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Theatre for Development and the Management of Land Conflicts Amongst the Tiv of Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the efficacy of Theatre for Development (TfD) as an alternative conflict management strategy that is people centred. The paper focuses on the potentials of theatre to manage land conflicts that have bedevilled Tiv land over the years. Data for the paper is randomly collected among conflict stakeholders in Tiv land. The survey design is used in order to elicit information on the conflict management strategies that have been deployed in the study area. Semi structured interviews and focused group discussion tools are used to collate information on conflict and conflict management strategies. The paper finds out that, land conflicts have persisted in Tiv land because of the top-down approaches that have been used in managing such conflicts. The top-down approaches do not get the support of conflict stakeholders as they feel alienated from them. The paper submits that, theatre for development can build the needed peace by giving voice to the *voiceless* in managing their differences for peace and development. Through a pilot study conducted in and around Mbatser district to test the efficacy of theatre in conflict management, the paper concludes that the development of a people centred approach in conflict management is essential to ensure that early warning signs are captured and acted upon to prevent crisis – hence prevention is better than cure.

Key words: *Theatre for Development; Land Conflict; Conflict Management*

Introduction

Conflict is a natural aspect of the human society and may arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by the different individuals or groups in defined social and physical environments. In any given society contestation over scarce resources is inevitable and the Tiv society, even with a homogenous culture, is certainly not an exception. Conflict has become inevitable because of the relatively scarce but desirable resources and the desperation of the people to have access to and control over these resources. Efforts to understand the root causes of conflict has been the concern of those who have been involved, in one way or the other, in managing conflict. The causes of conflict are so numerous and complex that some scholars have even argued that the very uniqueness of each conflict defies effort to formulate clear-cut hypotheses. Anifowose quotes a United States Government publication as saying: “There is no single cause ... which is more or less potent. In fact, usually, there are multiple causes and important contributing conditions rooted in historical relationships and brought to violence by a variety of catalysts Each conflict has been unique” (5).

For decades now, the Tiv nation has remained entangled in one form of conflict or the other which often results in loss of lives, property and displacements. These conflicts have greatly contributed to the state of under-development in Tiv land. The existence of conflict in Tivland presupposes the existence of the relationships between people or in the organisation of economic, political or social systems as the actors perceive a discrepancy between their valued expectation and their society’s valued capabilities. Most of the conflicts are linked to politics or land matters, all of which have roots in the political structure of the Tiv nation.

The Tiv people are culturally homogenous and have a common ancestry with a political structure that is stateless and segmented. Their pattern and nature of political arrangement is such that each segment is self governing, relatively independent and autonomous. However, there are levels of common contact and relationships between individuals and groups that cut across the whole society. The diverse nature of the political system explains the relationships and conflicts that are found among the people. The social milieu of Tivland as well as Nigeria seems to provide a

very fertile ground for the persistence of conflicts. Onigu Otite agrees with this assertion when he laments the social system of Nigeria as a whole. In his words:

The Nigerian society is a social system compounded by contested demands on access to scarce resources especially in the political and economic fields. It is a society defined by natural cleavages and man-made conflicts. Natural membership of ethnic group or occupational specialisations threatened by the expanding interests of other multiple users...provide grounds for the emergence of conflicts. The scale and dimensions of conflicts vary according to the issues involved in relation to the cultures concerned. (337 - 338)

The foregoing corroborates to a large extent the inevitability of social conflicts in Tiv land.

However the future of the Tiv nation, just like any other nationality, depends to a large extent, on how successful the Tiv people can reorder their political, economic and social systems and how well the people can have a sense of belonging and fulfilment through effective management of conflicts.

Successive governments have over the years set up tribunals and commissions of enquiry to investigate the conflicts with the aim of resolving them. Apart from government, several non-governmental organisations also have been involved in the management of conflicts in Tiv land. Moreover, International Organisations have also been involved in the management of conflicts in Tiv land and elsewhere. In spite of all these efforts, rising cases of conflict in Tiv land raises questions about the effectiveness of the management strategies adopted. It is in this regard that this paper advocates the use of theatre for development as an alternative instrument in the management of conflicts for a more lasting impact. However, it is scholarly important to conceptually clarify what is meant by conflict, conflict management and theatre for development.

Conflict:

When one raise the question of what conflict is, it is typically defined with a list of negative words, such as violence, population displacement, hatred and war. In reality, we live with conflict in our daily lives, and they are not necessarily negative. Rather, they are normal, natural and neutral, but the way they are managed will determine whether their impact has a positive or negative consequence on our lives. Conflicts are the result of human diversity and may have

positive consequences as much as negative. Conflicts management based on cooperation can lead to social progress and change.

Conflict refers to a relationship in which each of the concerned groups of persons in a clash perceives the other's interest, goal, value or behaviour as detrimental to their own. This means that for a conflict situation to arise there must be a clash of interests or opposing capacities in relation to perceived or anticipated benefits or outcomes between parties. Conflict originates from difference in objectives, interest, efforts, approach, timing, as well as attitudes of people to issues. Conflict is defined as an overt behaviour arising out of a process in which one unit seeks the advancement of its own interest in its relationship with others (Lammers, 559). The interference must be deliberate and goal directed by, at least, one part. This concept of conflict incorporates such protest movements in formal organisations as promotion of interest, secession and seizure of power. Conflict has also been defined as a situation of disagreement between two parties. Accordingly, a conflict situation is characterised by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences and reach an agreement on issues of common interest. This inability manifests in one form of protest or the other such as strikes and other work disruptions (slow-downs, sabotage and planned absenteeism). Imram Abdulrahman also perceived social conflict as “an expressed struggle between two or more interdependent parties who perceive scarce resources, incompatible goals and interference” (27).

