LOCATING WOMEN AND CHILDREN WITHIN THE NEEDS AGENDA: THE TFD APPROACH

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Introduction

Global relations pose a number of challenges by which nations of the world are classified into two categories– "developed" and "developing". These variables include advanced science, rapid technological change; political stability and economic growth which define the hiatus between poor and wealthy countries. Thus, the impoverished or underdeveloped countries are faced with a seemingly difficult task towards development. Several laudable economic policy blueprints have been implemented with enormous financial expenditure by governments of developing countries, especially Nigeria. Paradoxically, development in Nigeria is still a moral and structural predicament, given the increasing global competitiveness in the 21st century epoch. Explaining Nigerian economic development problems in statistical terms, Osunkeye (2007:40) states that, "...the database of the World Bank's World Development indicators on July 1, 2007 ranked Nigeria 48th out of 183 countries with a GDP estimated at 114.69 billion dollars". This shows that Nigerian Gross Domestic Productivity (GDP) rating is very low compared to other African countries like South Africa, which is ranked 27th with an estimated GDP of about 255 billion dollars, as well as Algeria in the 47th position with an estimated GDP of about 114.73 billion dollars. In this regard, Osunkeye (2007:40) further observed that

> However, two more relevant measures of human progress and welfare paint a different picture of the status of Nigeria among nations of the world. The Human Development Index (HDI), which arose out of the belief that human beings should be the beneficiaries of development programmes, places Nigeria in the bottom 18 among the 177 nations reported in 2006. In fact by occupying the 159th position on the HDI Index this country ranks below such African countries as Seychelles (47th); Mauritius (63rd) and Libya (64th). All of a sudden the giant has become a midget... another index, the Misery Index, which takes into account such variables as infant mortality, maternal deaths during labour, life expectancy, housing and unemployment... Nigeria's position is to least embarrassing given the GDP.

Be that as it may, the challenge in Nigeria at present towards economic emancipation rests on the shoulders of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). This "...is a development plan that integrates economic development efforts at the federal, state and local government levels", (NEEDS, 2005:8). In this sense, the integral effort at the federal level is known as "National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy" (NEEDS), the state effort is known as "State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy" (SEEDS) and the local effort is known as Local Economic Empowerment Programme (LEEMP). The NEEDS agenda, which is the umbrella body of both state and local efforts, advocates a vision of tomorrow's Nigeria plan for economic prosperity. This vision is clearly spelt out in the "Kuru Declaration" with such strategic aims as:

> ...value reorientation, wealth creation, poverty reduction and employment generation. The programme's core value recognizes the importance of respect for elders, honesty and accountability, cooperation, industry, discipline, self-confidence and moral discipline... All citizens, regardless of gender, race, religion, or politics, should feel that they have a stake in Nigeria's future and that their loyalty and diligence will be rewarded. The NEEDS vision is also one in which Nigeria fulfills its potentiality to become Africa's largest economy and a major player in the global economy (NEEDS, 2005: 3-4).

Extrapolating from the above, the issue of "empowering our people" and by logical extension "empowering our women and children" within the framework of NEEDS agenda bears on Women and Children's participation. Hence, how can Women and children be located meaningfully and purposefully in order to assess and access NEEDS and its integrated efforts at the state and local levels. The answers to these questions are not far fetched. In recent times there has been an increasing effort towards gender friendliness and child right protection worldwide. The Beijing Conference and other gender sensitive forums, textbooks, journals, tabloid, electronic and print media are all at the frontier of women participation on the development process. According to Okpeh (2000:4)

> There is... the question of the internationalization of gender matters due largely to feminist agitations during the last quarter of the last millennium. Arising from this is now a common concern for the development of a global blueprint for addressing gender questions and their significance in the actualization of

> the overall development of humanity... surely, the women question is an all important issue that must be thoroughly and properly looked into, if we intend to achieve a socio-cultural and economic leap in the 21st century.

