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Participatory Research in Theatre for Development: An Evaluative Paradigm of the Walukuba Project in Eastern Uganda

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Abstract

In Theatre for Development (TfD), participatory research, in which the members of the community get involved in a collective process of analysing their limited situations, is highly emphasised, but rarely achieved in practice. In most cases, practitioners have constructed myths of participation. They argue that their work is participatory, but instead end up with top-down processes where issues addressed come from above with the communities involved as consumers of finished theatre products. This article analyses the Walukuba TfD project in Uganda and argues that the practitioners in the project made an effort to engage the community in collective research and analysis and a democratic process of prioritisation of issues. The aim of this article is to present the Walukuba project as an example of effective participatory research in TfD and to discuss the benefits associated with the process.

Introduction: Theatre for Development as a Participatory Process

Theatre for development (TfD) is conceived as a practice that adopts a participatory development approach. For instance, Marcia Pompeo Nogueira, a Brazilian theatre scholar, considers TfD to be 'a progression from less interactive theatre forms to a more dialogical process, where theatre is practiced with the people or by the people as a way of empowering communities, listening to their concerns and encouraging them to voice and solve their own

problems' (2002: 04). In the same way, Frances Harding, a scholar in African theatre at the London School of Oriental and African studies, posits that:

> Theatre for Development is a practice which enables communities, as stake holders in development, to participate by outlining their fears, needs and aspirations. The process defines a new system in which the voices of development beneficiaries speak. This is important as there is increasing awareness of the need to hear the voices of those whom development affects and to listen to their fears and hopes.(1997: 38)

TfD is a process that adopts an inside-out or development from within, endogenous or bottom-up approach as opposed to outside-in or development from without, exogenous or top-down approach (Chinyowa, 2009: 02; Epskamp, 1989: 11; Mangeni, 2007: 31). It is a process which promotes the idea of giving voice to the oppressed sections of the community so that they may collectively analyse the issues that affect their lives.

The endogenous or bottom-up view of TfD is rooted in the Freirian critical pedagogy theories which promotes learning as a collective participatory process. Pivotal to Freire's influence on the development of TfD has been the notion of problem-posing education. Problem-posing education means that learning becomes an interactive process in which the identified community and the practitioner engage in naming the world in dialogue with one another. In Freire's words, 'if it is in speaking their word that people, by naming their world transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings' (1970: 69). In another work with Shor, Freire emphasises the significance of dialogue and argues that 'the pursuit of humanisation cannot be an isolated individualistic activity' (1987: 109).

In TfD practice, practitioners and scholars draw from Freire's critical pedagogy theories, especially the notion of problem-posing education, to foreground the participatory research methodology as key to working with communities in a theatre for development workshop.

According to Byam, prolific TfD scholar, 'this type of research is contrary to traditional research paradigms in that the participants are also the subjects and the teachers hold no elite distinction while gathering information through their active involvement in the community' (1999:24). Describing it as emancipatory action research, Margaret Ledwith, a community development and theatre for social change scholar argues that:

> It adopts a methodology and methods that are collaborative, and in doing so commits to identifying and challenging unequal power relations within its process. It is rooted in dialogue, attempting to work *with*, not *on* people and intends that its process is empowering for all involved. More than this, it is committed to collective action for social change as its outcome. (2005: 73)

Thompson, in his seminal publication *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond* explicitly articulates the significance of the participatory research methodology in community-based theatre processes such as TfD. Describing it as 'Theatre Action Research' (TAR), he views it as a process of fostering what he calls 'a democracy of the ground' (2003: 147). In order to contextualize his views on the place of participatory research in applied theatre processes, Thompson draws inference from a Ghanaian proverb that 'a person who rides a donkey does not know the ground is hot' and from Horton and Freire's aphorism that 'we make the road by walking' (Horton & Freire, 1990).

By alluding to the aforementioned proverb and saying, Thompson aptly suggests that for theatre to work as a participatory research process, the members of the target community must take the central role in the analytical process, because they best understand the compelling need for change or the problems that oppress them.

The article focuses on the Walukuba TfD experience and analyses how effective the project was in affording the community collective research and investigation of the issues underpinning their lives and in effect led to a deepened awareness of their situation. Having taken part as an observer in the Walukuba project's weekly TfD workshops with permission from Plastow, the principal facilitator for six consecutive weeks, I analyse the work based on my personal experience of the process.

A Brief Profile of the Walukuba TfD Project and of Facilitators

The Walukuba TfD project commenced at the beginning of February 2015 with the first community workshop aimed at community mobilisation and reached its initial climax in mid June 2015 with a grand community theatre performance. The project was initiated with the aim of engaging the people of Walukuba in exploring issues of environmental sustainability and development. The principal facilitator of the project was Jane Plastow, a long-time researcher of African Theatre for Development, Director of the Leeds University Centre for African Studies and Professor of African Theatre. Plastow has a deep grounding in the practice of community arts and TfD and has 30 years experience working in African countries such as Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda. She is well aware of the power exacted by international capital on the TfD processes. She has often warned TfD practitioners in the developing world to be aware of how global capital impacts on the TfD process. For instance, in one of her articles, Plastow advises practitioners thus:

> The fundamental question we need to start asking before all others in relation to TfD or any other applied arts work in Africa, of funders ... is, why are you doing this? If the answer appears to be to promulgate an institutional or individual view of a 'good thing' then we should reject the project. If the makers tell us they are seeking to 'do good' or to 'help the poor' or any similar answer, we should reject the project, because this thinking is patronising, denigrating and domesticating. (Plastow, 2014: n.p)