Conflict can be an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, but in many cases the cost and the consequences of conflict have become unacceptably high. Violent conflict is not inevitable and as such is an anomaly. Conflict therefore is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. In his submission, Alachi looks at conflict as “a situation where each of the parties involved perceives the other's values, behaviour, attitude, goals and interest as threats to theirs”(3). This further corroborates the fact that conflict is the brain child of a group's perceived interest over a thing. In his own perspective, Adejo asserts that conflict is “a period or moment of great danger or uncertainty, especially in politics or economics.” He further contends that conflict

can as well be understood within the context of “violent collision, a struggle or contest, a battle and a mental struggle” (3). In a moment or period of great danger, difficulty or uncertainty, the terms conflict and crisis are used interchangeably. In relation to conflict, crises connote moments of great danger, difficulty or uncertainty.

Conflict is therefore not to be seen as a pathological phenomenon that can be prevented or adjusted but rather, an essential ingredient in the balance and vitality of group life, which emphasises that conflict, is positive and will always be part of human nature. Coser’s outlook on conflict is said to be more valid and often the most quoted traditional definition of conflict phenomenon. Coser, as quoted by Otite, looks at conflict as:

...a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals.... Inter-group as well as intra-group conflicts are perennial features of social life. (2)

In some ways conflict can be looked upon as a way of settling disputes, even if the means employed is destructive and injurious to either or both of the parties in conflict and even others. Conflict by nature is dynamic and can be chaotic and uncontrollable and often manifests into violence. This clearly shows that conflict situations are usually destructive in nature. Otite acknowledges that conflict can also be seen as a means of settlement of problems arising from opposing interests and from the continuity of the society. According to him:

Conflicts arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and, or groups in defined social and physical environment. Changes in the social environment, such as contestable access to new political positions, or perceptions of new resources arising from development in the physical environment, are fertile grounds for conflict involving individuals and groups who are interested in using these new resources to achieve their goals. (1)

The above quotation clearly shows that conflict has a direct link with individual or group’s interest in the valued resources in the society. Park and Burgess consent to the above view when they posit that “conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism (in order to achieve) some kind of unity even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties” (574). By this, it means the ways

of pursuing the conflict in an attempt to settle it, is not necessarily straight forward or straight jacketed.

On a general note, conflict is a potential aspect of violence and some scholars place the two phenomena side by side in their analysis. Anifowose in his study attempts to put violence and conflict together as he gives the two phenomena a universal perspective when he asserts that:

Violence or the threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals and groups throughout history, have, in one form or another, resorted to violence or its potential use as a tactic of political action. Violence has been used by groups seeking power, by groups holding power, and by groups in the process of losing power. Violence has been pursued in the defence of order by the privileged, in the name of justice by the oppressed, and in fear of displacement by the threatened. (1)

For violence or a threat to violence to be employed by individuals or groups, there must be a conflict situation which will be made noticeable by the feeling of injustice, fear as well as the perception of injury or damage. Thus, the use or threat of the use of violence is a clear manifestation of conflict. The nature of conflict in Tiv land derives from ontological basis in human needs and it is the denial of these needs which causes conflicts, or differences that generate armed violence. This struggle over valued assets can result in wide spread social conflicts.

Social conflict thus occurs between individuals or between collectivities within a defined social setting. Against this backdrop, Tiv land is projected here as a social system compounded by contested demands over scarce resources. The Tiv social system is defined by natural cleavages and man-made conflicts over the need for identity, recognition, participation and autonomy. These man-made conflicts which emanate from the competitive interactions between the numerous sections of Tiv land are therefore described here as social conflict.

Conflict Management:

Conflict management is an act or a skill of planning, organising, coordinating and controlling the administration of the peace process. Management of conflict entails strategising in order to achieve set goals through effective actions. Strategy here means a well-planned series of actions aimed at achieving specific results. Best opines that conflict management is “the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by

working with and through the parties involved in conflict” (95). This means that appropriate measures need to be put in place to effectively manage conflict. Conflict has led to destruction, but it is also a strong motivating force for peace building. Conflict signals problems that need to be taken care of. If serious conflicts are not resolved effectively they can become destructive and cause a great deal of suffering.