The above submission finds expression in the need to actively involve women in economic and developmental programmes that concern their lives vis-à-vis their male counterpart. This also applies in the case of children. Protecting their rights is a fundamental prerequisite toward a greater Nigerian society in future. Just as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi A. Annan (2005: vii) puts it succinctly:

> The Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000 by all centuries as a blueprint for building a better world in the 21st century, was a landmark document. It captured the aspirations of the international community for a world united by common values, striving to achieve peace and a decent standard of living for every man, woman and child. In such a special place as an ideal we all hope to realise a place in which all children are healthy, protected from harm and surrounded by loving and nurturing adults who help them grow and develop to their full potential.

In the same vein, for women and children to be effectively located in the implementation of NEEDS visionary policy, it is paramount to understand the psychology and basic needs of the average woman and child. Ascertaining these factors through a horizontal and culture friendly approach will go a long way in empowering women and children economically for a meaningful and purposeful development. Such holistic approach to economic empowerment and development provides the basis for locating women and children in the entire corpus of NEEDS integrated effort both at the federal, state and local levels. This proposal poses certain question as to, how this can be achieved and through what means. This is where the concept and practice of Theatre for Development (TfD) finds expression. It is worthy to note that, statistical figures show 80% of Nigerian populace as illiterate, slum and rural dwellers. They constitute the majority or masses, as well as average Nigerians. Gender Sensitive and Child Right indicators have identified women and children within these strata to be poor and vulnerable to societal malady. It has been observed that women and children within this proletariat or peasant class are not favourably disposed to the conventional top-down approach to implementation of economic and development policy meant for them. Thus, the concept and practice of Theatre for Development is one tool in the development process that has horizontal and culture friendly potential to

involve women and children's psychological and physical resources towards assessing and accessing interventions and development programmes. Through the auspices of indigenous language and idiom, TfD avails popular art forms for expression within the context of addressing problem(s) and finding a way forward. More than this, the drama based approach seeks to empower the people by leaving the means of artistic creation in their custody to carry on behind the Theatre catalyst. To buttress this point, Alachi and Igbaba (2007:12) put it succinctly that, "...drama based... intervention is emphatic on the need to adequately mobilize and educate... folks through their folk media..." It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to propose Theatre for Development (TfD) as a viable gender and childhood friendly tool for locating women and children within the context of NEEDS implementation approach. In this regard, our proposal is founded on the need for adequate women and children participation in the development process, which will guarantee their envisaged rights and privileges in the 21st century through the auspices of NEEDS.

Theoretical Framework

This section of the paper focuses on significant theoretical foundations that underscore the TfD based approach to locating women and children in assessing and accessing NEEDS visionary implementation. The approach taps from experimental popular learning theories (Freire 1972 and Boal 1974), and participatory theories of popular theatre/Theatre for Development as tried out by Etherton in Zaria (1976), Kidd and Byram (1980). The approach equally derives from participatory tools established by World Bank (1996). Therefore, our proposed approach here rests on scholarly persuasions derived from drama, education and participation theories.

In the finest tradition of Marxist criticism, the approach by drama to societal reform is predicated on sociological theory. In this sense, existential reality within the ambit of dramatization focuses on man, community, society and civilization for the sole purpose of change

> In this approach, the theatre performance is not the total experience; it must be linked with critical analysis, organization and struggle. The performance can provide a dialectical view of the world but this must be consolidated and sharpened through dialogue and action; it must be part of a continuing process in which past action (struggle) provides the dramatic material (a historical view of reality), for analysis and strategizing leading to future action (struggle) (Kidd in Ogunbiyi 1983:137).

