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Transforming Ugandan Agrarian Communities: The Efficacy of Theatre for Development in fostering Gender Justice in Uganda's Agricultural Enterprises

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A work in progress submitted to the consciousness literature and the arts Journal for Review and Publication

September 2018

Abstract

Uganda has over the years put in place policy guidelines to reduce socio-cultural injustices, especially gender inequalities in the agricultural sector. In spite of the affirmative policy actions, statistics indicate that there is widespread marginalization of women in Uganda's agricultural sector. For example, Lakwo discovered that 'women produce 70% of the total agricultural output but ownership and control over land, their labour and above all the benefits thereof is minimal and that while 97% of women have access to land for farming, only 8% have leasehold' (Lakwo 2007: 14). This study is a work in progress which set out to explore through a practice based research design the effectiveness of Theatre for Development (TfD) in fostering gender justice in agricultural enterprise development among the communities in the Rwenzori region, Western Uganda. Specifically, it aims to examine the significance of TfD in facilitating a participatory research process of collective problem identification, prioritisation and analysis; evaluate the extent to which TfD can offer a space for transformation of historically entrenched oppressive attitudes against women in Uganda's agricultural sector and; consider how the notions of power, cultural interaction and sustainability work together to shape TfD as a process of gender empowerment. The study is based on an on-going TfD project with farming communities in Rwenzori. The ongoing project aims to investigate the efficacy of TfD in empowering both men and women to work together in developing their fish farming enterprises.

1.0 Political, Social and Academic Contexts

Ugandan is mustering every effort to attain its vision 2040 of alleviating rural poverty and becoming a middle income economy. To achieve this, the country has over the years put in place policy guidelines to reduce socio-cultural injustices especially gender inequalities in the agricultural sector. For example, Uganda is signatory to the 1979 UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which provides that 'women, like men, have the right to freedom from violence and freedom of movement, equal rights in decision-making, equal rights to own property, freedom of thought and association, the right to work, rest and leisure' (cited in Mayoux & Reemer 2011). In addition, Uganda adopted and aligned its development policies to the Global Agenda 2030 Sustainable development goals which aim to address issues of gender equality ensuring that nobody is left behind (UNFPA United Nations Population Fund), 2017). For instance, Uganda's *National Development Plan II* (NDP II, 2015-2020) prioritizes the empowerment of women and gender equality as a means to inclusive growth and social development.

In spite of the above affirmative policy actions, statistics indicate that there is widespread marginalization of women in Uganda's agricultural sector (see for example, Alfred Lakwo, 2007; Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2012; The World Bank, 2014; UNFPA, 2017). Lakwo discovered that 'women produce 70% of the total agricultural output but ownership and control over land, their labour and above all the benefits thereof is minimal and that while 97% of women have access to land for farming, only 8% have leasehold' (Lakwo 2007: 14). The UNFPA brief on population matters in Uganda indicates that 'majority of women are engaged in agricultural production, yet only 27% of registered land is owned by women'(2017: 06). According to the World Bank, 'women comprise a significant share of the work force in agriculture but have unequal access to and control over productive resources, such as land, limiting their ability to move beyond subsistence agriculture.'(2014: 02). 41% of women endure domestic violence and their participation

in community and economic activities requires men's approval (Lakwo, 2007; Mayoux and Hartl, 2009).

Such gender injustices in power and resource allocation in Uganda's have implications for economic efficiency at all levels – household, value chain and national economy (see Mayoux & Reemer 2011; Mayoux & Hartl 2009). As a result, gender inequalities in Uganda's agricultural sector are a key constraint to economic growth and a main cause of poverty not only for women themselves, but also their families and communities. A combination of women's increased economic activity and increased decision-making in the household can lead to wider social empowerment and transformation of Ugandan agricultural communities. Recent experiments with gender action learning methodologies indicate that the positive effects on women's confidence and skills, their expanded knowledge and the formation of support networks through group activity and market access can lead to enhanced status for all women in a community (Mayoux & Hartl 2009: 10).

