

A SYNERGY OF SCIENTIFIC AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Annas Ngunan Ashaver, Ph.D

Theatre for development approach use heavily indigenous knowledge of the people to actualize its goals. In recent times, Theatre for Development is facing challenges of global changes arising from the spread of scientific knowledge. The shift to specific had edged knowledge out those who relied only on indigenous knowledge and experience to develop their environment. The quest for specific knowledge and usage in development programme has also raised the issue of consumption and pollution, sustainable development, environmental, social and ethical considerations.

Most policy makers go through the unilateral scientific paradigm of educational system that glorified and visualized this developmental change while on the other hand indigenous knowledge with its approach is viewed as the poison for development. When indigenous knowledge is presented with backwardness the policy makers too execute plans for development at the expense of indigenous knowledge system. In order to understand the divisive development ideologies, it is paramount to have a glance at the historical evolution of development philosophy. According to the Britannica concise Encyclopaedia (2006) for Medieval Western thinkers like Aristotle, 'telos' (Greek word for "end," "purpose or good,") was an ideal state of being, which societies at that point in time lacked. Aristotle account of the word teleology implies that a full explanation or purpose of anything must consider its final cause for which the thing exists or was produced. In this context, development can be perceived in line with Aristotle's concept of teleology as a process involving the operation of a guiding end in order to have a purposeful transformation of a society. Thus ushering in the concepts of planning and policy as a guiding principles in the attainment of given nations development goals. To build on this argument Mark Hobart with reference to Moore (1963) says that;

Development has been linked to, or equated with modernization, this is transformation of traditional societies into modern ones, characterized by advanced technology, material prosperity and political stability (5).

Similarly Arun Grawal quoting Warren (1989) argues that;

Modern scientific knowledge is centralized and associated with the machinery of the state; and those who are its bearers believe in its superiority. Indigenous technical knowledge in contrast is scattered and associated with low prestige rural life...(417).

Since in many scientific tenets most indigenous knowledge systems have been dubbed as conservative and unsystematic, it can be argued that indigenous knowledge systems and their bearers are viewed as misfits in the confines of a purposeful, dynamic and goal oriented modern and developed world. That is why many policy makers have to do away in most cases with the past in modern policy making or planning on one side and implementation of development theories and perspectives that have over the years been advanced as pathways to the attainment of development.

Indigenous Knowledge in Africa

The knowledge system of the traditional Africa provided arrays of information, understanding and explanations that sustain their interactions with their natural milieu. These include the mediation

with ancestors, struggles against diseases and injury, their aspirations and fears, explanation of natural phenomena and the relevant strategies to cope with the fluctuating environment. Nakashima and Bridgewater state that, “sophisticated knowledge of the natural world is not confined to science. Human societies all across the globe have developed rich sets of experiences and explanations relating to the environment they live in” (12). Indigenous knowledge system was mostly passed on from one generation to another verbally and through cultural rites which has helped the indigenous people to live a sustainable life. Some scholars have argued that formal education has impacted negatively on indigenous knowledge and ways of learning by replacing them with abstract knowledge. Today great deal of Africa indigenous knowledge is eroding alongside with its values that contributed greatly to the continuity of African societies. For instance, Andah writes that,

The cirespendue method of casting were known in Africa long before European contact... and like all other social phenomena, art experienced enormous pressures and changes during the last four or five centuries... contact with first Arabic / Islamic and then European cultures was to contribute greatly to the decline of classic Africa art as it did to other aspects of Africa cultures (225).

All fused together in a cultural form. This is represented in their daily activities. As Batiste and Henderson puts it, “we carry the mysteries of our ecologies and their diversity in our oral traditions in our ceremonies and in our art” (200). In Africa, the belief systems according to Klerner “have given rise to many richly expressive Masquerades and other lavish festivals, figural sculpture, secular and sacred architectures” (10). Some scholars have argued that indigenous knowledge system is not cultural knowledge as such it rather means art song, myth, story, ceremony, architecture, medicine and so on. Its diverse knowledge conveys the identify of a person, clan, group or nation in relation to their respective societies and as such must be dealt with respect and discussed within its context.

Scientific Knowledge Systems in Development

Policy makers see scientific knowledge as the key resource for development. They believe that scientific knowledge could provide an objective basis for identifying problems and predicting future possibilities. Based on this mono- directional development ideologies and discourse, many development planners and implementers had viewed consulting the indigenous knowledge systems when embarking on development projects as backtracking into the undesired direction and as a helpless, time consuming enterprise in the process of attaining the time bound systematic development goals. Shubi Ishemo puts it thus;

Modernization theories regard cultures of non-industrialised societies as obstacles to development. Those societies are seen as being characterized by kinship, religious obscurantism and fatalism, stagnation and resignation. In short, they are traditional. The opposite of this is a “modern” capitalist sector. (28).