Plastow is cynical of TfD practices where the funders' ideology takes precedence over the need to engage communities in working out their own process of change. She is aware that if funders and the TfD practitioners go to the communities with the disposition of doing people good or to help the poor, they will not respect the potential of the community in contributing to the process of their own change. Plastow is not only aware of the influence of funding/international capital on TfD projects, but also of the need for practitioners to structure a TfD process in such a way that it engages the people in all the stages of the workshop. In her view, conscientisation, or the empowerment resulting from the TfD process, needs to be seen as the 'transformation of the human person where participants become transformed into conscious beings aware of and claiming voices and choices on how their lives will be lived'. (Boon & Plastow, 2004: 07)

Plastow was assisted by Kate McQuaid, an anthropologist from the University of Leeds. Before getting involved in the Walukuba TfD project, McQuaid received essential training in the conventions of TfD practice (Plastow & McQuaid, 2016). Perhaps in order to create greater links between the two English practitioners and the Ugandan community in Walukuba and to foster a people-centred process, Baron Oron, a Ugandan TfD practitioner, was recruited into the facilitating team. Oron, who worked with Rose Mbowa, the precursor of TfD in Uganda in its 1990s nascent stages, came to the project with his long standing skills in TfD facilitation. I noticed that he used these skills in provoking thought and drawing out discussion from the participants. He also helped in translating English to the local language.

Looking at the overall model implemented in the project, I noticed that Plastow and Oron shared some commonality in terms of facilitation methods. The Walukuba project model was similar to the Stepping Stones concept implemented by Mbowa and Oron in Uganda's early TfD projects. A key feature of the Stepping Stones model adopted in the Walukuba project was peer-grouping the community based on sex and age, which ensured that each group was afforded an opportunity to explore its issues with freedom.

The project took place in Walukuba sub-county, Masese Division in Jinja municipality, Eastern Uganda. In the 1960s, Jinja used to be Uganda's industrial centre but lost this glory

because of the economic slump caused by decades of political turmoil. In recent years however, the municipality has regained its reputation as an industrial hub with many foreign owned processing industries coming up. The area houses a number of factories in such as MML (dealing in steel and aluminium products), Tiptop which specialises in bread baking and many fish processing factories, all operated by Asian investors. Due to a lack of effective government regulation and rampant local corruption, the growing industrial sector has contributed to the destruction of the ecosystem with some industries built in swamps/wetlands.

Located in the fringes of Jinja municipality, Walukuba is an area composed of different levels of social and economic stratification. In fact, Walukuba is located in the greater Busoga region of Eastern Uganda, which is ranked as one of the worst poverty-stricken regions in Uganda. Generally, the region lacks adequate development intervention from government and non-governmental organisations to the extent that it is still home to people who die of preventable conditions such as jigger infestation. Widespread poverty led to high levels of rural-urban migration involving mostly the youths who come to Jinja municipality hoping to find employment in the mushrooming small-scale industries.

Socio-demographically, Walukuba is composed of people with various tribal affiliations coming from neighbouring regions such as Teso, Bugisu and Buganda and Eastern Kenya. These people compete for the overstretched amenities such as accommodation, health centres, schools and business facilities. One of the most disheartening features of the Walukuba community is the widespread disparity between genders with very few opportunities for the women and girls. Peer group discussions during the workshops revealed rampant suffering of women and girls caused by a patriarchal system where men wield a lot of power as family heads and as leaders of the community. Women articulated several problems affecting their lives such as single motherhood, lack of sufficient education, lack of access to economic resources such as land and oppressive cultural practices such as bride price and polygamy, which deny the women a voice in society.

A glance at the place revealed the glaring divide between the high end and low end sections of the community. On one side of the area, there was the Nile International Hospital and an international school—Galaxy International School. These two establishments provided health and education services for the rich working class, mainly the local politicians and the foreign investor community largely from Asian countries such as India and Pakistan.

I talked to a local member of the community who revealed that parents who take children to Galaxy International School pay over 4 million Uganda shillings (Ushs),

approximately 1500 USD per term and that a day in Nile International Hospital costs 1million Ushs, approximately 350 USD. These prices may sound small from the perspective of the Western developed world, but are exorbitant for a majority of the people in a developing country like Uganda.

Sandwiched in the above middle class establishments were a host of poor families who reside in a large colonial estate, which used to house council staff and civil servants in the pre-independence times. Many of the houses in the estate were dilapidated making the place look unkempt. Plastow and McQuaid discovered that 'originally designed as a series of one room dwellings in low blocks of four for single men in the colonial era, Walukuba now houses some 17,000 residents, most living as families in these same single room dwellings' (2016: n.p.). The photographs below illustrate the deplorable living conditions of the people in the estate.

Adopted from We are Walukuba website www.wearewalukuba.com

There were many jobless youths living in this community who flocked to the factories looking for casual jobs. I observed that some of the youths had resorted to antisocial habits such as drug abuse, alcoholism and gambling. There were no services for the hapless community. The only available services included two poorly built markets, a playground and a community centre. Looking at the community centre which was the venue for the TfD project, one noticed that the toilet facilities broke down many years ago and have never been repaired and that there were few bulbs to provide lighting when it gets dark.

The Walukuba TfD project was funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Intersection project. Intersection was 'an international research project,

covering three post-industrial cities in Uganda, UK and China, looking at intergenerational understandings of justice in relation to environment and consumption'(Plastow & McQuaid, 2016). Consequently, Plastow and McQuaid participated in this project as part of a bigger international team, examining, from an intergenerational perspective, key urban sustainability concerns in Uganda using arts based methodologies.

Before establishing the project, Plastow and McQuaid did preliminary research about Walukuba by reading about the place and walking around Jinja interviewing a cross-section of residents from across the town. Through this research they resolved that Walukuba would be the focus of their arts work, precisely 'because it was a relatively contained community and because as one of the most deprived areas of Jinja town they hoped to be able to make the greatest impact by working with the residents'(Plastow & McQuaid, 2016).

For most of the project—the first five months, the weekly workshops were led by McQuaid assisted by Oron. Plastow, who was still held by the normal academic obligations at the University of Leeds, UK, joined the team for the last three weeks in June (summer holidays) to facilitate the theatre making and performance aspect of the project.