It is also important to note that the high cost of violence has led to an increase in the efforts to prevent conflicts from degenerating into violence. This is called proactive conflict prevention. Proactive conflict prevention and management is a situation whereby effective measures are put in place for peace rather than reacting to conflict. It is more cost effective than reactive conflict prevention. The basic aim of reactive conflict prevention is to prevent a further escalation of the conflict by controlling the intensity of the violence, by reducing the duration of the conflict, and by containing or preventing geographic spill over. In the post conflict phase, conflict management efforts are needed to avert a new flaring up of the conflict. In their short course on conflict management Wilmot and Hocker identified some ideas for dealing with conflict as paraphrased by Otite thus:

Clarification of communication and the checking of perceptions which in turn involve the following: speaking out what is in one’s mind or heart, listening carefully, expressing strong feelings appropriately, remaining rational, asking questions, maintaining a spirit of give and take, avoiding harmful statements, asking directly what is going on, telling others one’s opinion, looking for flexible “shades of gray” solutions, recognising the power of initiating a co-operative move, identifying conflict patterns, and engaging in negotiations of agreements and settlements. (11-12)

Conflict management must therefore occur in a polite atmosphere. However, since conflicts do not generally follow the demands of politeness, it means that, conflict managers must be skilful to overcome the generally chaotic and disorderly scenes associated with the behaviours of parties in conflict. This is a clear indication that appropriate communication skills and channels are very crucial in conflict management.

There are several approaches to conflict management, one of which is the top-down approach. Albert states that, under the top-down approach to conflict management, “the peace builders...are usually eminent personalities with public profiles” (38). The work of these people is usually backed by government or international organisations like the United Nations (UN) considered being a neutral party in the conflict. The peacemakers in this kind of setting shuttle between the top level leaders of the conflict believing that any agreement reached with these people will trickle down the line. This approach is more effective where those considered to be the leaders of the conflicting communities are their true leaders, a situation which is so difficult to see in the present crop of Nigerian leaders that are selfish and self seeking. This informs why Albert explains that:

In present day Nigeria, those in charge of community conflicts are youth leaders rather than the traditional rulers with whom the top-down peacemaker might want to strike an agreement. This is why most of the peace overtures of the government agents, especially when dealing with community conflicts, hardly yield positive dividends despite their robust media coverage. Those consulted by top-down operators are usually not those in charge of the insurgencies but the “leaders” of the conflicting communities. (39)

This is a clear indication that the top-down approach to conflict management is not always effective. But it works only when community leaders are in effective control and command the absolute respect of the stakeholders in conflict.

The middle range approach to conflict management on the other hand is based on the premise that those who lead community conflicts belong to the middle range and that if properly integrated in the peace process, might be instrumental in facilitating sustainable peace. “This approach is the one favoured by the protagonists of the problem solving model of conflict management” (Albert, 39). The grass-roots or bottom-up approach to conflict management seems to be the most preferred by the community people. This is because the grassroots population in all communities usually has an intimidating numerical strength. Albert thus reasons that “peace initiatives developed from this point could be intimidating to leaders of a conflict” (40). Such initiatives come directly from the people either because they are tired of fighting or because they can no longer cope with the cost of continued hostility. The best way to sustain a bottom-up peace

agreement is to follow it up with a problem solving workshop or conflict transformation training for the affected parties on how to respond constructively to future conflicts. The main thrust of bottom-up approach is to destroy negative stereotypes held by parties in conflict situations against each other and help to re-humanise their relationships. By learning together how to respond to conflict, the parties in conflict are made to realise that they can actually work together at solving their problems.

Through conflict management, the conflict is not merely resolved, but the whole situation shifts as relations are rebuilt. Conflict management therefore refers to all the efforts required for the creation of a sustainable peace plan, and the design of an effective implementation of the plan. Conflict management is therefore a process that controls the effects of opposing needs or wants in a productive manner to obtain a desired outcome. It is a programme that teaches individuals the concepts and skills for preventing, managing, and/or resolving conflicts peacefully. Conflict management strategies are therefore approaches used to prevent, manage, and/or resolve conflict through peaceful means, which include decision making, problem solving, negotiation, and mediation. In this work, conflict management strategies specifically refer to the plan of action or activities engaged in by theatre activists using the instruments of theatre for development in trying to resolve conflict in Tiv land. Theatre for Development Approach is used as a conflict management strategy involving the use of drama on the identified causes of conflicts as elicited from the conflict stakeholders. Conflict left to its own devices will not go away. It has to be addressed, managed, disputed, and ultimately resolved.

Theatre for Development:

Theatre for the purpose of social development came to be practiced following political independence in Africa. A major inspiration was Paulo Freire (1921-97), a Brazilian cultural and educational theorist and practitioner. Freire assumed that the people (especially those who were oppressed and marginalised) obtain knowledge through their own life experience, but are persuaded by the oppressor to believe that knowledge is irrelevant and that they themselves are ignorant.

Consequently, education became a process of banking knowledge that serves the privileged rather than all people. Freire believes that education should help people trust their own perceptions. This is done through dialogue that is people-oriented. Stimulating people to become conscious of what they know and to generate knowledge in their own interests is called the pedagogy of the oppressed. The influence of Paulo Freire also impacted African theatre traditions through the work of a student of his, Augusto Boal, who developed the 'Theatre of the Oppressed': a form of popular theatre, of, by, and for people engaged in the struggle for their liberation (Boal 82). The rehearsal techniques practiced in Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' have been designed to help people learn ways of resisting oppression in their daily lives. It was also used as a tool for promoting self-expression, consciousness-raising, personal development, and collective empowerment. Boal drew up a set of methods and guidelines for provoking discussion and audience participation in theatre, called Forum Theatre. In this form, theatre is emphasised not as a spectacle, but rather as a means of expression that fosters critical thinking through the analysis and discussion of social issues. Groups learn to explore collective solutions to social challenges and enjoy the chance to express their views, learn new ways of communicating difficult emotions, and experiment with different behaviours and social situations. In many parts of African societies, there has been a large development of projects based on Freire's educational concept that work with marginalised communities on issues such as primary health care. Moreover, Theatre for Development is now widely respected as a creative, participatory and effective way to raise awareness and promote problem solving.

