

# Chapter Eight



## SOCIAL JUSTICE, CAPACITY BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: *EXCERPTS FROM SELECTED ARTICLES OF TOR IORAPUU*

**Bem Alfred ABUGH**

Department of Theatre and Film Arts,

University of Jos, Nigeria

0806208662

Email: [abughalfred@gmail.com](mailto:abughalfred@gmail.com)/[abughb@unijos.edu.ng](mailto:abughb@unijos.edu.ng)

### **Introduction**

Every academic research is built on the premise of solving a nagging problem. And this is why every researcher tries to identify a problem(s) within the society and at the same time, proffer solutions to such problems so as to improve the society. No research is conducted in a vacuum because, researches are meant to discuss very vital issues in the society. It must have been on this note that Achebe, one of Nigeria's great writers and researchers, reminds us that:

It is clear that African creative writers who try to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flame (78).

The reality that Achebe puts forth propels me to mention that Tor lorapuu is one fine writer/researcher who has not just taken upon himself to write about political and of course, social issues in the society,

but has actively engaged with several communities across the country by ensuring that the society is salvaged through his creativity and research. Gbilekaa also holds that:

....Therefore a socially conscious and realistic writer cannot simply dabble into the philosophy of abstract humanism. He must be alive to the realities and forces operating in his society. In Africa, there has been a symbiotic relationship between writers and politics. This is not simply because African writer incorporate political themes in their creative works but mainly that the writer and the politician are all rolled up into one (2).

Through Tor lorappu's articles and even his creative works, we can find out that Tor lorapuu's commitment to projecting issues of social justice, capacity building and human development in Nigeria remains a strong passion that can never be relegated to the background. His concern as a writer and researcher is to ensure that citizens are given the right orientation that can liberate them from the forces that make them oppressed members of the society.

lorapuu's commitment in building citizens was a motivating factor that led to his involvement in social activism as a social actor. This passion also led to his establishment of a non-governmental organization called Youth, Adolescent, Reflection and Action Centre (YARAC) based in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The mandate of the organization since its establishment some two and half decades ago, in the area of capacity building in communities across in the country has remained a great sacrifice for human development. YARAC has made significant progress because the chief executive/founder himself, is a Theatre scholar and a thorough bred at that, with vast knowledge in the areas of Applied Theatre, Theatre for Development, Theatre and Community Organizing, Transformative Theatre, among others. Tor has been able to use this residual knowledge to the service of YARAC and this has in no small measure, helped YARAC, hence, the utilization of the instrumentalities of Theatre for Development (TfD), Theatre and Community Organizing, Transformative Theatre and Soccer and many other platforms to provide enlightenment opportunities to the citizens all over Nigeria.

## Excerpts from Tor Iorapuu's Articles on Social Justice, Capacity Building and Human Development in Nigeria

In an article titled "From Ignorance to Celebration: participatory Theatre as Development Communication Paradigm for Rural Development in Nigeria", published as far back as 1994, close to three decades ago, Tor projected participatory Theatre as a means of communicating and empowering the rural people in the expressions which the people understand better. He makes it clear that the people are better informed about the social happenings around them, if the happenings are expressed using their idioms, dance, music and other cultural artifacts that are part of the people's life and living. His argument in this article is that the rural people can only be sensitized if they actively made to participate in whatever theatre that is geared towards empowerment of humanity. He goes further to say that participatory which is well known in Nigeria as "Community Theatre for Integrated Rural Development" (Tor, 129) has the capacity to bring the needed awareness to the people. He concludes the article by noting that Participatory Theatre as a medium of communication and a development apparatus; has the capacity to ensuring that rural people are well informed about the democratic happenings around them and making them adequately ready for future occurrences.

Tor in his article "Dance Education and Human Development" tries to dislocate the misconception that is often held by many scholars and ordinary people about what dance represents and of course, what education is presumed to be. In this thought-provoking discourse, the author makes it clear that the two concepts under review, though are dissimilar from each other, they have a common ground which to him can help human development and at the same time provide humanity with the requisite knowledge. He makes it clear in the article that "dance was a very serious activity of the primitive man because of the values it attained" (145). The point that Tor established in this article is the fact that primitive dances serve educational values that are instructive to humanity and at the same time, empowers mankind. He concludes the paper by stating that dance and education have common aims of developing the personality of the individual, irrespective of their other divergent roles. This is to say that through dance and education, as two

striking concepts in the article, the individual's emotional, psychological, physical, intellectual and spiritual development occurs through conscious experiences that can help transform the citizens.