Initiating a bottom-up process: Community Mobilisation through Local Community Leadership

At the beginning of this article, effective TfD practice was posited as a process which eschews the "top-down" or the "outside in" approach of development to adopt "a bottom-up" or "inside out" process of development. Adopting a bottom-up or an inside out model implies that the process of development should start with the very community participating in the process. However, the challenge in most TfD projects has always been that the facilitators come from outside the community. They are normally people with some level of power ensuing from their high levels of education and high profile employment usually in universities and NGOs. Such a scenario normally disrupts the balanced power relations expected in a bottom-up TfD process. For the case of the Walukuba project, the facilitators were not just outsiders but also people from another country (Britain, a former imperial power) bringing in issues of race and assumed political power.

So, in order to establish the desired bottom-up process, the facilitators had to carefully enter the community by dissolving the power inequality via cooperating with the local leadership of the community. In so doing, McQuaid and Oron made contacts with existing social groups and the local leadership, especially the established Local Council (LC)

structures. In the core group of the participants, there were three LC chairpersons from different villages in Walukuba sub-county who worked with the facilitators from the onset of the project. One of these chairpersons was female. As opinion leaders in the community, the LC chairpersons attracted members of the community to join the project.

Furthermore, the facilitators worked with a young man named Siraji who was helping them in mobilising the young people. Siraji was the leader of a community based group, Youth Legacy Africa and had been working as a peer educator using his artistry as a break dancer, mobilising young men and women and engaging them in activities that raise awareness about HIV and STDs. Because of Siraji's leadership, most of the young men in the TfD project were members of Youth Legacy Africa.

In the February first community workshop, the community was grouped based on age and sex, in a process called peer group formation. The process of peer grouping resulted into three groups: one group for young men, another group for young women and the other for older men and women who chose not to be divided according sex. Katie revealed that as a facilitation team, they had envisaged having another group of middle-aged participants but that these people voluntarily decided to join the older participants arguing that they were old enough.

In the process of doing participatory research and theatre making, the various peer groups worked at different times but the process later became intergenerational as the groups performed and dialogued with each other. In my review of the impact of the Walukuba project, participants spoke highly of having had an opportunity to discuss with various age groups—the little children, the young men and women and the elders.

For some participants, the 'intergenerationality' of the project was the greatest motivation that attracted them to the project. The voices below reveal the level of satisfaction with the project set up:

> Mwase Yusuf: When I was enrolling in this project, I came with great expectation to interact with other age groups of the community. Jane and Katie were working hard to bring together the young ones and the elders. In most cases it is the elders who participate in thinking and planning for the community. But they are ageing. It is the young people who will be responsible for society tomorrow, so they need to be trained by involving them.

> Abdallah: My greatest expectation out of the 'We are Walukuba' was to socialise and interact with different people. I wanted to meet people across age groups. I was interested in seeing the young generation and the older generation interact and work together. The project helped the different age groups of the community to come and work together. Such a thing had not happened in our community, to find the young

and the old discussing an important issue such as environmental conservation was really a big breakthrough for the community.

Siraji Koloto: My life has really changed because I have been able to work with various age groups, the young and the elders. I have now got new experiences of what life is with other age groups especially the elders. Different age groups have different challenges. I have been able to work with people of different characters.

Deo: My esteem increased, I became more popular especially among the elders of the community. The elder generation who took part in the project now know me better. They know that I can do something great for our community. I can now approach them with an idea to discuss and they will listen.

In my view, engaging various age groups of the community was a big step in garnering communitywide effort toward the project, in effect facilitating a bottom up process of development.

The Significance of Participatory Research through Creative Performance and Letter Writing

I started observing the Walukuba project in the seventeenth week. Before I could begin attending the session I wrote an email to McQuaid inquiring what had transpired in the last sixteen weeks and she replied thus:

I am living in Jinja at the moment which is where I am conducting the theatre research workshops. We began working with the community at the beginning of February, and since then each week on a Sunday I meet two groups, younger men and younger women, and on a Monday afternoon I meet with older persons, which is a mixed group. Within these groups we conduct a series of activities in order to explore every day constructions and understandings of the environment, as well as generational identities, dynamics, roles and responsibilities. Thus far we have used drama, music, poetry and art to explore ideas and generate data for our project. At the moment we are gearing up for a series of community theatre events to be held throughout the community in which we are working in mid-June, so our schedule is a little bit up in the air...

From the above revelation by McQuaid we note the Walukuba project from its onset adopted a participatory research process to explore ideas and generate the problems and opportunities which would be explored through the community performances. By the seventeenth week when I first attended and observed the workshops, the TfD process was still focused on using performance and theatre as a research method to explore the various problems affecting the community. McQuaid and Oron were trying to provide an environment in which the participants reflected on their lives as individuals and as groups.

I started observing the TfD sessions at a point when the different peer groups of the community were exploring their issues through letter writing. In their respective sessions, the young men and women were being encouraged to write letters to the elders expressing concern about anything they wished should be changed. Likewise, in their session, the elders were asked to write letters to the young generation advising them on anything they thought needed to change. Letter writing was done either by groups or individuals. In each letter writing session, there were moments of dialogue and reflection which came either after reading each letter or after the whole group had presented all their letters. What follows is a presentation of the letter writing process in sessions involving different peer groups. The presentation focuses on how the letter writing technique helped unearth the problems and opportunities of the community.

The Young Men Letter writing presentation

The letters written by the young men in their 2pm-4pm session included the following.

Letter 1:

Dear elders, you are the key decision makers and thus responsible for the wellbeing of our society. You are advocating for industrialisation as a way of developing our communities. Factories are coming up all the time. But please in all these development plans, consider conserving our environment. Are there any plans put in place to conserve the environment?