The issue raise in the quotation above is the problematic of defining development and its implementation. In both scientific and indigenous knowledge cases have the underlining factor of management. The issue of which knowledge is proper depends on who identifies the problems and who finally decides what development a group of people need. In some cases the identification and the final development project to be embarked upon are made by the prerogative of the policy makers. This may very well embody the disaster story for many botched projects. This is because the policy makers are far away from the realities of the problem. The human touch to development which is necessity result from consultation and participation by the beneficiaries has been lost.

Having lost out the human factor in the development process, the management and implementation are bound to run aground. The people who are to be the beneficiaries of the development project are likely not to be identify with the project since they have not been part of the setting up of their development project.

Theatre for Development Paradigm

The focus on the human participation in development process and the need to shape the people reality lie at the base of the ethics and aesthetics of Theatre for Development. Theatre for Development is the practice by which Theatre is put at the service of the disadvantage people for the purpose of discussing and working out strategies of dealing with their socio- economic conditions. This kind of theatre speak to the people in their language and deal with issues of direct relevance to their realities. It is a type of theatre that builds on the artistic expressions of the people in form of songs, dances, drama and rites into the process of discussion, performance and actions. According to Ahura and Mude “Theatre for Development strategies bring to lime light the fact that development planning should not be done in a vacuum. It should always seek to open up a dialogue with beneficiaries of the development project” (2).

In the context of development Theatre for Development functions as a medium of articulating problems of the people. This medium of communication is controlled by the people and is not outside their control like scientific knowledge of communication system such as radio, television or newspaper. The people who are to be the beneficiaries of development projects are considered as a esthetics of Theatre for Development Theatre for Development then becomes the process which the people use their indigenous knowledge of language, dance, rites, drama, music, song and belief system to articulate, analyse and take decisions about their problems.

What is require of the people to solve their problem is the indigenous knowledge they acquire and their bodies resources which is already in their traditional abilities to sing, to dance, to drum, to speak their language and so on. Robert Snyder, Williams and Peterson concretise the inter-connectedness of culture and development as practiced by Theatre for Development saying that;

The very concept of a culture-its ways of life and subsistence practices, system of meaning, social organsation and identity- can not as modern economic concept presume, easily be separated from its geographic location. Because so much of what constitutes a culture is woven into spatial patterns and localized meanings, to move a culture would be trantamount to destroying it. Much of what is valuable to a culture is embedded in the place of development (108-109).

From the discussion so far, it seems a development that exclude indigenous knowledge and value system during the planning and process of implementation can lead to partial or total failure of that development project since it follows the top-down model. For the people to take over their own development and utilize their indigenous knowledge system within their cultural matrix, then there will be the usage of indigenous knowledge in Theatre for Development Project.

The process of Theatre for Development is predicated on interpersonal contact of the intended beneficiaries of development using their indigenous knowledge through Theatre for Development strategy. In this strategy, people come together to discuss issues concerning them. The problem identify is of general concern to the people and awareness is created and collective efforts are made to solve such problems. In the context of Theatre for Development what is identified as a problem is analysed and is what inform as well as provide materials for the community drama that discusses the problem, explores options and through concretization discovers the solution of the problem. This is a

dramatic process by which dialogue and action in the drama is formulated by the people themselves using their indigenous knowledge system. Final decisions to solve the problem are also taken collectively by the people.

The concern of Theatre for Development strategy is to demystify the misinterpretation of the superiority of scientific knowledge to development that indigenous Knowledge is irrational to development. The demythologization is contained in the participation and involvement of the people and indigenous Knowledge used in the process of Theatre for Development by the people. The essential characteristic of Theatre for Development paradigm is people's participation using their indigenous Knowledge which is in opposition to the ethics of scientific knowledge.

The most fundamental element for development is involving people's creative capacity and their potentials. This creative capacity has a democratic content where the people determine what is best for themselves and adapt new techniques and knowledge to their concrete reality. The whole process and implementation involve not just the people's customs, belief system, attitudes, values, art and so on but to the whole way of life of a people which also embraces a complex web of economic and political activities, science and technology of the people.

Enshrined in the above democratic and all embracing theatre participatory approach to development planning and implementation is the high probability of project effectiveness and sustainability. This kind of development where the intentions of both the beneficiaries and development planners merge is the one which is suitable in the 21st C. That is through dialogue and active participation of the people involved in the development of their community. The people are empowered because there is recognition of their own abilities through Theatre for Development strategy. Through Theatre for Development strategy the development project is more effective and its sustainability become more profitable because it has a direct bearing on the people's reality. In this context, a sense of ownership of the development in the community becomes possible with its sustenance. In this 21st C there is need to merge both scientific and indigenous knowledge system that is from the planners and the beneficiaries of development.

