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## Community Theatre Education against the Terror Scourge of Hepatitis B: The EPE Experiment

**Dr. Idowu, Olatunji**

Assistant Professor, Department of Creative Arts, College of Humanities,  
Tai Solarin University of Education, Nigeria

**Apena, Jamal Adepoju**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Cultural and Creative Arts,  
School of Arts & Social Sciences, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Nigeria

**Suluka, Abedeem Babatunde**

Lecturer, Department of Cultural and Creative Arts, School of Arts & Social Sciences,  
Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

*It has been established that Hepatitis B virus infection is a pandemic and chronic infection that may lead to chronic liver diseases which are often lethal. Since over 30 years when pioneer works were done in Nigeria to the recent times the prevalence of hepatitis B virus infection has remained very high. In Nigeria, the transmission of hepatitis B virus occurs mainly during childhood and all the risk factors (like blood transfusion, sexual promiscuity, lower socio-economic status etc) implicated elsewhere in the spread of the virus in the general population also play role in Nigeria. Our people need to be educated on the reduction in the hepatitis B virus infection which could be achieved by public enlightenment campaign on mass immunization of the children and adults at risk, antiviral drugs and provision of the immunostimulatory therapy for those already infected. Since the pedagogy of a functional education transcends the esoteric lesson plan/ note of classroom setting, this research thus made use of community Theatre for Development (a proven, tested and trusted participatory drama education) at Epe Local Council Development Area of Lagos State for an aggressive dramatic health education to inform reform and empower the citizenry. It was indeed a political wake up call.*

**Keywords:** Community theatre, education, hepatitis B, EPE experiment

### **1. Introduction**

Though the concept of community theatre has been in our society from time immemorial via the numerous traditional festivals, local poets and entertainers but the official launching of community theatre for development in Africa has much to do with the activities of Laedza Batini projection in Botswana in 1974. The effect of this project soon spread to other parts of the continent including Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, and of course Nigeria. What is known as community theatre today has developed in context where drama is used as a tool for communication in a more direct and interpersonal way within the under privileged sector of the society stressing the fact that only by means of their own participation can their lives change and society becomes democratic. Iyorwuese (1990) defines Community Theatre as:....*a theatrical style which stresses participant dialogue, critical consciousness etc. as the practitioners of this theatre are committed to social transformation through cultural action using theatre.* Community theatre aims at achieving a developmental objective within community; it is a non-formal adult education to develop the consciousness of rural dwellers through the use of traditional media. Iyorwuese (1990) generalizes that all theatre forms that aim at stimulating a process of community or group- problem solving and actions using the people to create the theatre themselves in their own language/idiom that they can understand, express themselves in and identity will all be synonymous to community theatre.

Based on the above submission of Iyorwuese, it is logical to say that like the popular theatre the earliest form of community theatre in Nigeria could be linked to the Alarinjo Theatre of the Yoruba. However, the current trend of this genre of theatre manifested in Zaria, the northern part of Nigeria. Ever since then, various names such as Theatre for Integrated Development (TIDE), Community Theatre for Integrated Rural Development (CTFIRD), Theatre for Integrated Rural Development, (THIRD) and so on have sprung up. Whatever the appellation given to it the underlining tone of this theatre according to Ganzalo (1998) is that they all: *signify theatre of the people by the people and for the people and is used as an instrument of change.* It is the kind of theatre that is put at the service of the disadvantaged rural and urban poor for the purpose of discussing and working out strategies for dealing with their socio-economic conditions. This is very pertinent because there is need to develop the kind of theatre which will speak to the people in their own languages and idioms and deal with issues of direct relevance to their lives.

It was on this line of meaningful practice that Etherton in 1976 experimented Community Theatre through the drama unit of Department of English in Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria and since then the Department

of English has embarked on many productions and workshops in the field of Community Theatre. The popular project on Community Theatre in Samaru in 1985 was also a landmark event. On this project, students of Drama Unit of the Ahmadu Bello University moved into Samaru settlement, collected data on their origin and aspects of the life of the people and improvised plays based on data collected to treat the issues affecting them at that moment. Hence the philosophy of Gumucio (1994) that theatre should be brought to people instead of expecting the people to come to theatre was achieved.

Following the success of Community Theatre in Samaru and its environs Yerima and Okwori in Iyowuesse (1990) asserted that there were births of several groups in Community Theatre in Hayin, Dage, Borno, Palladam and other places in Zaria. In addition, the efforts of people like Harry Hagher in 1980 who introduced Community Theatre in Arts Council Makurdi and College of Education Katsina-Ala of Benue state also helped to spur the development of Community Theatre in Nigeria. These efforts were complimented with the works of James Alu Alachi in 1981 by starting Community Theatre workshop in Abwa, Wombo, Amafu areas of Katsina-Ala, and Tar Ahua who prominently engaged in several workshops and seminars concerning Community Theatre.