In a moment of dialogue and reflection two issues arose: what should be done to conserve the environment and what have the youth done to conserve the environment? In response to the first question, the youth said that the elders need to engage the young people in using the environment sustainably. The process was facilitated to help the youth to start thinking about what they themselves can do to preserve the environment. In effect, the process was beginning to build the level of agency among the young men so that they may consider what they can do to bring about change.

Letter 2:

Dear elders of Walukuba community, you make love affairs with young girls and you spoil our chances for good marriages. Because you have a lot of money, the girls decide to go with you leaving us the young men with few chances. Please stop this practice and stay with the old women you have already married.

Following this letter was a moment of dialogue and reflection. Oron who seemed to stand in the place of the elders asked, "But the girls come to us, what should we do?" The

boys suggested that the old men should say no when the young girls come to them. McQuaid the co-facilitator inquired about the age of young girls which was being implied in the letter. The boys replied "girls aged18 or 19 years"—those who are allowed by the law to go to clubs. The issue of age triggered some interesting discussion as it emerged that while the young men complained that the older men were invading their age bracket for love affairs, girls aged 18 or 19 were by the Ugandan constitution old enough (had attained the age of consent) and could thus get married to a man of any age. The discussion went back to the letter. It was discovered that while their letter was good, a number of issues such as the economic limitations of young men and HIV and STDs could be added to it. Oron reminded the young men to be aware that recent research had indicated an increase in HIV infections related to inter generational sexual relationships.

The third letter was written in Luganda. The participant who read the letter started by addressing the whole group with a good measure of freedom, "I have written my letter in Luganda". This caused some excitement and laughter. The letter read "*Basebbo ne banyabo abazadde baffe. Tubasaba mutusasulire ebisale byesomero ngataamu ekyatandika.Mulekerawo sente kuzitwala mumakilabu. Kubanga bwebatugoba kusomero, tutataganyizibwannyo.Tusanga banaffe ngabasomye bingi. Awonno ngatufiriddwa bingi*."

Literally translated in English the letter read:

Dear parents we request you to pay our school fees in time, at the beginning of the term. Kindly stop taking all the money to clubs and bars. When we are sent back home for school fees, after two weeks following the commencement of the term, we miss a lot of learning.

The dialogue and reflection by the boys expanded this letter. The young men noted that the parents needed to understand that all young people needed to go to school whether there is hope that they will get employed or not. They emphasised that the education of the young people should be unconditional. This point was triggered by a prevailing problem in the Ugandan society where many parents are compelled by the rampant joblessness to stop sending their children to school. As a point for reflection, Oron asked the young men to ponder on the question why the parents take time to pay fees. The boys replied "some parents have the money but think that the children are stubborn, so they expect them to drop out, some do not have money, while others are just irresponsible." One participant, Siraji who said that he represented the voice of the elders noted that there seemed to be a problem of lack of sufficient communication between the parents and their children. Another participant noted that parents mind about commerce/business; instead of paying fees in time, they go to

bars. They preferred to invest their money in trade than taking care of their children's welfare.

As a point of reflection, Oron invited the participants to think about why the parents do that. He invited the youths to ponder on whether the parents buy food at home or take them to hospital when they fall sick. The young men replied that the parents do take them to hospital when they fall sick but when they buy food, they do not buy good food such as meat or fish and that it is mothers who care most. There was a feeling among all the participants that some parents think that even if children have not gone to school, they can still be useful. One participant noted that sometimes neglect of children results from wrangles between parents, making the parents transfer their anger to the children.

From the dialogue and discussion, I observed that there was a great feeling among the youths that their parents do not love them yet young people needed to know that they are loved so that they are able to give love to others. In an attempt to take the discussion to a national level, the young men were invited to think about any help they can get from government concerning their welfare and protection. They were particularly invited to think about the probation and welfare services offered by the government. The youths in reply noted that government was discriminatory in that it serves the youth based on the parties to which they belong. If one belonged to the ruling NRM party, it was easy for that person to receive government support. This letter had facilitated a process of dialogue and discussion which helped the participants to explore the different dimensions of the school fees problem. An effective TfD process is one which empowers the participants to unearth underlying contradictions of their situation.

Another letter was addressed to the manager of Tasco Company, one of the factories established by foreign investors. In the letter, the youths requested the manager to take care of the needs and welfare of the workers who work for long hours and receive little or no pay. In reflecting about the contents of this letter, a young man, Abdallah narrated his ordeal. He said, "I was working for Bidco. We would work the whole night and be paid 3500 Ushs (an equivalent of 1 United States Dollar) per night. This money would come after two weeks. When this money would be paid, it would find me with many needs. The labour dispensed would be too much but with very little returns."

The discussion moved from analysing the local issues of workers to reflecting on issues of universal concern in the community. One participant queried which category of workers was by law supposed to register with saving institutions such as the National Social Security Fund (NSSF). Were low wage earners such as causal labourers supposed to save? This

inquest resulted from the fact that some factories were advising the causal labourers to register with the NSSF. It became clear from the discussion that workers in the area were victims of an unjust labour system with factories and companies taking advantage of the desperate situation of the local masses to exploit them.

The discussion further led to a reflection on the issue of a minimum wage which the government of Uganda has not yet fixed. The participants noted with profound concern that the government had decided not to put in place a minimum wage because this would make labour expensive and scare away foreign direct investments. On 1 May 2015, at the International Labour Day celebrations held in Kisoro district in Western Uganda, Mr Museveni, the President of Uganda had earnestly addressed Ugandans on the issue of a minimum wage and pay rise for civil servants. He had argued that what was critical to Uganda's current development was not a minimum wage or pay rise but investing resources in infrastructural development. This would provide an ample climate for foreign direct investments which would in turn lead to increased jobs.

