

THEATRE AS A WATER SOURCES CARE SENSITISATION TOOL: A BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE INTERVENTION AT WINNEBA CENTRAL MARKET, GHANA

Patience Nukpezah

University of Education Winneba, Ghana
patzah@yahoo.com/pnukpezah@uew.edu.gh

ABSTRACT

Located at Winneba Central Market is a hand-dug well which serves as a source of water for traders and is one of the main sources of water supply for the community and its environs during water shortages. However, the condition of the well and its surroundings was undesirable. In consequence, a project was launched in April 2016 to use of Theatre for Development (TfD) as a communication channel to sensitise the users of the hand-dug well on the link between water, sanitation, hygiene and improved livelihood in April 2016. This theatrical approach opened up discussion on keeping water bodies clean, safe and sustainable. This paper reports the findings of a study on the use of TfD as a communication channel. The study deployed semi-structured interviews, observation and focus group discussions were employed qualitative data collection tools. The post-project intervention follow-up indicate a marked improvement and efficacy of theatre in fostering change in people's mind-set and conduct.

INTRODUCTION

Access to safe water during the dry season in Ghana is sometimes a major problem in some communities. When this situation occurs, it grinds many productive activities to a halt, adversely affecting jobs and livelihoods in the process. In fact, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals document predicts a likelihood of a chronic shortage of fresh water in some countries by 2050. This reality has heightened the need to protect existing water sources to ensure a sustainable all year round adequate water supply and save Ghana from this imminent predicament. It is against this backdrop that in April 2016, the author initiated a project using the Theatre for Development (TfD) as a communication channel to sensitise traders at Winneba Market in the Central Region of Ghana on protecting available water

Sanaa Journal

African Arts || Media || Cultures

Volume 3 | Issue1 | 2018 | pp. 1-12
www.sanaajournal.ac.tz/index.php/Sanaa

ISSN 2507-7775 (Online)
ISSN 2078-9785 (Print)
© Sanaa Journal 2018

sources for improved livelihood and sustainability. The project used a participatory approach that included a drama performance and a forum for discussing issues to generate collaborative decisions and spur actions among the traders.

MOTIVATION FOR THE PROJECT

The idea for the project was taken from the Friday March 18, 2016 edition of *The Ghanaian Times* newspaper which featured an article on the 2016 World Water Day Celebration themed “Improved Water Access for Sustainable Livelihood”. The World Water Day is an initiative of United Nations aimed to celebrate clean water and draw attention to those who lack such access. This annual global event is also marked in Ghana. On 22nd of March 2016, there was a tree-planting exercise organised by the Water Resources Commission (WRC) in collaboration with the Forestry Commission for some selected schools in the Accra Metropolis (Bayali, A. & Agblevor, 2016).

The media activities for the 2016 World Water Day celebration included television and radio discussions and special interviews as well as special features, issuing of press releases to commemorate the day’s celebration coupled with newspaper adverts to announce the event. These activities aimed to inspire people to take action; however, theatre, a relatively economic medium which is not centralised like the technological media in use was overlooked. TfD as a medium can integrate indigenous and popular systems of communicating project communities in its presentation (Mda, 1993). As a TfD teacher aware of communication projects undertaken by students and faculty, I was highly motivated to explore the TfD approach to sensitising communities on taking care of all water sources.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Located inside the Winneba Central Market in the Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana is hand-dug well. The well was dug some decades ago by one of the market queens¹. Almost all the market traders use water from this well for cooking, washing, and cleaning. The townsfolk and the university students in this vicinity also draw water from the well whenever there was shortage of water in town.

The major problem, however, was that the well cover was in poor shape and people used a countless number of containers to draw water from the well (see Image 1). In addition, the sanitary condition around the well was appalling (see Image 2). The safe keeping of the well, for example, in cleaning the surrounding and making sure only one container was used to draw water was left to irregular volunteers. During a personal conversation with a daughter of the woman who initiated the digging of the well, she complained that users of this source of water were not ready to clean the surroundings

¹ Market leaders who oversee the day-to-day running of the market.

even when ‘akeshaa’ (a local cleaning agent) was provided. This attitude appears linked to drawing water from the well coming at no cost. Strangely, even though most homes and hostels do have their own sources of water, hand-dug wells, especially this one inside the market serves as the last resort for the community during water shortages as it does not dry up in the dry season.