The distinguishing feature of theatre for development and other theatre genres is the active participation of people in creating their own culture rather than depending on outsiders. Theatre for Development creates messages that reflect the reality of the people as viewed by them. This involves analysis of issues that lead to change of attitudes through self-examination, situation analysis by the people themselves and not persuasion or order from outsiders. Through Theatre for Development, people are enabled to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and

condition, and then plan, act, monitor and evaluate issues affecting them. Outsiders do not transfer technology; they share methods which local people can use for their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. Outsiders fundamentally do not impose their reality on the people; they encourage and enable local people to express their own ideas. This method stresses self-critical awareness and commitment to the poor, weak, and vulnerable. Ahura consents to the efficacy of theatre for development in the transformative process when he asserts that Theatre for Development:

Uses the very people's cultural artefacts to communicate to them, it is more practical in approach and creates awareness for the rural people through its projects and mobilises the people to work as a team. By so doing it eliminates the communication gap between the better informed and the less informed and establishes the spirit of belonging and identification. (55)

By this, it means that through theatre for development, human behaviour and institutions can be changed. It also shows that the audience, as potential agents of change should be active participants in issues that concern them.

Land and Related Conflict Issues in Tiv Land

Conflict has to do with the struggle for control over scarce resources. In Tiv land today agriculture is the main sustenance of the populace. This explains why Tiv people attach a great deal of importance to land. The insufficiency of land as well as greed has caused people to look everywhere for land to cultivate. In many cases speculators who perceive possible shortage of land in the nearest future begin to make trouble with those whom they feel are not sons of the *soil* (indigenes). This often leads to clash of interest over land. To this end Tiv land has witnessed a lot of violent conflict which are categorised into inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic. It is on this note that Hembe quotes Abul and Abul to have: "recorded over thirty cases of recent or on-going communal crisis mostly land disputes that either directly or indirectly involved the Tiv people or Tiv land" (67). These conflicts can be grouped into these categories; communal conflicts between Tiv and

non-Tiv groups at locations outside Benue State. This category is concentrated in Taraba, Nassarawa, Plateau and Cross River States. The best example of this type of conflict according to Hembe is “Operation Pavatsi or the land war which was declared by the Jukun against the Tiv in Taraba State in 1991” (68). Another category is that involving Tiv and Non-Tiv groups at state boundaries. This category includes disputes between the Tiv and Jukun on the Benue-Taraba State boundary; the dispute between the Kunav in Vandeikya Local Government Area and Ishangev-ya communities in Kwande Local Government Area in Benue State and the numerous communities in Cross River State on the other hand. Another conflict is the recent and on going Fulani and Tiv conflict on the border areas of Tiv land.

The other category of conflict is that between Tiv and Non- Tiv communities in Benue State. This category includes the crisis between the Tiv and the Jukun at Abinse; the Mbagen versus Etulo conflict in Buruku local government, the Masev/Idoma conflicts and the Tiv versus Ibo crisis in Gboko town. The last category of conflict in Tiv land is communal crisis between one or more communities within the same communities of Tiv land. This is probably the commonest type. These include Ikyor-Mbayegh crisis; Utange-Mbagwaza crisis both in Ushongo local Government Area; Ishangev-ya-Ugee; Uyough-Nyiev crisis in Kwande; Mbageva-Mbadim crisis in Gboko; Mbangur –Tsambe crisis in Vandeikya; Usar- Mbayegh crisis in Kwande; Mbaakar –Mbaagoho crisis in Ukum; Mbaliev –Mbakijime in Guma; MINDA-Ipusu crisis in Makurdi; Ukan –Ipav crisis in Ushongo and Gboko respectively and a host of other conflicts in Tiv land. Bur corroborates the above view when he recorded over 22 Land Disputes/conflicts in Tiv land (12-13). Under Bur’s categorisation conflicts have occurred in the following places: Ikyurav-Tiev (Katsina-Ala Local Government Area) versus Kusuv (Buruku Local Government Area); Mbagen (Buruku L.G.A.) versus Utange (Kwande L.G.A.); Mbagen (Buruku L.G.A.) versus Etulo (Buruku L.G.A.); Mbakijime (Vandeikya L.G.A.) versus Mbatie (Vandeikya L.G.A.); Tsambe (Vandeikya L.G.A.) versus Mbera (Vandeikya L.G.A.); Uyoo- Nanav (Kwande L.G.A.) versus Nyiev (Kwande L.G.A.); Usar (Kwande L.G.A.) versus Mbayegh (Ushongo L.G.A.); Utange (Ushongo L.G.A.) versus

Mbayegh (Ushongo L.G.A.); Mbawa-Nyiev (Makurdi L.G.A.) versus University of Agriculture, Makurdi; Tombo-Mbalagh (Buruku L.G.A.) versus Ugondo (Logo L.G.A.); Kaambe (Guma L.G.A.) versus Mbakor (Tarka L.G.A.); Masev (Gwer L.G.A.) versus Shangev-Tiev (Konshisha L.G.A.); Mbashian (Buruku L.G.A.) versus Wuav (Buruku L.G.A.); Ishorov (Buruku L.G.A.) versus Ipav (Gboko L.G.A.); Mbaivende-Ukan (Ushongo L.G.A.) versus Ipav (Gboko L.G.A.). All the above mentioned conflicts occurred as a result of *land hunger* and speculation.