The young men further noted with concern that top managers of companies and factories were largely picked from either India, Kenya or from other parts of Uganda such as Mbarara in Western Uganda. Never were they recruited from the local area. This was interpreted by the young men as a ploy by the factory owners to keep them in continued isolation so that they could easily exploit them.

There was an attempt to take the discussion to an international level by reflecting on the international trade unions movement. This issue was particularly raised by McQuaid, the facilitator perhaps because she came from a part of the world where there is a well developed labour movement. She wondered whether there were trade unions in the country. The answer emerging from the group was that the trade union movement in Uganda was not fully developed. Participants noted that there were some unions such as the Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU) and the Association of Uganda Medical Workers and Midwives, but these are frequently neutralised by the executive arm of government which appoints seasoned union leaders to cabinet positions. McQuaid revealed to the group that the problem of weak trade unions and how they relate with the political powers was a global concern. She said, "I have recently been in Qatar, the trade unions there have been banned by government".

There was a young boy of about 14 years who introduced himself as "So Skinny", a name perhaps coined from his feathery weight. He addressed his letter to the elders as follows: "Dear elders, you engage yourselves in sex with children, please stop it because it is

bad. Some of you mistreat children, please stop". In reflecting on the letter, one participant told a story of a recent incident in the community which involved a renowned politician in the ruling National Resistance Movement Party (NRM) sexually molesting a child. He said it was rumoured that when the parents tried to complain and take the matter to court, they were threatened with imprisonment and death by the ruling party big wigs in the area.

The last letter by the young men was addressed to the headmaster of Kaboja High School, a school in the Buganda region of Uganda. The young man in this letter was particularly concerned about the tribalism in the school. The letter in part read, "I am pleased with the quality of education offered at your school, but I am not pleased with how I am treated for being a Musoga. Because of my tribe, Baganda students call me all sorts of names and describe Basoga as people of low minds. Because of my tribe I am mistreated by the Kitchen staff."

When it came to moments of reflection, there was a heated debate about the subject of the letter. The young men argued that people in institutions of learning are not treated equally. The Basoga are referred to as people infested with jiggers and this breeds hatred and disunity which could be detrimental to national peace.

The young women's letter writing process

In the session commencing at 4pm, it was the turn for the young women's group to write their letters to the elders expressing their concerns. In beginning the session with the young women, McQuaid gave a prelude in the following words, "in the previous workshops, we have explored many issues: environment, sex and love, teachers getting into affairs with students, money for love among others. Today we want you to write a letter to any elder or group of elders expressing concern about something you find so touchy, so critical that you would love something to be done about it."

Unlike the group of young men where reflection on the letters came after each letter, in the young women's group, all the letters were presented and then the group collectively reflected on the various issues raised in the letters. In the letters, the girls made various requests.

Letter 1 read by Sophie raised concern about rampant corruption among leaders, witchcraft, money and the complaint that local people do not have a say in their issues. Letter 2 presented by Maureen read in part as follows:

We are tired of corruption; girls have suffered a lot because of corruption. Old men harass us by requesting for sex before they can give us jobs. I was a victim of this vice. There is also a big problem of political discrimination, before some elders offer a service; they first want to know your political party. They want to know whether one belongs to the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) or the ruling NRM. There is also a big problem of tribalism promoted by our elders. My name, Ayesiga identifies me as someone from Western Uganda. Recently I went to submit a job application. My name caught the attention of the lady at the reception. She asked me where I come from and I replied that I was from Western Uganda. Then the woman retorted, "You mean there are no jobs in Western Uganda?"

The third letter read, "Dear elders, we need justice and rights from the community. We need rights to do what we want. People should stop blaming us because we have rights." Letter 4 read by Sarah made the following requests:

Dear elders, misuse of property belonging to orphans pains us so much. Caretakers should stop grabbing the property of orphans. We also want to attract your attention to the problem of defilement and rape. You send young girls to market squares late in the evenings. This exposes them to ill intentioned men who defile and rape them.

Letter 5 read:

We want to comment on the problem of too much love for money. Girls put money first before love. This leads to high rates of spread of diseases. Girls go into sex for money but in the end become pregnant. They resort to unsafe abortion, which culminates into deaths.

During the collective reflection phase, the girls were guided by the facilitators to think about the issues raised in their letters. In the process the girls told stories of their experiences. For example, reflecting on the problem of witchcraft, one girl narrated the story of an incident involving two women who were fighting to possess a stall in the market. She said, "The woman brought a dead rat and hid it in the vegetables of her colleague. When the colleague exposed the rat, she died on spot".

Oron, one of the facilitators, invited the girls to think about which people in their community loved them and whether their parents loved them. All the girls agreed that the parents loved them but that they sometimes fail to help them when their welfare and rights are being infringed upon. The girls revealed that the offenders, especially the rich, buy their way out by bribing the police and the magistrates. While reflecting on whether the issues confronting them were similar to those of their counterparts the young men, the young women noted that girls had more chances of finding jobs. They argued that girls have access to men who give them jobs. The girls added that young men have a lot of needs —they are traditionally expected to be at a certain level of development before they can start family life.

One girl disagreed with the thinking that it was only young men who have a lot of needs, arguing that young women too, especially single mothers, have many burdens weighing on them. Evidently, the process was empowering young women to unearth the complex issues and contradictions underlying their lives.

Generally, having heard the issues raised in the letters of both the young men and women, I realised that there was escalating tension in the society. On one hand, the young men were overburdened by what society expects of them —to work hard and earn money before they can begin family life. On the other hand, there was the looming problem of single mothers who had to take on the responsibility of being both mother and father.

Elders' Letter Writing Process

In the evening of Monday 18 May 2015, it was the turn for the elders to write letters to the young generation expressing concern about anything they felt needed to change. McQuaid, the facilitator, made efforts to link the day's activity to the previous activities and what was going to come in the coming days. This was significant in ensuring the participants continued moving together in the process as a unified group. She addressed them with the following words:

> Dear elders, in the coming days; we shall be coming to workshops regularly. The process will become a little more intergenerational as we shall be interacting more closely with our young generation. Today we are going to get into pairs and write letters to our young generation advising them on critical things you think they should work on and change. Think about anything that we have explored in the previous workshops such as superstition, sustainability, environment, AIDs, the economy, family planning and others. In the coming weeks we shall make dramas revolving around these letters and perform them to the youth.