Image1: Condition of the well cover before the project



Image 2: Surroundings of the well before the project

This project was carried out during one of the seasons when there was a severe shortage of water in Winneba and, indeed, many other parts of Ghana. The situation resulted in the use of untreated surface water from ground sources, supply from water tankers and sachet water popularly known as ‘pure water’ for cooking, washing and drinking. This experience adversely affected community lives. During this water crisis, university students in the well’s vicinity were the worst affected. As result, the hand-dug well at the market became one of the reliable sources for the townsfolk and students.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the project was to sensitise the people at the market on the indispensable link between water, sanitation and hygiene as proposed by the United Nations. In addition, the project sought to promote the attitude of keeping the water in the hand-dug well in the central market and its surroundings clean.

THE LAB-SITE/STUDY AREA

The project was conducted at the central market of Winneba in the Effutu Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. This market serves Winneba Township and neighbouring communities. The market queens help with the smooth running of market activities in collaboration with the municipal assembly.

The market is open all day throughout the week, but Tuesdays and Fridays are the busiest days when other traders from surrounding communities come

to sell their products. Moreover, preachers, men and women, young and old 'gospel-ise' at the market, especially on market days. This proselytisation over time reveals elements of participatory performative acts similar to those Okaegbu (2010) has identified. He observed that local health product peddlers, who operate on buses and at market centres, employ different kinds of performances that engage the attention of prospective buyers.

These preachers in the market include those who move about and those who are stationary or simply mobile and stationary preachers. The stationary ones power their microphones or organs with generators or tap from market power sources at a fee. Stationary preachers create a mini-church whenever they position themselves at the market whereas mobile ones normally use megaphones as they move to different positions preaching within the precinct of the market. These two categories of preachers take turns to engage the audience (market traders) in these performative acts. They usually start singing a popular gospel tune to draw the traders' attention, with the women happily joining in. This song is followed by regular pronouncements very pleasing to the traders: 'God is blessing someone here', 'You will be overwhelmed by the number of customers today'. To which the traders ecstatically respond 'Amen!' In appreciation, members of the audience give them monetary gifts for the prayers or pleasant prophecies. Usually, they drop money in various denominations into bowls. Some passers-by also offer them money and receive various proclamations of blessings for such generous gestures. This act could also be likened to the persuasive 'foot-in-the-door' strategy (Myes, 2013), as the gentle tap on the shoulder is then followed by very intimate prayer and a subsequent request for a donation.

The preachers are not the only ones capitalising on such donations from the traders. The market queens also take turns to collect foodstuffs from the vendors. They then sell these foodstuffs to raise money for supporting welfare activities at the market. Although traders in the market come from different communities, they respond well to performative acts and persuasive strategies and readily return compliments. The TfD approach is contextualised in ethos and cultural lives of the target community (Prenkti, 2015). These traits formed the core of the drama performance in anticipation that the traders would respond to health issues, the way they do to the spiritual and social issues as galvanised by the preachers and the market women, respectively.

THE TFD APPROACH

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a method that uses theatre as a medium for fostering development communication (Mda, 1993). It is 'a drama process which draws on the pedagogic concepts of Paulo Freire by insisting upon participants' naming their own worlds' (Prenkti 2011, p. 36). Thus, participants get an opportunity to discuss issues that affect their lives. This approach goes by different names such as community theatre, applied theatre, popular

theatre. The overriding aim of this approach is foster effective communication with communities in a bid to usher in change.

Generally, communication is vital to human development. Discussing the importance of communication in the development process, Adedokun, Adeyemo and Olorunsola (2010) underscore how effective communication constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for human development and social order. In this regard, communicating through channels that aid better understanding of issues can, subsequently, result in action. To project the themes of the 2016 World Water Day, which was to improve water access for sustainable livelihoods, an approach that would not make people just listeners to speeches and distance discussions, but also involve them and aid them to take appropriate action.

Overall, TfD is a participatory social activity and possesses transformational qualities of enhancing critical thinking skills in participants which are essential in human development. In fact, this transformational activity is at the core of development, which Schumacher (1973) explains does not start with goods, but with people and their education, organisation, and discipline. Without these three qualities—education, organisation and discipline—he all resources will remain latent, untapped potentials, he observes (*ibid.*).