This approach is influenced by Marxist theory of social realism, which was occasioned by the radical poetics of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. This approach to popular theatre is a viable tool for mass social transformation in third-world countries. Augusto Boal, a Maxist educationist, has experimented extensively with theatre toward class reforms, which was published in his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed.* Boal is of the opinion that the peculiarity of the third world circumstance places education in the arena of cultural action. Boal's approach is aimed at educating the people to collectively realize and assess their common problems and proffer workable action plan toward solving their problem. An early trend in this approach was championed by Paulo Freire, Brazilian social activist. His revolutionary philosophy in the Third World was founded on pedagogical experiments, which finds expression in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* He advocated a process of instruction aimed at conscientizing the poor and vulnerable towards self-discovery, self-assessment and self-efficacy. He views the process of conscientization as a tool that facilitated peasants to see their disadvantaged position as the resultant effect of an established causative social regulation. Freire stresses that the pedagogical process must debunk fatalism and any unrealistic perception of the world, which does not conform to the existentialist view of the poor and vulnerable. According to Alachi (2001:14)

> Freire further contends that as the people move from 'a semi-intransitive state to a naïve transitive state of consciousness', progressive social workers equally experience an up and coming critical awareness on their own.

The summation of these popular approaches to drama situates the definition of popular theatre within the context of participation. This means that the people are not passive recipients (audience) of a finished product but are creators and performers of drama. These popular approaches view theatre on the benchmark of democracy as 'theatre of the people, by the people and for the people'. By rational extension of the democratic parlance, it is a theatre of the people in the sense that the issues raised in the drama are of the people. Subsequently, it is a theatre by the people in the sense that the people are the creators or makers of the drama process. Likewise, it is a theatre for the people in the sense that the people are the beneficiaries of the accrued dividend of drama. In this regard therefore, active and complete participation of beneficiaries in the drama making process for any intervention or developmental programme becomes imperative for implementation policy.

Within the context of democracy, Kabwe Kasoma, a South African TfD practitioner is of the view that the issues raised in the play are OF the people, the play process is initiated BY the people and the accrued dividend of the play is FOR the beneficiaries (the people). This approach emphasizes internal initiative and ownership on the part of the people. Instead of radical instigation toward social change and propaganda campaign, this approach seeks to advocate ownership and empowerment toward self-efficacy. By functional extension, Abah (1997:28) stresses that

> Theatre at this point becomes an integral medium in the development process. This stage has been reached in a number of African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

This position by Abah which also finds favourable expression with Kasoma fits into our proposal for NEEDS implementation, especially at the rural and slum areas. Drama for economic empowerment and development, as an integrated effort towards meeting NEEDS target should seek to involve Women and Children from the on set of the programme. As participants and target group, women and children should be located within the scheme of the playmaking process for NEEDS visionary target. Women and children issues are concretized and specified in dramatic form, which will be performed by the target participants. The dramatic form manifests in improvisation and does not need scripting. As the improvisation evolves, new issues arising are added to alter the context of the play with focus on the perceived NEEDs objective. According to Kidd in Alachi (2001:16)

> Experience acquired from making the drama and the crucial discussions that follow each performance make them become aware of how situations in the drama can change from representing actual problems to showing ideal situations. The manner in which the shift is made from the actual to the ideal has been discovered by participants themselves and makes the situation more concrete and real.

By and large, the foregoing discourse on theoretical foundation for locating women and children through the auspices of Theatre for Development within the context of NEEDS integrated target, finds workable expression in our proposal, with the potential of informing, educating, communicating, facilitating economic empowerment and development with special focus on women and children.

Drama Based Proactive Approach to NEEDS

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) blueprint stipulates that:

> The success of NEEDS rests on the three pillars: empowering our people, creating and environment that enables us to make the most of our natural resources an flair for business, and reforming our laws and the way our government works (NEEDS 2005:23).

Within this laudable framework, NEEDS proposes a contract between the people and the government to empower the poor and vulnerable by providing succour that is meant for:

> ...tackling social exclusion head on, paying particular attention to generating jobs to improve incomes, housing, health care, education, political power, and physical security.
>
> To improve the lives of the Nigerian people, NEEDS includes plans for creating jobs, creating affordable housing, improving health care services, strengthening the skill base, protecting the vulnerable, and promoting peace and security (NEEDS 2005:23).