> Letter 1 by the LC 1 chairman and his colleagues read:

> To the youths of this generation. We love you, you are our children but please we advise you to work on the following: Behave well, respect elders, parents and grandparents. Dress properly. Boys stop dressing balance and girls stop putting on miniskirts and dresses. Stop over drinking and abusing drugs. Stop overlooking jobs. Start with little jobs and then go on progressing in your careers. Do not wait for white collar jobs. Those of you, who have jobs, respect them by keeping time, and respecting your bosses. A boss is always right. Take your parents advices in matters concerning marriage, education and buying land. Put God first in all your plans; go to hospital when you fall sick and know your clan members and relatives.

> Letter 2 was titled "behaviour change" and pointed out the following areas that needed change:

Stop drug abuse. It is a source of underdevelopment in our community and it causes mental disorders. Youths have become sex workers leading to high spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and this eventually leads to poverty. Stop too much alcohol consumption. Please abstain from drug abuse so that we have well disciplined youths.

The third letter called upon the youths to be well disciplined, dress decently, keep good hygiene, stop cutting trees without planting new ones, avoid gangs and abstain from sex until they finish school. Written and presented in Luganda, the fourth letter advised the youths to be well disciplined, respect other people, avoid bad groups, dress decently, have good speech manners and to avoid rude language and to be patient until the right age of marriage. This letter also admonished the elders to stop marrying young girls.

The process of collective reflection and dialogue tended toward what Prentki (2007) called globalising contradiction by looking at issues in the local realm in relation to the universal or the global realm. One participant informed the group that government was in the process of tabling a Bill in parliament prohibiting treatment for those who get newly infected with HIV. The argument was that government had invested a lot of money in providing appropriate information and sensitisation. With this law in place, victims of new HIV infections would have to bear the cost of their treatment. The discussion on this issue raised a good debate relating to victims of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS. Participants debated what would be done for these innocent children and concluded that government needed to be careful as it makes a law which may potentially violate the human rights of its citizens. It was evident that having the ordinary folks of Walukuba engage in discussions relating to policy was evidence of transformative empowerment. The process had enabled the participants to explore the contradictions underpinning their lives. Looking at the enthusiasm of the participants, I became aware that they would as the process progressed move from mere discussion to action.

As a way of further globalising contradiction, the participants reflected on the issues raised in the letters in light of the forthcoming celebration of the African child's day on 16 June. The LC 1 chairman noted that the TfD activity they were involved in was quite appropriate as it related to the theme of the day's celebration—early marriage. He noted that Bugembe, one of the suburbs of Jinja municipality, had been chosen to be the venue of the celebration because it was leading in terms of many early marriages. To elicit a deepened discussion, Oron the co-facilitator invited the group to think about what the elders had done to help young people given that all the letters seemed to raise issues related to good manners,

respect and behaviour change. A number of issues came out of this process for further reflection:

> Some parents do not have time for their children; some parents come home quite late and when they are drunk; some parents are not friendly to their children. Some parents just hate their children; some parents fight and quarrel in front of their children and in effect display a bad example; the way some parents handle children matters is not appropriate—they overreact to situations and abuse the children.

The group concluded that parents played a huge role in shaping the way the children behaved.

For McQuaid, it was about giving a fair assessment of who the children were. She invited the elders to think whether the young people had anything positive for which they would be applauded. The answer was that they do good to go to school and that some of them help with chores at home during the school holidays. As the session was concluding, a participant observed that the group had discussed good points but they had not discussed at good length the issue of early marriage.

Generally, the process of problem identification through the letter writing technique provided an opportunity for every member of the community to think about what they could do to change Walukuba. In my dialogue with the participants about the project, some participants commented thus about process of letter writing:

> Abdallah: Letter writing is confidential. When you are challenged to write down issues you think need changing, you do it freely. Nobody will say that it is so and so who said this and that.

> Yusuf: The process of letter writing helped us think deeply about our problems as a community.

> Siraji Koloto: It was a confidential process. It is only the heart and mind of the person writing which is involved. Sometimes people are afraid of saying out their issues in public.

The above voices by the participants indicate that the technique of letter writing enabled every member of the community to articulate their issues. Members of the community who were still afraid of publicly mentioning their problems did it through writing. Thus, the process had gone a long way in increasing the voice of the participants.

Democracy, Collective Problem Interpretation and Prioritisation

As a practice which empowers participants to choose the kind of development they need and the manner in which they want to achieve it, TfD places democracy at the core of its participatory research process. Writing about applied theatre and social change, Tim Prentki and David Pammenter explain the significance of democracy in applied theatre processes such as TfD. They argue that:

> The core of the shared intention between facilitators and participants is an understanding that theatre becomes the practice of direct democracy. It becomes a reimagining of the ways in which democracy might be practised in the world in which our young people find themselves. The act of engaging in theatre places direct democracy at the heart of political and social transformation, leading to the development of political 'actors' both individually and, more importantly in the face of social fragmentation, collectively. The politicization of this collective leads, via shared social action, to political transformation. (Prentki & Pammenter, 2014: 12)

Typical of what the duo highlight as the significance of democracy, the Walukuba intergenerational TfD project displayed traits of the practice of direct democracy. Having identified the problems affecting the community through a participatory research process highlighted above, the various peer groups were led through a democratic process of collective problem interpretation and prioritisation. The first workshop sessions facilitated by Plastow who had arrived from the UK to take over the theatre-making facilitation process were devoted to prioritisation of the issues impeding the community's progress to greater human lives. As highlighted in the discussion above, the community had over the five months of a participatory research process identified several problems that hindered the progress of their community and several opportunities, which could be harnessed to promote better livelihoods and freedom. The process of prioritisation involved choosing both the most pressing problems and the most promising opportunities.