The activities of the Guerilla Theatre of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife founded by Wole Soyinka in the late 1980s could be linked to the growth of Community Theatre practice in southern Nigeria. Though the guerilla was meant to serve as a protest theatre against the corruption of the military regime of that time, it also used drama to conscientize the people against the ills of the society and bad governance.

Today, the concept of Community Theatre in Nigeria has gone through a lot of evolutionary process. The practice has moved beyond the confines of the University environment (as seen in ABU and OAU). Many governmental and non-governmental organizations whose focus is on development are now using this medium to propagate their objectives. Such governmental agencies like Mass mobilization for Social justice, Economic Recovery and Self-Reliance (MAMSER) use Community Theatre to propagate its aims and objectives towards successful implementation of the transition programme in the third republic. The gesture made by MAMSER is an eloquent testimony of the potentials of Community Theatre as a veritable medium for community mobilization for development. Community theatre thus serves as the most economical mode of expression which can convey an idea that can be accepted as true, and its impact is also direct and more immediate than other forms of expression. The immediacy and correctness of drama also qualify this form as that for inculcating social and political value. All these go a long way to show the importance of Community Theatre. It is on this premise that United State Agency for International Development/Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) in conjunction with Centre for Peace, Education and Development (CENPED) made use of community theatre for development in Abeokuta on peace and conflict resolution.

CTFD and education are one. Though the primary aim of any theatrical presentation is to entertain and by extension, educate. Its modern coinage is 'edutainment', education cum entertainment. It is unarguably pertinent that CTFD and education are two sides of a communicative coin in the social – political development of every community. CTFD is a participatory education and there is no functional education that can be inspiring and long lasting than participatory education. It on this note that Anyagu (2005) is of the view that CTFD means real education which engenders a process that instils in each individual, a level of consciousness necessary to develop his or her creative potentials to achieve independence, solidarity and justice. In corroboration to his view is that of Gumucio- Dagron (1994) who is of the view that there is virtually no experience of CTFD in the world that has not been intimately related to an educational process. Both in formal and non-formal systems of education, CTFD have played a supportive role as a privileged communicating tool capable of awakening the peoples' potentials. Gbilekaa (1990) defines the genre of theatre variously as:

- Performances (Scenario, and dramatic skills) dedicated to solving certain social problems of a select community.
- Performance by catalyst groups adult and social workers done before a group of people or select communities to educate them in ways of improving their lifestyle and environment through communal action.
- Tele-guided performances that aim at conscientizing the working class and the peasants by first seeking dialogue with them instead of taking to them finished theatrical product as is conventional of the traditional Western drama. The aim is to mobilize them for political economic objectives.

CTFD and education are interwoven because they both have the same goal which is to build an educational process that is genuinely democratic and through the analysis of problem lead to a critical evaluation of the reality and thus promote the ideal of liberty and change.

The effectiveness of CTFD as an educational tool is the possibility of incorporating reality as a point of departure according to Anyagu (2005) He views further that community and individuals who do not recognize themselves in the problem that one described or partake, connect became involved in their solution. He argues that it is pertinent to make each individual a potential communicator and not a mere perceive receptor of information as CTFD as to touch on topics that are recognizable experiences in the early life of the community.

In Nigeria, the transmission of hepatitis B virus occurs mainly during childhood and all the risk factors (like blood transfusion, sexual promiscuity, lower socio-economic status etc) implicated elsewhere in the spread of the virus in the general population also play role in Nigeria. Our people need to be educated on the reduction in the hepatitis B virus infection which could be achieved by public enlightenment campaign on mass immunization of the children and adults at risk, antiviral drugs and provision of the immunostimulatory therapy for those already infected. Since the pedagogy of a functional education transcends the esoteric lesson plan/ note of classroom setting, this research thus made use of community Theatre for Development (a proven, tested and trusted participatory drama education) at Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria, for an aggressive dramatic health education to inform, reform and empower the citizenry. It was indeed a political wake up call.

## 2. Objectives and Approaches to Community Theatre for Development (CTFD)

Obadiogwu, (2004) identified the objectives of CTFD as including the following:

- To explore, along with the local community, the problem facing them and to open their eye to the fact that the problem is common to all of them and as such require common solution
- To explore, with the target community, how their problem is related to the socio- economic structure of the society in which they live and to open their eye to the fact that certain aspect of their life should not be taken at face value or for granted
- To spur the people on to communal action to effect changes themselves where necessary
- To help liberate their inherent inhibition and to reflect on, and influence reality as perceived by them.
- To give students working along with the peasant's community and insight into the lives, attitude and reality of rural and urban communities.
- To awaken, in the rural populace, a new critical consciousness about their problem and the possible ways out through communal effort.
- The exercise also seeks to give drama its due recognition as a powerful weapon of communication, struggle and liberation rather than domestication and dominant.