In this regard, and in terms of the conventional top-down approach to implementing such policy blueprint, the question of women and children participation is fundamental. The women and children question in respect of participation is founded on the premise of militating factors such as cultural and legal impediments/constraints, especially by women's relative inadequate time and mobility caused by loaded responsibilities and multiple roles. Thus, if NEEDS is to locate women and children effectively and meet their particular basic needs, TfD proactive approach is one viable tool in the development process that can be available in NEEDS implementation exercise. Hence, the question of how to facilitate awareness and participation bears fruit here.

Axiomatically, give fish to the needy and the needy will remain a dependant, but teach and empower the needy on how to catch fish and the needy will be self-reliant for life. This implies that practical access to information, education, communication and needs assessment by women and children within the framework of NEEDS implementation is capable of opening a new vista. Therefore, the TfD facilitator in an attempt to locate women and children in the NEEDS programme must be focused. This means that women and children are

the focus group for carrying out the TfD based NEEDS agenda. The role of the TfD facilitator is to guide and stimulate women and children with open-ended questions within a plenary session or focus group discussion at the onset of the programme. The objective or essence of such exercise is to ascertain and elicit data on what women and children know, their opinion and perception of NEEDS and it's integrated efforts towards impacting on their lives. For example, if the implementation strategy has to do with microfinance loan for widows and access to education for poor and vulnerable children, the facilitator stimulates the learning process by asking leading questions as to how best they can assess and access the intended succour for their own benefit.

Data derived from such community research through the anspices of focused group discussion (FGD) exercise must be analysed collectively. As earlier mentioned, the data collection process is focused on women and children in the context. The focus group discussion for data collection may involve a plenary session of women and children or women may be separated from children during discussion session. This approach differs from the conventional TfD methods of data collection, because it focuses on 'assess' and 'access' to a particular implementation strategic plan of government economic and development policy. Data analysis in this regard, should enable target participants assess the causative factors of their common problem, especially in the case of women and children. With due respect to peculiar socio-cultural and ethnic values, it is worthy of note on a broad perspective that the causes of inequality between men and women are deeply embedded in established institutional values in society. It is crystal clear that men and women

> ...play different roles, have different needs, and face different constraints in responding to macroeconomic or sectoral policy changes and to the specific opportunities and limitations provided by particular projects and programs. Systematic gender biases often exist in the form of the following:
>
> - Laws and Customs that impede women's access to property ownership, credit, productivity inputs, employment, education, information, or medical care;
> - Customs beliefs, and attitude that confine women mostly to the domestic sphere;
> - Women's workload, which imposes severe time burdens on them, (The World Bank Participation Source Book, 1996:201).

The implication of these imbalances between men and women in terms of their roles, as well as access to education and productive resources affect or has effect on equity, economic output, productivity, food security, fertility, and child welfare. Such effect can also be perceived in men's and women's differences in capacity and incentive to participate in economic and social development programmes. The point here is that where there is 'cause', there is an 'effect'. This means that problems are not isolated, they come as a reaction to causative factors of social malady. Therefore, the chain of cause and effect must be detected through analysis. Such analysis can be carried out through group discussion or community discussion (plenary). Experimenting with participatory analytical tools, Igbaba (2000:17-18) reports that:

> One Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning Appraisal (PLA) tool that could be useful for problem analysis is the causal/solution diagram (CSD)... The ... CSD analysis is likened to a problem tree... problems are trailed by other remote causes. Normally, the investigation would start with the question –"WHY" (Why are women and Children not assessing and accessing NEEDS? Subsequently, the answer to each question leads to the next "why" question until the root causes of the problem is reached.

The identified causative factors militating against women and children are collected for the purpose of drama skit formulation. However, such collated data should be prioritized within the scope of the intended NEEDS programme. The entire process of data analysis should be carried out in a stakeholder's forum involving men, women and Children.

