FOLKLORE AND DRAMA AS COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Attitudinal and value changes are often regarded as pre-requisite to creating an enabling developmental environment. As such, communication for development has been largely understood as persuading people to adopt cut-and-dry messages which engender/direct progress, hence the concept of mass communication. This paper proposes folklore and drama as efficacious tools for development messages. Folklore and drama conscientise people on aspects of life such as environmental conservation, assist in political education, health matters, self-help and survival strategies. Folklore and drama as this paper shows, are natural communication which can ensure high impact, yet low cost effects.

Introduction

The word 'development' has become identical with directed, purposive progress that results in economic growth. Many a social scientist seems happy when material outputs increase. (This is quite expected given the nature of their training).

The word 'communication' has the hidden prefix "mass" always attached to it whenever it is perceived. This gives it the stigma of an apparatus of persuasion and manipulation and therefore something to avoid and something unfriendly. Unfortunately, government, institutions and even humanitarian organizations use mass communication to beam propaganda, persuasion and coercion or at least some cut and dry messages which force receivers of the messages to adjust to the messages.

The position of this paper is that our national programmes of mobilization, equity, good government and social development can benefit a lot by new but bold strategies and innovations from the frontiers of our past cultural and indigenous repertoires of wisdom, applying the mechanisms embodied in the functions of our traditional folklore media of communication now popularized by African cultural communicologists as 'orernedia' (Jefkins and Ugboajah, 1986).

Drama identifies with concepts like entertainment, education, social comment (e.g. political, religious, cultural, inter-alia). Drama has continued to be ignored as trivial by some, believed as reality by others, feared as too critical, admired as courageous, hated as too threatening, trusted as effective in effecting change and revered as balanced, neutral, vital and appropriate. Drama is a make-believe controlled experiment which because its events and outcomes are deliberately created by the playwright, can be used to depict any and every human aspect for specific objectives. Drama is communication par-excellence because of its ability to grip its receivers as it unfolds and rolls at a predetermined pace in a predetermined direction. Drama supports all that is progress in our lives - it is development. This then makes drama a most appropriate tool in development communication.

Why Folklore and Drama
Folklore

These are often grounded in the people's tradition and language. They seek to promole the indigenous values and cast aspersion on the negative and unacceptable behaviours.

It is self-evident from our numerous folktales and myths that art in the traditional Nigerian community setting is interpreted as 'life' itself and invariably, it is functionally used for the projection of aspirations and expectations, through the mechanism of information diffusion, for transmission of

knowledge and skills. Based on these local parameters, there is no doubt that such a system or technique can be applied for modern trans formation of the society, especially in the exploration of the hidden frontiers of science, technology and general education. Through folklore or 'oramedia[1] Nigerians will have an opportunity to participate in the dynamics of development and social change through the communication imperatives of cultures.

Drama

Drama is considered an appropriate tool because it removes the stigma of 'mass' from the concept of communication because humans carry messages in their own flesh and blood and communicate almost at interpersonal level with receivers. Where the receivers do not directly participate, they at least seem to observe immediate neighbours as the neighbours thrash the issues and messages loaded onto the script - on stage, on the screen or on air (radio), communication then ceases to appear as "organized" manipulation but rather takes the form of spontaneous, natural interaction.

Drama broadens the meaning of the word 'development' to include concepts like education, conscientisation of the people, empowerment of the indigenous communities, insistence on good governance, moral purification of society, condemnation of crime and corruption and above all, drama ushers in participation by the communities, a very crucial element.

Through interpretation of the characters in a play, a citizen begins to ask and evaluate his own character. What another person does can help to mirror the character in an individual. For example, the moment a citizen learns the implication of a flaw in a character, he tries to purge himself of such weaknesses.

Above all, there is no better forum of fostering citizenship education than a drama piece realized on stage. With the experience of tragic flaws, falling from grace lo grass, a citizen can learn how to become useful to the society through an objective evaluation of the fictional citizen in a play.

According to Scrvaes et al (1962:21) drama challenges the "taken-for-granted" assumptions and pries open the gaps between ideological promise and institutional performance".

Promise with no performance is no development. Those who give the promises always have the means to broadcast the promise and yet usually, there is no platform to question the unfulfilment of the promises. However, in a manner subtle and bold, drama exposes the gap between promises and performance. Drama directs the spotlight to those responsible or is it irresponsible! Drama demands accountability and suggests remedies. Drama evaluates the totality of performance by all organs within a community be they political, social, economic, ideological, moral, philosophical, etc. This evaluation is not a question and answer session in the gate-keeping method. It is a no holds barred, unstoppable exposition. This way, those charged with developmental assignments dare not rest on their laurels. Drama as tool in development communication not only communicate development but also insist on development. The icing on this case is that no matter how serious the message contained, drama will always be loaded with entertainment (e.g. humour, comical blunders and misplaced trusts).