Land is therefore a central element in the valid and complex social relations of production within which conflict between individuals and groups are bred. Alubo attests to this fact when he avers that: “The major object for contestation are land, its ownership rights, opportunities such as access to education and on what terms; political participation, including the right not only to vote but to stand for election and appointive office” (36). The excerpt from Alubo suggests that land matters are strong factors that contribute to conflict. Conflicts over land are often due to economic and emotional benefits to the owners. Competition over access to land is often at the core of such conflicts. Land matters are said to be major causes of prolonged conflict between the Tiv and Jukun and among Tiv people themselves. In the present Tiv, land conflicts have become strategic in terms of social relationships between communities and these have been a major source of worry to the development of the area. The regularity with which these crises occur is highly responsible for the underdevelopment of Tiv land and Nigeria in general. The impact of these conflicts is severe as most of the time valuable human resources and property are lost, while the relationship among fellow brothers is strained. Due to these reasons there is need to do everything possible to effectively manage all forms of conflicts that impede development process.

Having examined the state of recent scholarship on conflicts, it is evident that not much has been done on conflict management considering its prevalence in Nigeria particularly Tiv land. Yet one needs to also get acquainted with the relationship between Theatre for Development and conflict management. The conflict situation can be managed by the people themselves using the medium of theatre.

Pilot Study

In order to test the effectiveness of using Theatre for Development in managing conflicts, a pilot study was conducted by the researchers in and around Mbatser Kindred in Mbatyough District of Mbagen, Buruku Local Government Area around August 15th – December 22nd 2013.

Mbatser is made up of two kindreds of Mbaiwar and Mbakwer with Chief Iorungwa Tseke and Chief Orban Uvie as kindred heads respectively. Mbatser is a potentially rich agrarian community of about 5,000 inhabitants segmented into two main Kindred as mentioned above. The Mbatser community members are said to be the children of Tser one of the sons of Gen (Mbagen) from Buruku Local Government. The community is bordered by Mbatyough in the North, Mbaazagee in the East, Ukan and Ipav clans in the South. The community is situated about four kilometres away from Gboko-Lessel Road en-route Posu-Abaagu-Nyamatsor Road. The inhabitants of Mbatser are solely Tiv people. The main activity for survival and development of the area is farming. Majority of the inhabitants of the community are illiterate farmers. A few members of the community are semi literate that can read and write. The community has two primary schools; NKST Primary School, Zua and LGEA Primary school, Igbur. The community also has a Community Secondary School located at Zua. The community is a mixture of Christians and those that practice Traditional Religion.

The growing population of the community couple with the settlement pattern has exerted great pressure on land with the attendant consequences of conflict over portions of land. The traditional and political system among the people is highly fragmented. Apart from the traditional chiefs the community has elected representatives that coordinate the activities of the community. The representatives are the President General, the Secretary, Treasurer, Women Leader (*Torkwase*) and others. Tswen Paregh is the current president of *Mbatser* Community as at the time of the research. The president and the executive members are answerable to the community. The executive committee of the community is usually elected for a period of two years which can be renewed if they performed well. Zua is the headquarters of the community.

Just like most communities in Tiv land, the inhabitants of *Mbatser* derive a large proportion of their income from farming. Over 70% of the working population of the community is directly engaged in petty agriculture. The development of the local areas of Tiv land and indeed the entire Benue State depends on increasing the productivity in the agricultural sector which is possible by peaceful cooperation among community members. However, there exist cases of conflict among the community members of *Mbatser*, basically on land ownership for the cultivation of food crops like yams, soya-beans, ground-nuts, and orange orchards over the years.

The Strategy for the Pilot Study

To effectively mobilise the *Mbatser* Community to actively participate in the management of conflicts that affect them, the researchers organised a two day advocacy visits with the Community. The advocacy visit was meant to identify with the traditional cum political structures of the area to solicit the people's cooperation and participation. Both district heads of Mbaiwar and Mbakwer, Chief Iorungwa Tseke and Chief Orban Uvie received the researchers warmly. The researchers also identified themselves with the President General of *Mbatser*, Mr. Tswen Paregh, as well as the Youths and Women leaders. Having agreed to use drama as a key instrument to mobilise people to participate actively in managing conflict in the community, the researchers set out to collect data on the causes of conflict.