Given these objectives, there are two major approaches to CTFD namely the outside-in or Migratory approach and the inside-out or home instead approach. The outside in or Migratory approach which suggests a situation where by theatre artists go to the community for research and problems identification and later go back to their station to put the rehearsal on ground, when performance is ready it is then taken back to the community in question for performance and post-performance evaluation. This approach has raised many questions among the experts from various angles. One such questions is that the community involved is ostracized from the playmaking process therefore they are (the hosts) just mere spectators. Its effect therefore is that it achieves little effect in which the actual problem of the community remains unsolved after the CTFD workers are gone. Also, the method of getting information in this approach is not comfortable enough at interview method.

- Interview method – A journalistic approach to data collection which is capable of scaring villagers thereby holding back vital information.
- Official Eye method- going through official records in ministries parastatals and agencies to obtain information. The problem with this is that the information recorded might be wrong as it might recorded from a bias perspective tempering reality with falsehood.
- Flooding method: when the resource personnel flood the target villages in search of information, interviewing the villagers anywhere they are found. This could be intimidating and scaring as well and that is tantamount to the villagers holding back information.
- Hierarchical method: talking with the village head, elders, and opinion leaders of the community on what they consider as the problem of the villagers (Lawal 2010)

The second major approach to CTFD is inside- out or home instead which suggest that participant first live within the community for a certain period of time before embarking on any dramatic presentation. Being residents in the community according to (Osofisan 2004) does not only help acclimatize them to the people's immediate problem and traditions, but the community itself has an opportunity to know the outsiders and develop some trust in them. In this, context of mutual intimacy, the goal of social mobilization would become enhanced. This much more adopted and effected approach could then be summoned up in the injunction of a Chinese community organizer:

Go to the people  
Live among the people  
Learn from the people  
Plan with the people  
Work with the people  
Start with what they know  
Build on what they have  
Learn by doing (Obadiogwu 2004)

Whichever approach and method adopted in CTFD, it is very important that the following cardinal steps or sequence of events are observed for the successful execution

Training the participant

- Researching the communal issue
- Data analysis
- Story/ scenario development
- Rehearsal through improvisation
- Performance & post-performance evaluation
- Follow-up

## 3. Understanding the Terror Scourge of Hepatitis B

The doctors who specialized in hepatitis treatment defined it as an inflammation of the liver caused by an immune response to the presence of Hepatitis virus in the liver cells. More than 350 million people globally are said to be infected with chronic Hepatitis B and C, which are the most common causes of liver cancer and liver cirrhosis. That is, one in 12 people worldwide is living with either HBV or HCV. It was also recorded by the experts that No fewer than 20 million

Nigerians are infected with Hepatitis B, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). This was corroborated by the Society of Gastroenterologists and Hepatologists in Nigeria (SOGHIN) in Lagos. The group said the figure is high because people are unaware of its mode of transmission, prevention and treatment. The body of experts is calling for collaboration to raise awareness and treatment/vaccination on the disease, which they said is more infectious and common than the human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

A member, Dr. Hameed Oladipupo, said Hepatitis virus is transmitted through contact with body fluids e.g. unprotected sex with an infected person and sharing of infected needles or other sharp objects that can break the skin. In addition, babies born to an infected mother have a 90 to 95 percent chance of contracting Hepatitis B virus (HBV) during childbirth. Fortunately, babies born in Nigeria receive Hepatitis vaccines that protect them from developing full-blown Hepatitis as adults. He observed further that biggest obstacle confronting Hepatitis treatment in Nigeria is not the virulence of the disease virus or even the spread of the disease but a lack of awareness among Nigerians, of the importance of discovering their Hepatitis status. There is also the issue of not knowing what to do, where to go to and who to see when it comes to hepatitis. These anomalies are worrisome even though they are the least government could do in ensuring effective Hepatitis B control.

The experts explained further that hepatitis B is a common disease in Nigeria that affects at least 19 million or one in five Nigerians. They called on Nigerians to take steps to prevent contracting the disease, as there are vaccines to prevent its occurrence, instead of coming late to the hospital with advanced stages of hepatitis.

According to another member, Dr Charles Onyekwere, consultant Physician and Gastroenterologist at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), she was of the view that even though one out of every five Nigerians has Hepatitis B virus (HBV), which attacks the liver, local and foreign agencies pay more attention to HIV, which affects one out of every 400 Nigerians. 'At one time HIV and AIDS had a prevalence rate of six per cent but local and foreign intervention brought it down to 3.8 per cent today. The Nigerian government should be critical about the state of Hepatitis B management and the need to declare the disease a national emergency just like HIV was declared in 2001 by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration,' said Dr. Onyekwere. Types B and C are of significant concern in Nigeria since a high proportion of people infected with these viruses may not experience symptoms at the early stage of the disease, and only become aware of their infection when they are chronically ill.

