performance the audience is free to join the performance to direct the course of the story line. Also there is follow up action after the performance to determine the degree of success. The community theatre for development deals with the problems of the people by involving them through using their own language and artistic forms of expression. This theatre also addresses communication and development issues and the key to this is through participation of the community in all the process of implementation.

This participation according to Yerima and Okwori (1990:38) happens "during the process of play creation-where collective creativity happens...(in which) people are brought together to exchange ideas, share experiences, discuss problems and try and figure out solutions to the problems raised. Collectively, therefore, they devise plays to deal with the problems."

Based on this concept (participation), Ahura (1990:55) gave a comparison of popular and participatory theatre for development. In his comparison, he defined popular theatre as:-

the theatre of the people which is the expressive medium of the people and which treats the actual problems of the environment highlighting the problems in new light for the purposes of reopening discussion on them as a way of seeking solutions to them. It is a theatre that recognise the creative potentialities of the rural masses and seeks to activate those potentialities for the common good... It tries to use the very resources of the environment, human, linguistic, creative

and material resources so that the very people for whom it is meant are placed at the center of the theatre instead of the periphery to which conventional theatre tends to push those who are expected to benefit from it.

He defined the features of participatory theatre as theatre that: "emphasizes the mass mobilization of the rural masses so that they come to actively participate in the theatre for the purpose of upgrading themselves intellectually and materially so that they come to a thorough understanding of themselves and their environment. This participation helps them to master their environment, which leads them to an understanding of the structures of their society. By this understanding they as a group come to full knowledge of the structures that are injurious to them and those that enhance their prestige as human beings. They, therefore, prepare themselves to control their destiny by seeking to change the existing situation." The concept and focus of popular and participatory theatre are the same because they both aim at the development of the rural people and their environment; they put the future in the hands of the deprived man; they assert the dignity of man irrespective of material status; they instill confidence in the deprived rural man who has for long been ignored in development planning and execution giving back to man his basic humanity to explore, control and play an active role in the development of his environment (Ahura, 1990:55).

Based on this understanding, Gumucio-Dagron (2001) gave the following as roles that popular theatre can play in educating and empowering people at the rural communities. This strategy has been adapted for HIV/AIDS preventive education in many communities in Nigeria:

- i. Popular theatre is an important alternative means of expression, especially when the electronic and print media

- are under censorship or cannot reach the expected target audience.
- ii. Popular theatre has enormous potentials for mobilizing the community and awakening its creative potentials to act and make changes.
 - iii. Popular theatre creates opportunities for societies to develop collectively; it abolishes individualistic views of life and induces people to act together to achieve common goals.
 - iv. Popular theatre seeks to build an educational process that is genuinely democratic, that through the analysis of problems leads to a critical evaluation of the reality, and that promotes the ideals of liberty and change.
 - v. Popular theatre incorporates reality in its messages of what the people are experiencing and give room for solving any problems that they might be facing.
 - vi. Popular theatre supports the new ethics of education, which aim to make each individual a protagonist in his or her own educational and cultural development.
 - vii. Popular theatre helps to communicate human values and builds on existing community- based democratic organizations or operations.
 - viii. Popular theatre seeks to transform the passive receiver of messages into a critical, reflective or reflexive and active participant in the communication process.

Importance of drama in HIV/AIDS Education

Uji (2000) examined six functions of the importance and usefulness that drama for education or community empowerment.

- i. *Mobilization*- the theatre provides motivation to members of the community to actively participate in developmental programmes that will yield self-reliance.
- ii. *Conscientization* - The community or people are conscientized in that it is able to identify and analyse its

problems more from the point of view of socio-political and economic injustice. Such an awareness is a prelude to positive action which is a necessary condition for development.

- iii. *Effective communication* - The theatre creates a two-way communication system with an in-built feedback system. The structure of the performances allows dialogue to develop among the members of the community and between the agents and them.
- iv. *Discussion and decision-making* - The plays produced in this form provide ample opportunities for discussing problems, deciding on solutions and implementation.
- v. *Solidarity* - The dialogue that ensues before, during and after performances have the effect of bringing solidarity among the members of the community since they come together to discuss problems that are common to all of them.
- vi. *Cultural revitalization* - The productions serve as a potent stimulus for the people's cultural life. This is partly because they now use their traditional art forms within a modern context of development.

This type of theatre is found useful and effective communication tool in disseminating various development messages including HIV/AIDS to the community people. Ahura (1990:61- 63) then suggested the following steps for effective implementation of popular participatory theatre for community education or empowerment.

- i. The animateur must get relevant information about the language and behaviour of the people of the community.
- ii. He must instill some trust in the members of the community and work within the social framework provided by the environment.

- iii. The theatre experiment must be based on a sound premise, which should enhance individual and society's values within the community.
- iv. The innovation to be introduced by the theatre should be appraised in terms of broad perspective instead of a single goal.
- v. The theatre must give room for the community to express themselves in their own language.

In other words, drama is popular for building effective positive change on issues of HIV/AIDS in the community. Change involves a process of education and empowerment, which requires the acquisition of new knowledge, tools skills and techniques. This is the foundation that gives stability to the people within the communities. Hence, drama plays the role of educating the people on issue of HIV/AIDS by redirecting their focus to accept the challenges of HIV/AIDS and ways in solving them.