Through the assistance of the Kindred Heads of the community and the President General of the area, the community members were invited to converge at Zua Market square; which is also the meeting place for the community. This gave the researchers ample opportunity to interact with the community members in groups (Focused Group Discussions) for the purpose of data collection on the causes and effects of conflict in the community. The youth of the area became handy in evaluating the collected data. During evaluation, mistakes made were identified and corrections effected by the community members and the researchers. At the initial stages of the study community members avoid expressing their sincere opinions on the causes of conflict and what can be done to manage the menace. To allay the fears of the community, the researchers through the

local Chiefs and the President General of the community as well as the elderly in the community assured the people of absolute confidentiality asserting that the content of the data would be used for academic purposes and would as well help the community to find amicable ways of addressing conflict related cases in their midst. With this in place the fears of the community were allayed and they participated actively.

At the end of data collection, a number of problems that bring about conflict in the community emerged. These ranged from ignored truth, lack of respect to the leaders: elders and chiefs, people's perception on the issue of land use, pattern of settlements, name calling (other people feel that other community members are visitors). Other causes include; quest for more land, and jealousy. At the end of collective analysis, community members together with the chiefs agreed that most of the conflicts are caused and aggravated by lack of respect to the views and decisions of the elders by other community members. An agreement was reached that, for proper management of conflicts in the community the people must consciously work towards doing away with these causes for peace and development. The information collected is then compiled in preparation for the rehearsals. Thereafter the researchers and the community members decide on appropriate scene development. The community members suggest a story around a chosen conflict. On the basis of these suggestions, the most relevant stories proposed are selected. The ingredients of a story are agreed upon, based on the best ideas proposed by the community members with the appropriate characters. The researchers then reviewed the story to make sure it is appropriate with the theme mission; the environment in which the performance will be made; and the socio-cultural and security environment. The community members further enter into the creation of characters, plots and scenes. The scene development took into account the following: A maximum of four scenes; for each scene setting, the characters involved were made very clear; the duration of the scenes was determined by the scope and the target population, but does not last too long. The community members' roles were distributed in relation to their artistic skills and physical profiles.

Rehearsals

The community members were highly represented in the entire process of drama making. Discussions and analysis followed each rehearsals and the community members themselves criticised any aspect that they felt was not properly done. Suggestions for improvement were offered. The involvement of the people from the very beginning of the rehearsals to the point where they can begin to handle activities themselves was very impressive and a plus to the issue of conflict management. The foundation for sustainability and ownership of the outcome of events as regards what the people can do when there is conflict had therefore been laid.

The significant shift was that a finished drama product developed by outsiders is no longer the basis for learning. The process where by community members make, critique, and remake drama on a conflict subject matter and through it discover central contradictions and implications of various strategies for action became the new experience for learning to manage conflict situations. Acting out the situations brought out in a natural way some of the underlying contradictions, motivations, rationalisations, and the reasons why some conflicts remain unresolved. Subsequent discussions drew out the underlying structures and contradictions and made them clear. Further dramatisation made the analysis concrete and at the same time threw up new perspectives which were then discussed. The drama kept changing as the understanding of the community members deepens. Each time, the drama reflected their new analysis or a new attempt to transform conflict situations for the desired peace and development.

The implication of this approach, even though difficult to realize at the initial stages of the research was that the people of Mbatser and indeed, others present at the pilot study had their thinking and their earlier attitudes to conflict challenged, and they begin to get a clearer understanding of peaceful coexistence which is possible only when the people themselves collectively resolve to put self aside and strive to fight for the common good of all. In effect the pilot study got the people conscientised against conflict.

Production and Discussions

Prominent among those that attended the drama presentation were Chief Iorongwa Tseke, Kindred Head of Mbaiwar; Chief Orban Uvie, Kindred Head of Mbakwer; Mr. Tswen Palegh President General of Mbatser Development Association; Mr. Ashiekaa, the immediate past president of Mbatser Development Association; Elders of the community, women, youths, Motor-Cycle Riders Association members and children.

The drama revolves around the supremacy of truth over deceit. The drama presents two families: the family of *Truth* and the family of *Deceit*. In the drama, the deceitful family requested for a piece of land from the truthful family on condition that the land shall be returned on demand. After some years the head of the family of *Truth* died and the family members are discussing how much they are missing their father. To the utmost surprise of everybody the head of *Deceit* family came demanding for more land from the children of *Truth* instead of sympathising with them. Out of annoyance the children of *Truth* demanded for the piece of land their father gave *Deceit*. *Deceit* in turn called the children of *Truth* visitors that must be chased out of the land to where ever they came from. In a bid to outwit *Truth's* children of their land *Deceit* took the matter to court. *Deceit* bribes the judge and some community members to testify against *Truth*. All the witnesses testified against *Truth* and the judge passed judgement against *Truth*. An injunction compelling *Truth* and his family to move out of the land within five months is given. *Truth* and his family cried bitterly for justice to no avail. *Deceit* after some time paid *Truth* family a visit to remind him of the judgement and when they are expected to vacate the land. Out of anger *Truth's* children asked *Deceit* and his followers out of their compound. They also asked him not to farm again on the piece of land their father gave him. *Deceit* reminds *Truth's* children of the court judgement. *Truth* said they will not honour the judgement because it was deceitful. Due to this, *Deceit* mobilises his people and launch an attack against *Truth*. In the process many lives and property on both sides are destroyed. The aftermath of the conflict is underdevelopment and suffering from both families. After the presentation, the drama is then open to discussion by the members of the community.

