

Book Review

*Drama and Theatre Communication in Development
Experiences in Western Kenya*

Edited by Loukie Levert and Opiyo Mumma

Published by Kenya Drama/Theatre and Education
Association, 1995

This little book is aimed at a wide audience, but more specifically drama teachers and communicators interested in using the drama medium to convey messages.

According to the editors, the book is meant to document the experiences of performers (or those involved in theatre). It also aims at providing communicators involved in development, with documentation that will help them realize the possibilities offered by using drama and theatre to convey on messages.

The book so to speak, seeks to expose its users to how drama/theatre can be used as a learning medium and a workable method.

Chapter two attempts to explain concepts like development, grassroot communication, differences between drama and theatre etc. The editors assert that misrepresentation of the concepts of development and communication have led to ineffectual communication strategies which lead to the unsuccessful implementation of development programmes. It is a pity the words theatre and drama are used interchangeably and no attempt is made to differentiate them at the onset. This is certainly, a major shortfall.

The editors also run into problems when they fail to explain clearly, the differences between theatre for development and developmental theatre (in a style reminiscent of African communication scholars who do not define journalism for development and developmental journalism) nor do they tell us the form that theatre for development takes.

In Chapter three titled "A Theatrical Development Model" the author asserts that in using theatre, time allowances must be made for communities to change. One can only motivate people, one cannot force them. The conclusion one reaches is that theatre for development programmes is crucial in allowing communities to see the world, to see themselves as human beings and then find their connection to the world.

Chapter four - Oral literature for development at a glance seems a bit misplaced in this book but its true worth is reflected in a paragraph that shows how oral literature can be used in passing development messages as its role (verbal art) is to perform the service of drawing attention to the sources from which people gain identity. Oral literature has potential to provide an avenue to understanding through personal experience of an otherwise abstract world. The mediums that tackle these are proverbs, tongue twisters, songs, etc.

Chapter five - Drama festival movement - traces the history of Kenya Drama Festival as a national event but with concentration on the practices and practitioners from Western Kenya. The piece suffers as it promises more than it actually delivers. Its conclusion is not sustained as one goes through the text and one only needs to look at the Bibliography offered to notice the absence of many materials in the text e.g. - quotes from the Daily Newspaper as well as reference to dated texts.

Chapter six - Theatre and Womens groups begins in a predictable manner. Too much is said on harambees in an attempt to place the subject of women's groups into perspective. The piece also suffers as it does not explain nor tell us what the needs of women are in as far as theatre and development are concerned.

Chapter seven - Child Care, Folk media and theatre-highlights the initiatives taken to use theatre as a means for strengthening a peoples knowledge - crucial for development. The theatre medium is seen as important in helping communicate and propagate information, solicit support from the target group to enhance child survival programmes in Kisumu. Theatre as the author asserts is crucial in enhancing a community's participation by involving people in community diagnosis, analysis, action plan and implementation and becomes a strategy for development. The author concludes that theatre is a great vehicle to mobilize people and educate them for social change. It allows sensitive issues to be discussed without offending an individual person, while challenging the guilty. It enhances peoples power to make informed decisions as opposed to giving directions or instructions.

Chapter eight-Child labour and teenage fertility-explores a drama and theatre methodology that was used to create awareness on the above theme. The method was participatory in that whole communities were involved in defining the problem, writing and reworking the scripts, as well as using popular art forms familiar to the community. The content and form of this drew responses that demanded re-examination of the community values and thus showed that communication had taken place. The author concludes rightly that drama has potential to sensitize people and reinforce a process of social change as well as changes in self concept, attitude, awareness, skill or behaviour.

Chapter nine looks at the impact of theatre for development singling out the effect of a project drama for hygiene used in Kisumu. One of the main results observed is the potential that theatre for development has to trigger new/other thoughts as communities watch a performance.

Chapter ten focuses on the grass root approach to theatre. Theatre, as observed by the author, has a traditional and cultural place in the everyday life of the people in rural areas. Thus the medium can be used to tackle issues that are not easily discussed at home. Everyone can get involved and air their

views; express fears, frustrations, understand each other and even propose solutions. The chapter is well written and the conclusion that theatre blends many aspects of life together as it is not a one way process, is well sustained throughout the chapter. Theatre has a place in helping to spread information and expression of feeling and opinions about social topics.

Chapter eleven is titled "Change in the Village". In the piece, the authors make contentious statements about theatre and its use in Kenya. Straight away, one can question why drama is being alluded to as one of Kenya's most popular and accessible communication mediams. The authors have forgotten the power of oral literature, oral performances of poetry (the Nyatiti Player) and music and dance.

Though the book suffers from minor editorial problems of typographical errors, poor construction of sentences, poor grammatical use of words, errors of spelling, use of first person, it is a useful addition to any collection on development communication. More editorial work should have been undertaken to ensure a continuous thread throughout. By focussing on an important, but often neglected area of development communication, (i.e. theatre and drama) this book will be found useful by communication students and scholars.

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