There are many ways of engaging in TfD practice. One way, which was employed in this project, entails gathering data through both qualitative and quantitative modes when the need arises to analyse a particular problem. Then a story is crafted out of the data gathered with the people affected by the issue under discussion; this story is then rehearsed, tested and performed. A post-performance discussion follows before a follow-up and evaluation aimed to assess the objectives set.

This project required a baseline survey at the research stage at the central market. Using a qualitative approach, the study collected data using semi-structured interviews and observations. Participants in the project included students drawn from the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Education, Winneba (UEW), the market queens and traders at the Winneba central market. The respondents for the interviews were six market queens, six traders and six students. Data also included observation field notes on the patronage of the well and its surroundings, especially on market days when the market is the busiest. Analysis of data collected at this stage revealed the following:

- i. Users take the regular stock of water from the well for granted.
- ii. There was a general lack of care of the well.
- iii. The cover on the well at the time was not in a good shape thereby making the physical appearance appalling.
- iv. The height of well is very low and children could easily fall in.
- v. All kinds of containers were dipped in to fetch water.

- vi. Users thought it was okay to use water from the well for cooking, washing and cleaning.
- vii. Users of this water source felt it was not safe for drinking.
- viii. A pH test of the water showed 7.2 alkaline level which is within the normal range of ground water systems (UMass Amherst; APEC Water).

These initial findings formed the background that guided the creation of the storyline for a drama performance and, subsequent, discussions. To facilitate the creation of a focused drama capable of yielding the desired results, I deduced various themes from the initial findings as follows:

- i. The effect of shortage of water on livelihoods;
- ii. The need to keep water sources safe;
- iii. Participation in development issues by all those affected by the problem.

Although TfD performers often include members of the immediate community, this was not possible in this project. The market women from Winneba and its environs even with their ready willingness to partake in the performance are often too busy selling their wares and generally lack time for rehearsals. As a result, the performers were selected from students of the Department of Theatre Arts of UEW, who rehearsed and performed the play at the central market. Although the students do not spend many hours in the market like the traders do, they rely on water from the well when there is a shortage in the town. They also purchase food items and, sometimes, food prepared with water from this well.

ABOUT THE PLAY

The play titled “Our Water Day Celebration” was about the actions and inactions of citizens towards preserving their water sources and keeping them safe through the deployment of hygienic practices. In the drama, the main character is a pastor, preaching a message on the keeping and protecting all things God has given people as they would give account of it someday. Using catch phrases such as ‘Cleanliness is Next to Godliness’ and ‘God will Demand Answers’, he emphasises on how people should take care of the water sources at their disposal, not only the one in the market but also all around them and even in their homes. He also stresses the need to change their attitudes towards sanitation and take hygiene seriously. The play reiterates that the attitudes towards water and water sources have for a long time been affecting their health and livelihoods. The performance done in Effutu and Fante, indigenous languages the people in the area speak, admonishes all to be wary of the destruction of forests and water bodies, whose destruction has an adverse effect on their lives. The use of indigenous languages for TfD projects, as suggested by Kerr (2014), facilitates community participation in the drama performance and post-performance discussion.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF OUTCOME

The planning, research, story creation and the rehearsals took eighteen days. Finally, the play was staged on the 13th of May, 2016. A section of the participants, who were UEW students improvised and rehearsed story. Feedback from the rest of the participants from the market during a pre-test performance inspired many changes and new directions in the play. To make the story more concrete and focused as well as believable, the participants then edited and re-edited through further rehearsals. This exercise in itself had implications for the students' participants (who were also severely affected by the water shortage) as it provided them with an opportunity to experience life-long learning processes and ability to make critical judgements; in this case, taking care of water resources.

The theatre performance took the form of 'preaching' traders are accustomed to in the market, with the preachers using all forms of techniques to solicit monetary and non-monetary rewards from the market traders. During the performance, offertory bowls accompanied by pictures of the cover of the well for reinforcement went around members of the audience. The performers also deployed strategies borrowed straight from the market queens' tact of appealing for support from traders on market days. An amount of seventy-six Ghana cedis, sixty pesewas (Ghc 76.60p) was realised from the 'offertory' to the surprise of one market queen who had initially expressed her trepidation at incorporating donation solicitations in the performance as she had feared it might incur insults from the traders. The money realised was given to the leader of the market queens to help desalt the well and replace the damaged cover (see Image 3).