Drama Skit Formulation

Improvisational and episodic scenario drawing from the list, identified as causative factors militating against women and children is recommended for NEEDS programme. The storyline should not be complicated with too many detailed information. Provision should be made for debriefing. The creative process should be based on the people's art forms such as song, dance, music, proverb, masquerade, puppet, storytelling etc. The facilitator should be careful in order not to tamper with the sacred aspects of folk culture. For purpose of comprehension during performance, discussion after each episode is important. Debriefing is carried out at intervals during the performance while discussion at

the end of each episode provides a recap of issues raised during the performance and debriefing.

The post performance discussions in this context are best conducted in plenary sessions. In such plenary session, stakeholders include NEEDS officials, NGOs, CBOs, women, children, men etc. For discussion of this nature to be effectively conducted, the facilitator must stimulate discussion with emphasis on gender awareness/sensitization. Moreover, effort toward eliciting women's and children's views in respect of NEEDS agenda should be the point of focus. The goal of the discussion is to ensure that the perspective of women and children are incorporated fully in the implementation project of NEEDS. At the end of the discussion, NEEDS should be in the position to know that

> Appropriate measures vary depending on the particular social and political context, the exact constraints operating against women and whildren), and the kind of activity in which their participation is sought. Constraints affecting women more than men may include any combination of legal or cultural obstacles, time constraints, lack of access to information, illiteracy, lack of transport, or lack of finance (The World Bank Participation Source Book 1996:211).

Sensitivity to such gender issues during discussion within the framework of NEEDS agenda should be aimed at establishing laws and programmes that will be implemented to empower women and children. With focus on our future, NEEDS realise that:

> Half of Nigeria's people are children, the bridge to a prosperous future. NEEDS recognizes the importance of children by making the improvement of the education system a top priority (NEEDS 2005:6).

By and large, the foregoing positions are fundamental issues that the facilitator should take into consideration and strive to stimulate the discussants to address and find a suitable way forward in peculiar situations. The conclusion that is arrived at during discussion (plenary) should be a collective decision toward a workable action plan that can be availed by NEEDS and its stakeholders during implementation, especially at the grassroots level.

A follow-up exercise involving a team of monitoring and evaluation officials will see to the effective implementation of decision made and the practicability of the

action plan. The monitoring and evaluation team would include representatives from stakeholders' forum working with NEEDS programme officials in the field.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing discourse on TfD proposal for locating women and children in the NEEDS agenda, the following recommendations are made;

- A proactive approach such as TfD is imperative to NEEDS agenda, especially in its implementation programmes that are focused on women and children;
- To enhance women's ability to contribute to and participate in NEEDS process, a valuable gender analysis and policy blueprint should be produced by stakeholders;
- An implementation framework in the same sense, should comprehensively establish and recognize the fact that children have among other rights, the basic right to survive and develop in an atmosphere of love and security.

Conclusion

In summation, this proposal on locating women, children within the NEEDS agenda envisages personal, cultural, communal and socio/political modes of empowerment. This implies a holistic approach to empowerment vis-à-vis development. In terms of personal empowerment, drama is seen as a transforming tool for 'self' through a learning process for women and children. Culture wise, drama in this instance is culture friendly. In other words, women and children are given a voice in their own language, idiom and other art forms for expression. Communal empowerment in this regard, entails communal endeavour. Thus, drama is seen as a communion for locating women and children in NEEDS agenda. Drama as social base provides a communal forum for women and children to participate actively toward expressing their aspirations, hopes and fears. The socio-political dimension of empowerment places drama on a radical pedestal for mass social transformation. In this regard, empowerment implies change. Therefore, the implementation challenges that are arising in NEEDS situation hinges on the issue of learning towards behavioural change. Specifically, women and children within rural communities effectively learn the values and rationale of new policy blueprint through their folk media. It is against this participatory, gender and childhood sensitive vista that our proposal stands out to complement NEEDS effort towards improving women and children livelihood.

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