2.0 The Purpose of the Study

Against the above backdrop, this study sets out to explore through practice based research the significance of Theatre for Development (TfD) in fostering gender justice in agricultural enterprise development among the communities in the Rwenzori region, Western Uganda. Fostering gender justice refers to creating a world where women and men are able to realize their full potential as economic, social and political actors, free from all gender discrimination, for empowerment of themselves, their families, their communities and global humankind (Mayoux & Reemer 2011: 13). Gender justice in agricultural enterprises is concerned with uplifting the status of women so that they can have an equal stake with men in production decision making, value chain management, marketing and enjoyment of the benefits of agricultural production.

TfD is a post-colonial participatory development practice which has been adopted in the developing world, especially Africa to engage target communities in a transformative process of collective problem identification and analysis. 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). Conversely, Frances Harding, a scholar in African theatre at the London School of Oriental and African studies, defines Theatre for Development as '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' (Harding 1997: 38).

Theoretically grounded in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), TfD is a dialogue driven practice that adopts an endogenous or bottom-up approach as opposed to an exogenous or top-down approach to solving development problems (Chinyowa, 2009: 02; Epskamp, 1989: 11; Mangeni, 2007: 31). In short, TfD facilitates a process where the solutions to the problems that impede a community's progress emanate from the beneficiaries of development themselves.

In Africa and Uganda in particular, TfD developed as part of the wave of paradigm shift in development communication practice beginning with the 1970s. Over the past three decades, development stakeholders such as NGOs, and International Organizations (IOs) such as UNESCO, UNICEF have been advocating approaches to development that place people at the centre of the development process to decide which development is good for them, hence the advent of the term participatory development communication (Bessette 2004: 01, 08). The aims of communication in development shifted from the use of messages designed externally (top-down) to supporting people's participation in their development by enabling groups and communities to diagnose the problems they face, make well-informed decisions, mobilize for action, and assume responsibility for their own development (Bessette 1996: 14; Melkote & Steeves 2001; Srampickal 1994; Breitinger Eckhard 1994; Breitinger, Eckhard & Mbowa 1994).

The project at hand will make a critical examination of an on-going TfD project with fish farming communities in the Ruwenzori region, Western Uganda. Since 2016, we have been working with a team of other practitioners from Mountains of the Moon University (MMU) on a two years practice based research project. The project titled **Strengthening Business Practices of Small Scale Fish Farmers** aims to investigate the efficacy of TfD in empowering both men and women to work together in developing their fish farming enterprises. In our effort to mobilise and engage the farmers, we have developed a TfD model which brings together theatrical performance and Enabling Rural Innovation (ERI) techniques. Like TfD, ERI is a participatory learning approach which aims at placing farmers in the driving seat of working out what is good for their agro based enterprises. By making a fusion of theatre performance and ERI techniques, our TfD project focuses on gender empowerment, ensuring the participation of both men and women in participatory problem diagnosis, participatory market research, farmer participatory research, and participatory monitoring and evaluation.

As a scholar and practitioner of TfD in Uganda (Bamuturaki, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2018), we have over the last ten years been motivated by the fact that TfD is a process which can facilitate a dialogical process among the members of a participating community enabling the people, including the most marginalised, voice and agency to confront the problems which affect their progress as human beings. It suffices for us to highlight a few experiences.

In 2009, Keneth Bamuturaki was involved as a participant observer in a TfD process which focused on issues of disability in Uganda. The TfD workshop which took place in the Ruharo Mission Hospital in Western Uganda aimed at empowering communities on the problem of widespread exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstream socio-economic participation (see Bamuturaki 2017). The TfD workshop had been inspired by the feminisation of disability in Uganda, where people believe that producing a child with disability is a curse which comes to the family through a woman. The TfD workshop afforded the community an opportunity to dialogue on the problem of stigma and lack of effective care for persons with disabilities. The participatory and collective performance process was fundamentally transformative, enabling the women who are normally blamed for giving birth to disabled children space to voice out their grievances and be heard by the community. It also empowered the children who normally suffer from the stigma of being disabled by giving them a voice and agency about their needs. They were able to voice out their discontent on the denigrating language which was being used by the community in reference to persons with disability. In the post-performance discussion and analysis phase, a member of the community who happened to be a child with a disability voiced out her feelings and requested members of the community to stop using derogative words such as *ekimoga* which means helpless child in preference to *omulema*, which means a child with disability. She noted that the children with disability know that the word *ekimoga* which participants were consistently using means helpless child and it irritates them (Bamuturaki 2017 :12).