I sensed that Plastow and McQuaid had in their private planning meetings gathered all the problems and opportunities that had been identified through collective community research and analysis over the previous five months. They had neatly inscribed the problems and opportunities on large flip charts. In fact they stitched together two large flip charts to have one large chart on which the problems and opportunities were separately written. The fact that Plastow and McQuaid took time to plan for their TfD sessions was a gesture that they were keen to execute an effective TfD process. On many occasions when TfD projects have lacked effect, it has been because the facilitators have not taken time to plan how they would engage the community. This normally results into try and error processes which

mostly become anti-climactic. Figure 1 contains all the problems which were identified during a sustained participatory process of community engagement while figure 2 contains all the opportunities.

**Figure 1: Showing the list of problems identified by the community through collective community analysis**

Contaminated water, youth not doing low class jobs, underage sex, rape and sexual violence, local corruption, poor communication between age groups, poor condition of roads, poverty, tension between generations, blocked drains, superstition, swamp degradation, bad habits (smoking, drugs, alcohol), energy(charcoal vs. Electricity), polythene bags (buvera) and plastic bottles, tradition vs. modernity, women expect men to provide everything, young women have no voice in the community, girls have many responsibilities at home, poor greeting mannerisms or lack of greeting, few latrines, young generation selling land, oppression of factory workers by Asian supervisors, cross generational sex, lack of respect for elders, tree cutting, single mothers, lack of HIV testing and disclosure, polygamy and domestic violence.

Figure 2: Showing the list of the opportunities available in the community

Working across generations to share knowledge, irrigation, use of energy saving stoves, making pottery, creating local self-help organisations, cleaning up the community, unionisation, making biogas, making brickets (charcoal) from garbage, making crafts from recycled material, planting tree seedlings, better and sustainable use of land, Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs), peer education, lobbying local government, linking with useful NGOs, better latrines, helping develop talents, better nutrition, family planning, digging drains, creating sustainable arts groups, sharing practical skills, recycling and reusing and tree planting.

Having grouped all the problems affecting the community and all the opportunities which could be exploited to create better communities, the participants were facilitated into further analysis and reflection. The problems and opportunities were still inscribed on flip charts in English, a language which could not be understood by everyone. To ensure that everyone understood the problems and opportunities, Plastow invited participants to volunteer and help interpret each problem and write a local language translation below each problem. In Freirian terms, this process of collective analysis deepened the process in which the participants could name their world in dialogue with one another. I remember in the

young women's peer group session, I volunteered to help in the analysis of the problems. Plastow made it a point that instead of me it was one of the women who led the analysis. I sensed that Plastow's interior disposition was that it should be the very people who suffer the oppressive realities who analyse their needs, not me, a person from Kampala. The result of this reflective and analytical process was that all the participants in the peer groups moved as a unified whole in terms of knowledge and understanding of the community issues being explored. The photograph below illustrates the process of continued problem analysis by the community.
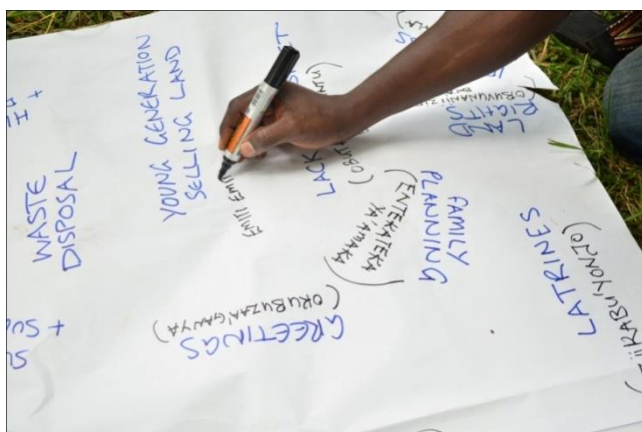
A young man volunteers to translate the problems of the community from English to Lusoga; the community's major language. The participants advised him on what to write. *Photo by Keneth Bamuturaki*

With the problems of the community and the available opportunities clearly identified, all the peer groups were facilitated in a collective and democratic process of choosing the most pressing problems and most promising opportunities. The democratic process was executed through voting during sessions in the various peer groups. The creativity of the facilitators in the voting process was good. I noted that they used plastic bottles which had been thrown in the environment to create/craft pieces which would be used as votes. It was captivating to see the facilitators bridge the current activity of problem prioritisation to the previous sessions. Plastow addressed the participants saying:

> In the last five months, you have been working with Katie and Baron, you identified several problems and opportunities. So the issues we are dealing with have all come from us. These problems and opportunities are too many. We are not able to handle all of them conclusively. We are going to choose through a democratic voting process just a few problems and opportunities.

Voting in each peer group was in three shifts. In the first shift, participants had three votes which they would place on the most pressing problem(s). In the second shift,

participants had two votes while in the third voting shift, they had one vote. If participants felt the need to emphasise one pressing problem or opportunity, they were free to place all their votes on the particular problem or opportunity. After the first and the second vote, all the issues which did not attract a vote would be crossed out so that only those issues which received a vote would be voted on in the subsequent voting sessions. After each voting session, the participants were given the opportunity to consider if they could change their voting decision. Through this voting process, participants had to choose at least six problems and opportunities about which they would make creative pieces such as poetry, songs, theatre plays and image theatre. The photographs below show the voting arrangements.