Another member, Dr OlufunmilayoLesi, Consultant, College of Medicine, University of Lagos, said, Nigeria needs not wait for 28, July of each year before raising awareness on hepatitis. For, HBV is highly contagious – between 50 and 100 times more infectious than human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) – and can survive outside the body for at least seven days. During this time, the virus can still cause infection if it enters the body of a person who is not infected. 'The virus incubation period is 90 days on average, but can vary from about 30 days to 180 days. HBV may be detected in the body 30 to 60 days after infection and persists for widely variable periods of time. The Gastroenterologists and Hepatologists submitted that only by increasing awareness of different forms of hepatitis and how the same can be prevented and treated, would not only check the spread of the disease but thousands of lives would also be saved. It is on this note that Community Theatre for Development is being made use of to create awareness to the people of Epe Community on the terror scourge of Hepatitis B.

#### **4. Intervention of CTFD: Reports on the EPE Experiment**

##### *4.1. The setting: Data gathering and Analyses*

Training the participants and researching into the community is not difficult at all because in the recent times of about eight years, there has been a regular use of Community Theatre for Development on different contemporary issues within Epe and Eredo environs. There is a team of trained enthusiasts that are readily around. Also, the community and the people are not strange to the researchers. So, with little efforts of few days of informal discussions with some market people, health workers, religious and political leaders of the community, a pool of information was gathered and later stream lined among the team to arrive at a clear-cut analysis. The information gathered provided the basic idea around which the play revolved.

The various causes, means of transmission, preventive and control measures were later developed into scenarios. Among the causes and means of transmission include vertical transmission as in mother to child mainly during after birth, use of unsterilized syringes and injections, transfusion of infected blood and blood products, close body contact with patients with active infection carriers especially those with skin lesions like impetigo, scabies and cuts that enable transfer of blood fluid, unprotected sex with infected person and human bites, sharing of tooth brushes, razors, needles, nails and hair clippers. Among the control and preventive measures include vertical immunization of children and adults of risk, health education of the public to discard various habits and practices that encourage the transmission, screening of blood and blood products, improving the socio-economic status of the citizens etc.

##### *4.2. Play Making and Rehearsal*

In developing the analysis into plot and scenarios, casting took place first in a form of forum theatre where there was no permanent cast, as anybody in the team could take any role. The rehearsals and playmaking processes were carried out within the community (at the residence of one of the team members who happened to be an indigene) where people moving around had the opportunity to see and even participate in it. Along the line roles were given to some of these villagers and those that already have theatre group were eagerly incorporated into the team. This later brought more

people to see the rehearsal and their known people in the play which made the playmaking rehearsals process a very interesting one, therefore coming out with a good storyline.

#### 4.3. Performance and Post-performance evaluation

The performance was presented in two different places based on the geographical distribution of the communities. The first presentation was at the Ayetoro market, Epe while the second one was at main Garage Bus stop popularly called Ikorodu Park. The community where the play making process took place was deliberately avoided for performance venue because the environment had witnessed the playmaking process fully and even participated in it, which brought about the agitation, so to a large extent; the empowerment had taken place in that environment, it was then logical to try a new ground. The play went very well in the two places. It was a six to seven scenes performance reflecting on the aforelisted analyses. The post-performance evaluation was a thought provoking one, it was a very critical evaluation of the drama, controversial and debatable, many questions were asked and observations were made. Many members of the audience saw that there was a problem of ignorance within the community as far as Hepatitis B is concerned. A concerned market leader admonished the team and encouraged them to make the play a regular one. Some faces that were in the market performance at Ayetoro followed the team to the Ikorodu Park performance to learn more from the play.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

CTFD is a tested and trusted organ of functional arts education in addressing contemporary challenges in the community. It is an understatement to submit that our society today is faced with many contemporary challenges and it is the duty of various scholars to make use of their much cherished professions to address the challenges and it is by doing this that one has really contributed to the social political development of the society. Towing the line of Daniel and Bappa (2004), the following are thus recommended:

- There is need to advocate for the inclusion of budget lines in Federal Government innovation to local government Area/ LCDA that have drama group and use them as an important part of their local information and communication strategy.
- The need to increase the use of support of the CTFD techniques by Local Community Based Organization (LCBO,) interested in development issues
- Community funding for local troops as they participate in local decision making on issues that affect conflict resolution and peace building in different state.
- Need for support through local churches and mosque and other religious group.
- Communal contribution to the sustenance of local troops that could incorporate such techniques in their repertory of local community entertainment and conscientization efforts.

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