His article titled "Democratising Playwriting in Contemporary Nigeria," presents a situation where playwriting as a means of communication can be a dialectical activity that is "interactive, pragmatic, functional and residual" (202). To Tor, the argument in this article is the fact that playwriting as a social activity serves as a tool through which the consciousness of the citizens is re-awakened, and they become aware of the social realities that befall society. He established the fact that contemporary playwriting dates back to the 1950s. In this article, Tor makes bold to say that Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and Ene Henshaw were the pioneers of playwriting in Nigeria and their themes were woven around social realities in the country either on culture, religion, politics and so on. Given that playwriting is an interactive, pragmatic, functional and residual activity, it provides the needed intellectual emancipation to citizens in the areas of voter education, civic education, knowledge on religion and many other facets of life. Tor concludes the article by stating that playwriting in contemporary Nigeria should begin to radically deploy the dialectical approach that is participatory in nature. This can help build in the masses a sense of belonging and at the same time emancipate them from many daunting realities that stand against peace and progress of democratic practices in Nigeria.

In the article titled "Community Participation and Civil Society in Nigeria: Matching Theory with Practice", Tor emphasises community participation by stating that it is only when community members are fully integrated into a course that development can be said to have been attained. To Tor, development will remain a mirage if community members are left out of discourses that are geared towards the liberation of the masses. He advances the argument that for development to occur or for members of the society to be fully integrated into developmental strides, civil society actors have a fundamental role to play. He established further in theory; there is the paradigm of 'things' and the paradigm of 'people' which entails very essentially that engagement in the community is all-encompassing. He

makes the dichotomy known that in practice, there is actually a missing link between the people and the powers that be, and the need to fix this lacuna that has over the years served as a cog in the wheel of progress amongst communities. Thus, his approach to civil society actors as key players that can interface with both the powers that be and community members to ensure that sanity remains in the society.

The article makes it very clear that different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have continued to midwife the course of community participation and development. The article also mentions that the activities of these non-governmental actors have greatly influenced the state of things within the praxis of community participation and development. The article highlights the benefits of civil society groups by noting that they have greatly served as intermediaries in many instances and their role has yielded positive results in same instances. Tor concludes the article by saying that in as much as these civil society groups have done tremendously well in the area of enhancing community participation in issues that bothers on development, civil societies on their part need to be more organized so as to continue to deliver on the mandate they are saddled with.

In his article titled "Identifying, Building and Connecting our Diversity in Managing Conflict and Peace-building" Tor, makes a case for the society in this challenging piece. To him, the society must be aware of the fact that the wellness of the society is not dependent on a journalist, doctors or any politician in leadership position. He is of the view in his presentation that every member of society is part and parcel of the society and as such, should be intune with the social realities that befall the society in order to find workable solutions that can help build a peaceful nation.

Tor goes on to question the nature and character of journalism in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to democracy and diversity. He asks some fundamental questions that bother on reportage; he inquires to know if our journalists are really reporting issues with fairness and equality without partiality, so as to foster peaceful coexistence. He makes it clear in the article that we can only have a peaceful society if we have the ability as a people to manage our diversities about cultural differences, religious differences and economic diversities. The article

concludes that the more likely we are able to identify and come to terms with the fact that differences exist at individual level, at team level, at community level and even state/national levels, then we can consolidate by connecting our diversities and building peaceful coexistence in our society and the world at large.

Tor again discusses issues of transformation and development in yet another engaging article titled "Expanding the Pedagogy of Theatre for Development in Nigeria: Lessons from Transformative Theatre Experience". In this article, Tor advances the argument that within the last three decades or so, Theatre for Development (TfD) has remained one instrument that its practitioners have adopted as pedagogy for interacting with the people on different issues that bother on their wellbeing. For Tor, many scholars of TfD describe it as a praxis that is "still crystallizing". He makes bold to say in this article that "not in all cases have the audience explored the inner dynamics of TfD to initiate sustainable action". Thus, Tor's option for "Transformative Theatre", he presents substantial evidence in this article that over the years, and taken from the experiences gathered in different communities across the country, Transformative Theatre as a branch of learning which is taken from Jack Mezirow's theory of "Transformative Learning".

To Tor, just like transformative learning emphasis individuals' critical reflections upon their environment, transformative Theatre consolidates on this; it allows the masses the room to critically reflect on their dilemmas. Tor reveals further that the experiences at Panyam and Rice Mill Settlements, Doma Road Lafia, transformative theatre provided the appropriate space for digesting and constructing ideas about building a sustainable society. Tor concludes the article by noting that the citizens in these communities were given the right platform to reflect on issues that affect them as a people, the issues were not limited to insecurity, leadership failure, political manipulations, cultural barriers, land disputes and so on. Transformative Theatre approach is a powerful medium where every participant is an active member of the communication process that is geared towards providing the people with various answers to nagging issues even though it is only but a means and not an end.