A Synergy of Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge in Theatre for Development Strategy

Indigenous knowledge system is part of Scientific Knowledge since its values are not only derived from primitive system but also embraced African science and technology. Scientific knowledge is influence by tradition which by extension is indigenous Knowledge system of Africa. Since development necessitates the freedom of people to choose what they value in a globalised world, different societies should be allowed the liberty to pursue what they believe and value. Sen opins that, "No society should arrogate to itself the right to determine what others need. Furthermore, no society needs to be subjected to unsolicited and sometimes force transfer of values and practices as was occasioned by colonialism" (10). In line with the opinion of Sen, no particular knowledge has the monopoly of development. Both scientific and indigenous knowledge systems are possessed by different global cultures on different areas which are very important on particular elements that promote certain aspects of development. For instance, the scientific knowledge has led to development of more advanced technology and economics while indigenous knowledge system generated very strong family systems that house people whose abilities are needed for development. These are all conducive to sustainable development. On the other hand, global warning, a result of scientific knowledge and superstition derived from indigenous knowledge are formidable threats to sustainable development.

The integration of scientific and indigenous knowledge in Theatre for Development strategy for modern world is more preferable. Indigenous knowledge is required during the process of Theatre for Development intervention to reflect on the reality of the concerned community. That notwithstanding, the policy planners and Theatre for Development practitioners are also free to introduce some scientific techniques that can be adopted by community members. In this way, there will be integration of two knowledge systems. In this contemporary time the interaction between indigenous and scientific knowledge is inevitable. For instance, Meagher and Wilkinson had advocate that African music can be integrated with western technology. According to them “A proper interaction between traditional music performers and ethnomusicologist will give rise to an effective and holistic modernization of traditional music that would restore it to its former eminent position and role in modern society” (3). In agreement with their advocacy, the Theatre for Development practitioners has to make efforts to strategize on how to best integrate scientific and indigenous knowledge to move along with the global community. This indeed is the imperative for which Theatre for Development practitioners have to consider if they want genuine development that will be sustainable in this globalized world.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that Theatre for Development strategy is influenced by indigenous knowledge system of the target community under intervention. The usage of indigenous knowledge in Theatre for Development strategy within the context of global changes also embraces technology as expressed in Theatre for Development materials and techniques which has its base in scientific knowledge system. Therefore, the typical African setting with indigenous knowledge has to be integrated with scientific knowledge that is confronted by western technological resources for sustainable development. With this synergy, Theatre for Development practitioners will transform Theatre for Development process from traditional works to assume modern character by the adoption of scientific knowledge system. As community members recognize indigenous system and appreciate it as expressed at their local community levels, it will enable them to understand its principles and apply it in their contemporary expressions with new materials from scientific knowledge. By doing this, the synergy will simple means repositioning indigenous knowledge in the main stream of scientific knowledge in the globalised world.

References

- Ahura Tar and Iortiom Mude. (1987) Popular Theatre and Rural Development: The Ogoja Experience. Cuso Newsletters. Ontario.
- Andah, B. (1988) African Anthropology. Ibadan: Shaneson C.I Limited.
- Arun Agrawal: (1995) “Dismantling the Divide between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge”, Development and Change vol. 26.
- Batiste, M and Henderson, S. (2000) Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd.

- Britaninica Concise Encycloepadia at <http://www.answers.com/topic/teleology> Crain William (2006): *Theories of Development: Concepts and Application* (5th Ed) Prentice Hall press.
- Hobart Mark. (1995) *An Anthropological Critic of Development: The Growth of Ignorance*. Routledge.
- Kleiner, F.S (2009) *Gardners Art Through the Ages*. USA: Thomas Wadsworth.
- Meagher, P: U and Wilkinson, B. (2001) *Combating Rural / Public Works Corruption: Food for – Work Programs in Nepal*, IRIS Center Working Paper #239, College Park Maryland.
- Nakashima, D.et al, *Trapping into the World Wisdom*.
- Robert Synder et al. (2003) “Culture Loss and Sense of Place in Resource Valuation: Economic, Anthropology and Indigenous Cultures” in Svein Jentoft et al (eds) *Indigenous Peoples: Resource Management and Global Rights*. Eburon Delft.
- Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*. New York : Knopf .
- Shubi Ishemo (2002) “Culture, Liberation and “Development” in Eade Deborah (ed) *Development and Culture: A Development in Practice*. Reader, Oxfam GB, 2002.