In 2015, as a doctoral student at the University of Exeter, Keneth Bamuturaki was involved as an observer and critic of practice in the Walukuba TfD project which focused on environment degradation concerns in Jinja Municipality, Eastern Uganda (see Bamuturaki 2016b; Bamuturaki 2016a). In this project I observed that TfD afforded the participating community a democratic participatory research process in which they could collectively analyse the issues underpinning their lives and choose the most pressing ones, a process called prioritisation. W noted that a well-structured TfD 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.

The proposed study postulates that our engagement with fish farmers using a participatory TfD process can produce fruits of empowerment resulting from collective action and dialogue. The main goal of this study is to examine the efficacy of TfD in fostering collective dialogue and action on issues relating to gender justice in rural agricultural enterprises in Uganda. Specifically, the study aims to: 1. examine the significance of TfD in facilitating a participatory research process of collective problem identification, prioritisation and analysis; 2. analyse the extent to which TfD can

offer a space for transformation of historically entrenched oppressive attitudes against women in Uganda's agricultural sector and; 3. to consider how the notions of power, cultural interaction and sustainability work together to shape TfD as a process of gender empowerment.

3.0 Methodology

This project is a qualitative study which will employ a Practice as Research (PaR) design. Writing about the nature of PaR, Sally Mackey notes that 'Practice as Research insists that practice is the core method of engaging with one's research hunches or questions: it would not be possible to engage in the research unless you undertake practice (Mackey, 2016: 480). Adopting a (PaR) design, the methodology of this project is embedded in the on-going practical TfD project with fish farmers in the Rwenzori region, Western Uganda.

At the time of writing this project statement, a considerable amount of work has already been done and a number of methodological procedures will have been implemented by the end of our intervention with fish farmers. Thus, we will explicate the methodology of the project in terms of the methodological processes already undertaken and the methodology which will be employed at the end of the project with fish farmers. The methodologies so far implemented can be deciphered from the steps taken to execute the TfD project in Western Uganda.

3.1 Processes undertaken to execute the TfD project in Western Uganda

The starting point of our engagement with the fish farmers in the Rwenzori region was a community mobilisation process in which we mobilised groups of sixty farmers in six different districts in the Rwenzori region. We were keen to mobilise an equal number of men and women into the groups. In total, we are currently working with 360 farmers, of whom 160 are women. Since TfD builds on the principles of participatory democracy, we have facilitated the groups to elect their own leaders to ensure ownership of the project, its implementation and sustainability of its outcomes. As part of the community mobilisation process, we conducted a baseline survey focusing on the nature of working relationship which exits between Ruwenzori men and women as they develop their fish farming enterprises. We aimed to ascertain whether men and women jointly make farm decisions, jointly access and manage credit facilities, make joint market research and whether they enjoy the benefits of their fish farming together in their families. With the help of a team of research assistants, we administered 50 questionnaires for a pilot study and finally expanded the survey to include the rest of our project participants. The baseline survey data is being analysed as the practical project workshops continue.

The purpose of the survey was to integrate research with development practice, a process technically described as 'Research and Development (R&D)' (Thornton, 2009). We aimed to ascertain the development needs of the people in the groups so that we may professionally approach our development intervention. The baseline survey will be significant in informing our post project impact assessment which also will thereafter shape the work. For my research, we will use the baseline survey data to compare the understanding of the fish farmers, their attitudes and beliefs pertaining gender justice before and after their participation in the TfD project.

In order to constitute a sustainable TfD project, we embarked on a process of group building and fostering ownership. As Clifford and Hermann have advised, 'for the identity of the group to be one of power, the group needs to have control over the decision making process and experience the responsibility which exists with this role' (1999: 39). Consequently, our process of group building involves engaging the participants in activities that would help them to begin to learn to work together with the goal of achieving something together. It involves fostering a sense of a group where social barriers can be broken bringing about a situation where participants can have shared ideas, concerns and goals. We have been aiming at creating an 'emotionally safe space' (Prendergast & Saxton, 2013: 33) so that the participants can become more prepared to express their opinions and feelings. An emotionally safe space in practice involves having an environment devoid of fear to express oneself.