From top left to clockwise: problems sheet displayed for community analysis, Baron Oron explaining the voting process as participants prepare to vote while McQuaid distributes the votes and after a voting session, Plastow is removing the votes to pave way for the next voting session. *Photo by Keneth Bamuturaki*

I observed that the voting process turned into some kind of exciting theatre game. I noted that the participants were excited and pleased to use the power in their hands to choose the most pressing problems and most promising opportunities. The process gave the participants equal opportunities and voices. The photographs below show the actual voting Process.

From top left to clockwise: in first two photographs young women and young men respectively are casting their votes and in the last two photographs, the elders are casting their votes. *Photo by Keneth Bamuturaki*

The results of the voting process were indicative of the needs of the various peer groups. In the young men's group, following the three voting sessions, tree cutting, poverty, tribalism, school fees, police violence and corruption emerged as the most pressing issues; while unionisation, developing talents, making crafts, better latrines and better nutrition came out as the most hopeful opportunities. In the young women's group, the problem of single mothers, HIV testing and disclosure, polygamy, tree planting and underage sex surfaced as the most pressing problems; while forming SACCOs, helping to develop talents, family planning, making crafts and peer education were viewed as the best opportunities. In the elders group, poverty, bad habits among the young people, HIV testing and disclosure and single mothers emerged as the most serious needs. This group was very decisive in their choice and came up with only these four issues. Because the facilitators wanted at least six most pressing problems, they requested the group to choose two more problems by casting one more vote. As a result, the elders added school fees and tree cutting to their priority list of problems. In terms of the existing opportunities, the elders chose planting tree seedlings, family planning, peer education, energy saving stoves and lobbying local governments as the most hopeful ones. Table 1 illustrates the community's choice of the most serious problems and most hopeful opportunities.

Table 1: Showing the community's choice of the most serious problems and most helpful opportunities.

Peer group	Priority problems/issues	Most promising opportunities
1.Young men	tree cutting, poverty, tribalism, school fees, police violence and corruption	unionisation, developing talents, making crafts, better latrines and better nutrition
2.Young women	problem of single mothers, HIV testing and disclosure, polygamy, school fees and underage sex	forming SACCOs, helping to develop talents, family planning, making crafts and peer education
3. Elders	poverty, bad habits among the young people, HIV testing and disclosure and single mothers	planting tree seedlings, family planning, peer education energy saving stoves and lobbying local governments

Looking at the pattern of what the different peer groups considered their priority issues, it is interesting to note that some problems cut across all the segments of the community while others were felt more in particular segments of the community. It was fascinating to note that the school fees problem had not been a pressing problem among the elders but was a critical problem among both the young women and young men. It was also interesting to find out that unionisation as opportunity was only unique to the young men. This confirmed the earlier discussion during the participatory research process which had indicated that the young men were at the apex of a financial struggle in the community and the major victims of oppression in factories.

The fact that certain problems were unique to particular segments of society further emphasises the significance of participatory research in TfD. It underscored the fact that participatory research and/or collective problem identification in TfD helps communities to isolate the very problems and opportunities they feel are most pertinent to them.

As I interviewed the participants about the project in form of an impact assessment, I noted that they were satisfied with having chosen those problems they thought affected everyone. The following were some of their responses:

Yusuf: The process helped us choose the most pressing problems. We had many problems but, we selected only a few which needed special attention.

Deo: We were able to choose the most important problems: we identified problems such as abuse of political office through corruption and land grabbing. In fact the importance of these problems evidenced itself in the outcome of the local general elections. Political leaders who were known to be corrupt and grabbers of land were voted out. Even when those people dished out money to buy votes, they did not succeed.

Abdallah: It created awareness. People came to know the most pressing problems for each age group. We did not know the kind of problems that affect the youths, the women and the elders.

Siraji Koloto: We were able to identify the most common problems from the perspective of different people in the community.

The democratic process which was implemented to explore these problems led to deepened ownership of the project. Such a process was different from top-down processes where the problems handled in development programmes are simply impositions from above and in most cases different from what the community consider to be their pressing needs.

Conclusion

The experiences recorded in this article have indicated that if a community is facilitated in a collective and participatory process of identifying their felt needs, the process becomes one of empowerment participation. As Mlama (1991) puts it, 'both animateurs and participants research and analyse development problems in order to arrive at a critical awareness and if possible plan a course of action to solve those problems' (cited in Chinyowa 2009a: 97, 2010: 14). The article has indicated that such a process helps the community to analyse the deep-seated contradictions underpinning their lives and in effect come to understand their needs holistically. This process leads to what Freire (Freire, 1970, 2009) calls thematic investigation, a process in which the community analyses the themes and the generative themes of issues affecting their lives. As Plastow and McQuaid put it in their post community performance reflections, they had 'engaged men and women of all ages to achieve a 'plenitude of praxis' of action and reflection'(2016: n.p.). They had facilitated a Freirian inspired process invoking the praxis of a sustained process of action and reflection as a means for researchers and community members to gain increased critical understanding of the factors that both constituted and constrained the people of Walukuba (Plastow & McQuaid, 2016).

One important point to make about the participatory research process above is that it developed because of the skill of careful and sensitive facilitators. They were facilitators who were willing to learn together with the community. On various occasions, McQuaid and Oron

asked appropriate and leading questions which led to deeper reflection and dialogue. The issue of facilitation is critical because without a good facilitator, the process may only become another top-down experience. This happens when the facilitators come with a feeling of being all-knowing technocrats of development and want to "save" the community using their knowledge. In such cases, the process turns into an act of filling the participants with knowledge; denying them the opportunity of collective analysis. Here, the facilitators worked closely with the community to explore the problems of the community. As a result, there was effort to implement 'a research with the people model'(Ledwith, 2005); in so doing engendering a Freirian collective learning process.

The most captivating feature of the Walukuba participatory research process was the democratic process of choosing the most pressing problems affecting the community and most promising opportunities that could be harnessed to bring about better livelihoods, something which was found to be lacking in the contemporary Ugandan TfD practices by practitioners in organisations such as IATM and Rafiki Theatre Company .

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