In his reaction to the concept “truth is supreme” (*Mimi hamba*) Chief Iorungwa Tseke says: “The implication of truth being supreme is that the entire community members should strive to speak truthfully. Even though truth is said to be bitter, the end result of truth is harmonious living and peaceful coexistence.” He therefore calls on the entire community members to be truthful in all their dealings. He likens truth to a calabash that is in its original context and cannot be forced to sink in the water. He said if one force a calabash inside water the moment the force is off it, the calabash will appear to the surface.

Commenting on episode one of the drama, Mr Tswen, President General of Mbatser Says: “The episode reflects characters in the community. Some members of the community are highly deceptive and they can go to any length to cause disaffection to other community members.” He however concludes by calling on those who have good characters to continue in those characters. He reminded the community members to always endeavour to return whatever is given to them by their fellow members on demand to avoid trouble. Ashiekaa on the other hand says: “The episode is a true reflection of happenings in the community.” He asserts that it is common for members of the community to refer to other members as ‘visitors’ in times of misunderstanding. He cautions that “nobody is a visitor in Mbatser, we are all members of one family.” He concludes by reiterating that starting from the individual family members to the larger community, people must learn to solve and manage their differences and misunderstandings for peace and development.

On episode three the most vital comment was made by Ishardye one of the women present. She said: “It is the usual practice for those who have ‘money’, ‘the rich’ in the community to subject others to arrests by the police.” According to her “most times, those who subject others to police arrests and intimidation are those who have forced themselves on other peoples’ land.” The drama according to her was a true reflection of the plight of the poor in *Mbatser* community. She concludes by saying that as long as such acts continue, the community will not experience peace and development. The crowd acknowledges her contributions with laud claps of hands; an indication that the people are not at home with

such practices in the community. At this moment, one young-man who calls himself Tyongi stood up and disputed Ishardye saying, that nothing of such exists in the community. He was however shouted down by the community members. The researcher learnt from the community members that Tyongi is from the family of trouble makers in the community on land matters. It was the feeling of most community members that, the community as a whole is better off when people manage and resolve their differences themselves rather than resulting to litigation that put permanent enmity among the people. Other members of the community called for collective action by the community against such people like *Deceit* (Iyongo) that exist in the community, otherwise there would be no peace. The community members further opines that taking matters that can be resolved by the people through amicable dialogue to court is not the best option. If this continues the rich in the community will take away everything at the detriment of the poor and this will worsen the situation. They said if Iyongo had not taken the matter to court, there would have been an alternative way of resolving the matter.

Commenting on episode four, one of the oldest persons present, Mr. Zenke asserts that the actions in the drama are a direct representation of what people are doing in the community. He said, some people have decided to take issues in their hands instead of looking for better ways of resolving their differences. He vents further and accused the youth of taking over the leadership of the community, a trend he says is not good for the development of the society. He therefore calls for a return to the olden tradition whereby the elders decide on issues affecting the community. He also calls on the respective household heads (*Mbayaav*) to look inwards and discipline their subjects, particularly those that cause disaffection in the community. He concludes by calling on elders to stand firm, and not to allow themselves to be used by mischief makers in the community. Instead elders should be the voice of wisdom for the community.

Akor, one of the youth supports the argument of Zenke and adds another dimension to the discussion process. He said that, in those days, house heads and elders in the community, use to sit

together to collectively look into issues affecting the progress and development of an area (community); however the trend had changed. Today, house heads are influenced by the position and ideas of women on issues. He further claimed that, women (house wives) were the ones instigating their husbands to take certain actions, which were usually detrimental for peaceful coexistence. He therefore called for the return to the system of administration in Tiv land whereby important decisions in the community are collectively taken by the elders in a free and fair manner. If this is done, our society will once again experience peace and development.

In response to the above statement Mrs. Dyegh began her defence by stating that, she had not in anyway subjected her husband to any form of mischief. She denied any knowledge of women in the community instigating their husbands to carry-out arms against their brothers. She however attributed the cause of incessant conflicts in the community and indeed Tiv land to jealousy (*iyuhwe*). She further said, there is no gain in crises situations but losses in form of property, time and lives as seen in the drama episode. She concludes by saying that, what she learnt from the drama is that, people must learn to be truthful even in difficult times.

The elders at this time took time off to confer among themselves. When they finished, the youth leader, Joseph gave his testimony being a witness and a participant in the conflict in the community. He accused the elders of not always calling a spade a spade, which is, not speaking the truth. According to him, elders have participated in terrible and unreasonable activities with the youth; this has made them to lose the voice of reason in times of unforeseen circumstances such as conflict. He stated that, elders have in recent past indulged in alcoholism particularly the illicit gin called *ogogoro*. Due to this, it is common to see or witness the so called elders indulging in idle and baseless talks with the youth. He viewed elders as a group of people who have sold their elderly roles in exchange to mischief particularly when they see money before them. At this moment in time, the researchers discovered that, the discussion had digressed from the real issue at stake and had taken the direction of accusations and counter accusations and fault finding and so there is

every reason to arrest the situation. The researchers then ask the community members what they feel can be done for amicable conflict management.