The key activities we have been deploying in the course of building the group and fostering ownership include engaging the participants in a collective activity of making ground rules, games and exercises, and other elements of participatory research. Making ground rules was done at the onset of the project and served two purposes, namely; creating a sense of unity of purpose and 'handing over power and the responsibility of the decision making process to the group' (Clifford & Hermann, 1999: 62). The ground rules were proposed and endorsed by the participants and they included "being serious and committed to the process, avoiding shyness, being active, speaking loudly, respecting the opinions of others and observing a good level of discipline and punctuality."

In setting up our project we have been keen to adhere to the ethics of effective TfD practice. For instance, we have eschewed the notion of 'participation as a *means*, where participation is used to 'accomplish the aims of a donor's project more efficiently, effectively or cheaply and instead adopted participation as an *end*, where participation entails that the community or group sets up a process to control its own development' (Nici & Susan, 1995: 1). We have set up an engagement space where participation is 'a spontaneous process emerging out of the organic impulses of the participants, distinct from a process that emerges as a result of a discreet act of intervention by the project team' (Rahman 1993: 152). We have made effort to constitute an empowerment participation process, ensuring that 'the members of the target community are viewed as capable of initiating the process and taking part in analysis of development goals which leads to joint decision-making.' (Tufte, & Mefalopulos 2009): 07).

Adopting the Freirian problem posing approach, our practice adopts an action research paradigm or what Ledwith (2005) calls 'emancipatory research.' This approach is deeply rooted in Freirian pedagogy and as Ledwith puts it 'adopts a methodology and methods that are collaborative, and in doing so commits to identifying and challenging unequal power relations within its process.' (Ledwith 2005: 73)**.**

As part of the methodological processes already undertaken, participants as well as the facilitating team have been provided with resources such as cameras, books, pens markers and manila papers and advised to keep regular journal of their experiences with the project in form of diaries, videography, photography, drawings and testimonies. These experiences are as part of the process of the TfD workshops used as material for collective community analysis, theatre making and performance. By the time our work with the farmers end, we will have gathered sufficient experiences from the project which we will use as data to critically analyse the efficacy of participation in TfD in empowering men and women to collectively shape their own agenda for viable aquaculture business. Towards the end of the fish farmers project, we plan to conduct an impact assessment of our practice through focused group discussions and personal interviews to determine the changes in attitudes and understanding of gender issues resulting from participation in the project. The change will be analysed in light of the baseline survey which was conducted at the beginning of the TfD project.

4.0 Potential Impact of the Research Project

In Uganda, the field of TfD has over the years has been largely applied in areas of social mobilisation and education such as HIV education, environmental education and sanitation and hygiene. This study will demonstrate the significance of TfD in fostering human empowerment in the realms of politics and economics. The government of Uganda has in the recent past initiated programmes such as National Advisory Agricultural Services (NAADS) and Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) with an aim of bolstering agricultural livelihoods. These programmes, however, did not produce the desired effect because they lacked an efficient community based model. This study is expected to showcase TfD as a bottom up model of engaging agrarian communities in highlighting issues which affect their lives and provide remedies. In a country where much of the gender focused community based efforts are message oriented and top-down, the study is expected to underscore the significance of TfD in fostering collective participation and dialogue with the view of transforming the historical oppressions women suffer in the Ugandan/African communities.

5.0 Evaluation and Dissemination

Upon completing the research project, we plan to organise a dissemination workshop hosted at Kyambogo University. The workshop will engage professionals at gender based organisations and institutions such as Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE, Uganda), Action Aid international and participants from the Women and Gender Studies Department of Makerere University. In the course of our research, we will submit abstracts about our research seeking opportunities to present academic papers at applied arts and gender focused symposia and/or conferences. Presenting our research at academic conferences will not only help me in disseminating our findings but also open up prospects for us to initiate useful professional contacts and consequently lasting knowledge exchange opportunities with our academic peers. Moreover, discussing our work at academic conferences and workshops will ensure its critical appraisal and appreciation by the academic and professional community and deepen dialogue in the field of TfD and gender empowerment. In order to have our work reach a larger audience, we plan to publish it as a book and to publish one academic article in the International Journal of Communication, a refereed journal.

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