Image 3: Presentation of Money realized to the leader of the market queens

This response gives credence to Prenkti's submission that Tfd achieves results when the process involves the cultural lives of the people, or what the,

people are familiar with. Additionally, it demonstrates that the traders are not concerned only about their spiritual well-being but also about their health. What was required was an effective channel of communication and sensitisation that could bring about the desired change.

Incorporated in the theatre was a run of pH test on a sample from the well to let the audience know about the quality of their water. The test result showed a 7.2 alkaline level of the water which is within the normal range for ground water systems. A similar test on a sample of pure water, which is perceived as a safer drinking water, proved that the water from the well is much safer in terms of alkalinity. Overwhelmed, audience members made comments such as: "This is a real eye-opener, oh! So we had something to be proud of before huh!" (Comment by a vendor).

During the post-performance discussions, other members of the audience also expressed similar sentiments when reviewing what they had just witnessed in the performance. Reflecting on the process, the student performers said the experience has changed their perception of water and sanitation. They had also gained experience on how theatre could help develop themselves as well as their communities. They realised that the role-playing deepened their capacity for metacognition and to think about how they view things as Weinert and Kluwe (1987) have observed.



Image 4: A snapshot from the post-performance discussion

An initial visit six days after the project revealed a marked improvement in the sanitary conditions around the well. A vendor in the market voluntarily started keeping the well's surroundings clean in addition to making sure that there was only one container for drawing water from the well. She kept the container and gave it out to whoever wanted to draw water. She also prevented children from going near the well for fear they might fall in as the height was quite,

short. However, she subsequently gave up performing these voluntary duties after two months. When contacted, she expressed displeasure about the uncomplimentary attitudes of other traders at the market. She also lamented that other users still used different items to draw water when she was not around because the well is not covered.

Furthermore, during the follow-up visits the market the leader of the market queens informed the researcher and the student participants that they had been in touch with the municipal assembly and plans were in an advanced stage to put the well in good shape. This story was repeated on three subsequent visits to the market. At this stage, it seemed the project had yet to yield the desired results. A year after the project, however, the well was desilted, the height raised and a new cover made with the help of the market queens in consultation with the municipal assembly (see images 5 and 6). In other words, though effecting change in people's lives is time consuming the results would finally come, hence worth the effort.



Image 5: Well elevated above ground level after the Project



Image 6: Covering of the well in progress

Some comments from the students' participant/performers are as follows:

“Oh this is what we should be using theatre to do around us. It is very enlightening and thought-provoking.”

“I didn't think this could work, I thought they were not going to mind about us [and our performance] but look at the well now...I am glad I made an impact with my theatre.”

The general observation made through the use of theatre in this study correlate with the findings of the women empowerment project by the SAKHHI Theatre Company as reported by Sharma (2015): ‘The success achieved in the programme called SAKHHI indicates that this tool has a potential of empowering participants and should be tapped and used for larger growth and wider and effective dissemination of message’ (p. 233). It also renders,

credence to Mda's observation on achievements of the Marotholi Travelling Theatre and The Telu workshop theatre experiences affirming the effectiveness of theatre in conscientising and disseminating developmental messages to communities (Mda in Prentki and Preston, 2009).

CHALLENGES

The major challenge in the execution of this project was finding performance space because the performance date fixed happened to be a Friday, which is one of the busy market days. Imminent competition with the stationary and mobile preachers described earlier in this paper for space was another factor. They saw the performers as a threat to their establishment, especially as the main performer introduced himself as a pastor to one of them. It became necessary to relocate with the help of the leader of the market queens to a more convenient space. Additionally, the traders in the market, though willing to take part in the play performance, could not do so because they could not leave their wares unattended to participate in the rehearsals.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore how the theatre process can help sensitise the people of the Winneba central market on the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene for improved and sustainable livelihoods. The implementation of this project resulted in the water-well being desilted, a new cover being made for the well and awareness created to keep the environment of the well clean. These results underscore the value and effectiveness of using theatre approaches to the sensitisation and education of communities. Moreover, using traits learnt from the preachers, which has become a mainstay culture at the market, contributed to the warm reception from the traders.