Drama therefore becomes a vehicle of education. Education in this regard helps the people to acquire new skills to identify and solve their problems. Drama then becomes communication strategy for persuading the people to make progress through a process of reflection and mediation. (Ahura, 1990:95). Based on this understanding for effective process toward a positive change in the community, communication becomes critical. Communication is the agent for change while drama becomes the vehicle. Hence, Ahura (1990: 97-98) presented the following functions of drama as an effective communication strategy toward a positive change that leads to empowerment or education.

- i. Popular theatre is a medium of cultural action for change. It integrates the people and their culture into the performance and then motivates members to join the performance eventually, which leads them to empowerment and transformation of their lives.

- ii. This theatre gives its information a local colour. It makes use of local indigenous language, dress, costumes and the familiar local musical rhythms. It localizes the definition, analysis and solutions of problems presented in the performances.
- iii. It uses the resources of the communities to pass on its developmental information e.g. popular local folk artist. The efficacy of entertainment is that its form of presentation is familiar to the community because it is cultural and it builds on the community's history and culture.
- iv. It gives room for dialogue between the animateur and the community members. Dialoging creates avenue for critical analysis of the problems, brings greater understanding of the development issues and gives room for feedback.

Entertainment-education approaches to health promotion and disease prevention are popular methods for interventions. Hence, drama as an enter-education approach can be an effective medium for communicating HIV and AIDS information and can reduce knowledge gaps associated with low levels of formal education. Drama can also be used in a broad range of settings to convey socio-emotive and sensitive material. In a study of the use of drama to communicate HIV and AIDS information, findings revealed that exposure to the drama significantly increased viewers' HIV and AIDS-related knowledge. Before the drama, audiences had relatively low knowledge or misconception about HIV and AIDS. The drama presentations reduced those misconceptions and increased the level of reported intentions to treat HIV-positive individuals more kindly (Valente, Bharath, 1999).

The impact of using drama as an education strategy to inform and provoke discussion on HIV and AIDS was significant in India through "Nalamdana"-a popular theatre strategy among the populace of Tamil Nadu (63million) in Southern India (Bharath, Balaji and Jeevanandham, 2002). "The Bridge

Theater" concept used dramatic techniques in their health promotion and disease prevention education performances. The interactive drama presentations were performed by 14-19 year old Puerto Rican and Dominican actors about how young people can protect themselves from contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS, against abuse and violence, and how to make healthy decisions (Castle, Zelaya, Torres Reis, Miranda and Colon, 2002).

The experience of South Africa's Sibikwa Community Theater group, shows that performing arts can be used as a vehicle of change and education, and can contribute to improving the lives of the ordinary people (Klotz, 2002). In an innovative project called the "Baabas", HIV prevention messages were taken to street children, the local community, and local leaders through street and community outreach, HIV prevention clubs and training workshops. The result shows a significant impact within the community (Mitchell, Oling, Onen; Nyakake and Kihuguru, 2002). The experience of Kaalamang 343, a street play on HIV and AIDS in the Philippines was significant. The project used a popular medium- street theater -for bringing critical information to vulnerable audiences (Pernito, 2002).

The "Arepp" project was significant in using puppetry and theatre for social education to address the issue of HIV and AIDS, sex, sexual relationships, gender, discrimination, life-skills and all forms of abuse among in-school youth in South Africa (Schutz and Bilbrough 2002). "Africa Alive!" is another bold multinational initiative that used drama by young people from schools and local communities, professional artists, athletes, and public figures as role models in its campaign to educate people and encourage positive behavior change for HIV prevention. Youth rallies in the form of community concerts on HIV and AIDS reach about 10,000 people with consistent messages promoting abstinence, correct and consistent use of condoms and support for people living with HIV and AIDS (Serlemitsos, 2002).

In a study using professional theatre for HIV prevention and social change in Kenya, the evaluation revealed that the audience judged the plays to be educational, provocative and depict public health and social relevance (Valadez, Blair and Falkland, 2002). In some of the research studies documented exposure to the dramas significantly increased viewers' HIV/AIDS-related knowledge. Before the drama, audiences had relatively high levels of accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS, but lower knowledge levels of common HIV/AIDS misconceptions. The dramas reduced those misconceptions and increased the level of reported intentions to treat HIV-positive individuals more kindly. Drama can be an effective medium for communicating HIV/AIDS information and can reduce knowledge gaps associated with low levels of formal education. Drama can also be used in a broad range of settings to convey socioemotive and sensitive material (JHU, 2009). These studies show the impact of drama in educating the people about issues relating to HIV and AIDS.

Conclusion

Looking at the effectiveness of drama as a communication strategy for a positive change and HIV/AIDS education, Warrity (1988:120) submitted thus: "the interactive nature of the theatre calls for a new acceptance of theatre as a medium for the dissemination of ideas and the bridging of the communication gaps within the media systems. Modernizing campaigns aimed at achieving change in a relatively short period of time depend on communication systems that combine the efficient diffusion of information with opportunities, or reinforcement and feedback are needed. The use of drama in existing media systems should be encouraged, promoted and further facilitated, to enhance these developmental goals, these goal could be in a sense "HIV/AIDS education" in Africa.

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