The president general Mr Tswen declares that “for amicable conflict management in the society all and sundry must learn to speak the truth, nothing but the truth can make it possible for peace in the community.” He then called on the chiefs; women; youth; elders and everyone present and said:

We have all watched the drama presentation and we have collectively listened to our discussions. What we must know is that we are all one, nobody is a visitor and nobody can as a matter of fact take another’s piece of land through an unjust means. If such has happened before in our community, today we have resolved that it will never happen again. The Chiefs, the elders, women, and the youths and indeed everybody have today resolved to always speak the truth in all matters including political matters for our own development. From today anybody that foments trouble in whatever guise within this community shall be collectively dealt with. We have today discussed and concluded to dislodge the monster of disunity in our community. Perpetrators, be warned.

He then thanked the researchers for making it possible for the entire community to come together to discuss a very difficult phenomenon that had been disturbing the progress and development of the community.

The community members affirm their cooperation and acceptance by giving the president an ovation. Some said; “you have spoken our minds; *Imo or vesen ka imo Ivungu* (the voice of an elder is the voice of an Owl. Meaning, the voice of an elder is the voice of wisdom.) To round up the discussion *Torkwase* (women leader) Yasar raised a unity song: *Tyo ne I gba iyol na shi i mough oo...* which the community responded with enthusiasm and commitment an indication that they have accepted the theatre approach to conflict management.

In order to wrap up the discussions the researchers pleaded with the community members to sit together in groups of elders, youth, women, and children. To the greatest surprise of the researchers the community members obliged. The idea of asking them to sit in groups was to accord them fair representation as their ideas will cut across generational boundaries. It means breaking the barrier of inhibition as no group will feel inhibited when their ideas are sought concerning the

subject matter in separate. It means giving the community members freedom to express themselves without hurting anybody.

The researchers sought to know the perception of each group in respect of the dramatic message and the discussions that follow the production of the play. Each group was given the opportunity to confer together and get a common position on the issue of conflict management in the community. The elders reasoned that communication among stakeholders is necessary. And such communication must be centred on truth. The elders and the chiefs reasoned that as custodians of culture they will do everything possible to preserve and protect the community by exposing mischief makers in the community. Their views were presented by Tswen in these words:

We know that we have rights, just like any other person. Now that we know exactly what those rights are, it is our responsibility to make sure that our community understands them, too. We are thankful for this opportunity to learn and to teach about our rights. If we know about the guiding principles on internal displacement and the norms, we know how our lives can improve.

The community people thus became conscious of their rights and the obligations of the authorities towards them and towards society. The results speak for themselves: an increased feeling of empowerment for the people in the management of conflict situations.

The youth position was presented by Mr. Tyotyev. According to him the youth is the backbone and the future of the community and so must do everything possible to preserve the future by fighting enemies of progress and development. It is the youth that fight, elders and women do not. So the youth have collectively resolved against those that do not want peace and progress in the community. "Truth shall be the guiding principle for our conduct in this community. If the elders do not speak the truth we will compel them to do so for the betterment of the community members." In relation to conflict management, the optimal goal is to avoid re-occurrence. However, unless conflicts are minor and goodwill prevails, conflict resolution is rarely a single-step process. Conflict management is not an end in itself but rather a means to achieve better resource management.

Theatre for Development has the capacity to effectively do this. Just as conflict is a natural part of life it is a critical ingredient for drama.

Conclusion

Theatre for Development drama that encourages participation is both a means and an end to effective conflict management. As an instrument of development, participatory drama provides the driving force for collective commitment for the determination of a people centred conflict management processes and willingness by the people to undertake sacrifices and expend their social energies for conflict management. As an end in itself, participatory drama is the fundamental right of the people to fully and effectively participate in the determination of the decisions which affect their lives at all times.

It is believed that participatory drama is, in essence, the development of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structure and in designing policies and programmes that serve the interest of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in its benefits. Therefore, there must be an opening up of political process to accommodate freedom of opinions, tolerate differences, accept consensus on issues as well as ensure the effective participation of the people and their organisations and associations in the management of conflict. This requires action on the part of all, first and foremost of the people themselves. But equally important are the actions of the state and the international community and non-governmental organisations, to create the necessary conditions for such empowerment and facilitate effective popular participation in the management of differences.

It is a fact to emphasise that the role of the people and their popular organisations is central to the realisation of popular participation towards effective conflict management. The people have to be fully involved, committed and indeed seize the initiative. In this regard, it is essential that they establish independent people's organisations at various localities that are genuinely grass-root, voluntary, democratically administered and self-reliant and rooted in the tradition and culture of the society so as to ensure community empowerment for the management of conflict situations. It is

crucial that the people and their popular organisations should developed links across local and national borders to promote corporation and inter relationships aimed at sharing lessons of experience, developing people's solidarity towards conflict management.

Theatre embodies many of the key techniques and tenets of the *common ground* approach, whereby deeper understanding can promote more effective solutions for resolving conflict. The act of empathising is taken one step further as the people attempt to find novel and positive solutions to the conflict. Theatre for development offer communities the opportunity to actively reflect together by using the stage as a place to explore new ways of living and to express new vision of the future.

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