Observations from follow-ups on the project a year later indicated marked improvement in the behaviour towards the water source at the market. However, it was also evident that without the collective decisions taken in consultation with the market queens and other leaders, the project would not have achieved such favourable outcomes. In other words, active participation of the target audience is centripetal to the success of any TfD performance. The realisation that the water in the well was wholesome as suggested earlier also contributed to the collective decision to take good care of the well and its water. Overall, the process of investigating the issues, crafting and role-play by the student performers were transformatory, which renders credence to the '*a rehearsal for revolution*' phenomenon by Boal (1979)—that within fictitious limits an experience could become concrete.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although a test for the alkaline level of the water was carried out, it is recommended that further tests be done for other minerals in the water.

Subsequent follow-ups are recommended to provide support for sustained hygienic maintenance of the well. Additionally, it is also essential to solicit for the necessary support from other stakeholders on the possibility of installing a water-pump at the well for numerous containers to be used for drawing water without compromising the quality of the water.

REFERENCES

Adedokun, M., Adeyemo. C. & Olorunsola, E. (2010). The impact of communication on community development, *Journal of Communication*, 1(2), 101-105, [Online] DOI: 10.1080/0976691X.2010.11884775 [Accessed 28 May 2016].

APEC WATER. PH values of water completely explained water quality, [Online] www.freedrinkingwater.com/water-education/quality-water-ph-page2.htm [Accessed 29th March, 2016].

Boal, A. (1979). *Theatre of the oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc.

Byam, L. (1999). *Community theatre in motion: Theatre for development in Africa*. London: Bergin and Garvey.

Bayali, A. & Agblevor, E. (2016). Ghana marks 2016 World Water Day. *Government of Ghana, Government of Ghana* [Online] <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/media-center/news/2626-ghana-marks-2016-world-water-day> [Accessed 22 March 2016].

GNA (2016). Accra commemorates World Water Day with tree planting competition, *Ghana News Agency* [Online] 22 March, <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/commission-organises-competition-on-world-water-day--101844> [Accessed 22 March 2016].

Kerr, D (1995). *African popular theatre*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishing.

Ker, D. (2014). Theatre for development. In Wilkins, K., Tufte, T. & Obregon, R. (eds) *The Handbook of Development Communication and Social Change*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Mda, Z. (1993). *When people play people: Development Communication Through Theatre*. London: Zed Books.

Mda, Z. (2008). When people play people. In Prentki, T. & Preston, S. (eds) *The Applied Theatre Reader* pp. 177 – 189, New York: Routledge.

Myers, David G. (2013) *Social psychology* (11th ed). New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Okaegbu, V. (2010). Performative encounters: Performance intervention in marketing health products in Nigeria. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*. 1(1) [Online] DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.1.1.35/1> [Accessed 25 November 2016].

Schumacher, E.F. (1973). *Small is beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered*. London: Blond & Briggs Ltd.

Sharma, S. (2015). Addressing gender concerns through Theatre: A study of women empowerment programme by WASPJ. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 3 (2) [Online] www.ijellh.com. ISSN 2321-7065.

The Ghanaian Times (2016). Improved water access for sustainable livelihood, *The Ghanaian Times* newspaper, Friday March 18.

Prentki (2011). Theatre for development, theatre as development, *Drama Australia Journal NJ*, 35 (1), pp. 35-46, [Online] <https://doi.org/10.1080/14452294.2011.11649540> [Accessed 31 March 2016].

Ukaegbu, V. (2010). Performative encounters: Performance intervention in marketing health products in Nigeria. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*. 1(1), pp. 35-51. 2040-2457.

UMass Amherst. <https://ag.umass.edu/cafe/fact-sheets/ph-acidity-of-private-drinking-water-wells> [Accessed 30 April 2016].

UN (2016). Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all, *UN Sustainable Development Goals* <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/> [Accessed 21 March 2016].

Weinert, F. E. & Kluwe, R. H. (Eds.) (1987). *Metacognition, motivation and understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.