Drama exploits the politics of possibility. Over the centuries, drama has been used to criticize, suggest ideals and propose solution to problems. It uses humans to suggest how its proposal could be implemented. The playwright creates ideal communication situations with actors who interact to fulfill the playwright's purpose. Implementation of suggested proposals develops society and yet through drama, nobody feels "exposed" as the ringleader in criticizing lack of development -sometimes not even the playwright. The development support message seems to come from this huge powerful but anonymous bulldozer called drama. The message becomes a collective effort of the playwright, the depicted, the actors, the criticized, the critics and, in fact the whole community not only feels part of the issues raised by the drama, but feels it *owns* the issues and is therefore *owed*

restitutions. This is true of "Rituals'[1] and "Brotherhood of darkness". Older Nigerians familiar with classical dramas like "Village Headmaster", "Karambama", "Icheoku" and a host of others will attest to the impact of these dramas in social engineering.

Areas of Application

Folklore and Drama as tools in communication development can be used to:

(a) Criticize political mismanagement. This type of literature is plentiful. It is easy to come up with examples of such drama which have landed many playwrights either in jail or at the gallows. Servaes et al (1996:13) says that drama can be used to "advance and validate a people-based counter-culture; people's versions of social reality versus political hegemony of the ruling class".

(b) Comment on social problems like street kids and tribalism. The radio should explore the possibility of effectively integrating our rich traditional mode of reaching rural folk through a marriage or fusion of oral media (folklore, drama and oral narratives) and relevant modem mass media, specifically for rural consumption, where the bulk of our people reside. The type

proposed by Jefkins and Ugboajah (1986:102). Popular local musicians should be given a specific task of putting into songs any mobilization campaign for health care and family planning. This could be recorded and dished out in radio as development news or jingles as the case may be.

(c) Assist educational programmes: The education-for-development messages should reflect the needs of the victims of development especially where these are very unique like sections belonging to the rural poor, the politically or tribally discriminated against.   Success in such issues like ethnicity, gender relationship and inter-religious harmony can only come about as a result of sustained long-term efforts at education. If drama is used, it should be used as a teaching and/or learning aid and not as a complete education-for-development message in itself. This calls for clear, specific and measurable-objectives for the drama so that it serves its purpose well.

(d) Assist health efforts: Many dramas have been made in Nigeria to assist awareness programmes on diseases e.g. "Good bye tomorrow".

(e) Conscientise people on conservation including animal conservation, vegetation conservation and environmental pollution.   Suleiman (1991) proposed a rural community radio as an effective way of making effective use of folklore as effective support for development efforts. This will ensure that messages are relayed in the language the people are at home with.

(f) Assist in spreading the latest technological advancement and discoveries. A modern drama will show how new technology is used to improve the welfare of the people. For credentials, the star roles models will use the gadgets and make it clear that they derive the maximum possible satisfaction from using the gadget thereby popularizing the use of the gadget. If its use truly develops society, drama then plays a crucial role as an appropriate tool in communicating development news. After all, the advertisements that are now an economically powerful industry in themselves are short dramas.

Those are just examples of areas of application for drama. A drama can deal with one of these areas at a time or it can deal with two or more of these areas at a time. Where more than one area is dealt with, care must be taken to carefully interrelate the areas in the true systems approach where the components must each play a role towards the sustenance of the whole (in this case the plot).

Once a component has outlived its usefulness, it must be got rid of (e.g. a burnt-out sub-plot). Carefully interwoven sub-plots have a wider appeal and therefore tend to have a wider following. The playwright as communicator reaps greater satisfaction as he/she fuses horizons with a wider audience. But the bigger beneficiaries are the communities as they assimilate development messages at a broader base.

Conclusion

Drama and folklore are natural communication tools that can be very effective in communicating development messages. It entertains, counsels, informs, stimulates debate and educates. About conferences and symposia, people complain that after all is said and done, there is more said than done. Not so with drama. In drama there is more done than said. In the process, human happiness is maximized through the resultant development. A belief in drama as a vital tool in development support communication is not a mistaken belief, it is not a misplaced trust, but a guarantee that those communities will adopt development projects as their own and therefore an investment in the future. Communicators should explore the great potentials in folklore and drama as we are still trying to communicate with rural people in the age of information "super high-ways".

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