In an article titled "Femi Osofisan, Youth and Performance in



Nigeria's Democracy: The Transformative Theatre Paradigm", Tor opens the discourse on democratic practice in Nigeria; to him, the history of democratic practice in Nigeria can never be told or written without the mention of the active roles that the youth have played and continue to play. To him, even in the most severe times of military regimes, the youths were never deterred, they actively participated. Tor makes it known in the paper that Osofisan's imperativeness of Theatre as a means for social justice in Nigeria and beyond is the propelling force for this paper. The paper holds that the persistent issues of social inequality, deprivation, unemployment, corruption, leadership failure and many others stand against the progress of the youth and have become a cog in the wheel of democratic practice and progress in Nigeria.

He opens the conversation with the propelling question that seeks to find out if Transformative Theatre has actually helped in the area of social justice, social change and social transformation. In this regards, he acknowledged many scholars and their views with respect to the themes that are projected in the works of African writers and how these themes should be tilted towards the transformation of their respective societies, Nigeria inclusive. Tor presents Femi Osofisan as a leading voice who wants social justice for all in Nigeria and beyond. He makes it clear that since Nigeria's independence, writers like Osofisan have continued to create enduring works that question negative democratic practice in Nigeria and at the same time, demanding for social justice. He sees the plays of Osofisan and their various engaging themes as signposts for community organizing, democratic projection and transformative change in Nigeria.

In the same article, Tor sees Theatre for transformative change as a great and viable medium that if properly utilized, can help in building capacities in the masses by propelling them into action. He sums it up by bringing to the fore that youth and democracy in Nigeria are propelled by the application of reflection of the engaging dramaturgy of Osofisan as response to changing the narratives. Through these various plays that question the way and manner politics is practiced in Nigeria, the youth are gradually aware of the issues and at the same time, their attitude is transformed for the better. Tor concludes the article by stating that Theatre for Transformative Change is a powerful medium with nexus

between drama and democracy where participants can actively engage with the issues and at the same time arrive at the way forward.

In a paper titled "MDGs Without People's Voice in Nigeria: Ensuring Community Involvement Through Participatory Theatre", Tor Iorapuu brings to the fore that within the last one and half decade, Nigeria and its leadership saw the need to improve on the wellbeing of the citizens and as such the presidency created an office headed by the senior special assistance to the president on MDGs projects. The rationale of this creation as presented in this article is to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) implementation in the country is closely monitored, to ensure equity and fairness in the area of government's interventions in various communities across the country. Of course, the article states that one of the critical mandates of MDGs is to ensure that projects are situated in different locations across the country to ensure democratic dividends for citizens and at the same time, to reduce the level of extreme poverty, hunger, poor health care system, amongst others.

In problematizing the issue in contention, Tor makes it clear that Nigeria as a country lacks proper monitoring and evaluation of her projects and this has remained a huge challenge to the developmental strides of the country. It is established that lack of democratic involvement of the citizens on the choice of projects to be situated in their region(s), left alone their implementations has been a huge mirage over the years, across the country. The article also made known that MDGs is a rescue initiative meant to improve the high rate of underdevelopment in the country and as such, the government on her part has invested a lot of money in this regards but the dividends is not being felt in many parts of the country because of the way and manner the project is handled and of course, lack of involvement of the citizens.

Tor also presents facts from a survey conducted of some of the MDGs intervention projects in North Central Nigeria and concludes through the findings that the people are often time not even aware of the nature of projects to be situated in their region(s) not to talk of the usage of such projects. The article makes it clear that in many parts, these laudable MDGs projects are dying off in bushes without being put to use because of the alienated nature of the government machinery to



the host communities. Tor in the article concludes that Participatory Theatre and other key actors in the arts industry should ensure that there is democratic participation in every activity that involves the rural people. The people must be given a voice in whatever project that the government, through the MDGs agenda, wants to carryout. By so doing, there will be equity and fairness in the entire process.

In an article titled "Men Don't Have Aids: Gender Issues in HIV/AIDS Education in Nigeria: Lessons from TfD Experiences", Tor presented very troubling issues of HIV/AIDS stating that at a period in the history of Nigeria, and by extension the world, specifically in the '80s, the issue of HIV/AIDS was ravaging and killing millions of people. In the article, Tor made known the fact that HIV/AIDS emerged as a pandemic and its effect was grave because it was sweeping people away both the young, the old and even infants. In this article, he lays bare the realities that surrounded the pandemic, he presents the fact that in many parts of the country, the men felt that HIV/AIDS was an exclusive kind of pandemic for the women, hence, every single intervention activity in the country was targeted towards educating the women. The author reveals further that stereotyping of women was the order of the day; according to the article, women were blamed for being responsible for the spread of the disease HIV/AIDS.

Tor goes further to establish the fact that this particular pandemic had a devastating effect on the sub-Saharan Africa. To him, the reality of this disease is "Epic Disaster" and that explains why researchers like himself are were poised to communicate the realities around this disease and of course, ensure that the misconceptions around the disease are deconstructed and appropriate education made available for the people. He also touched on serious issues of health, culture and gender interpretations where he amply discussed health implications of HIV/AIDS on the people by providing evidence from what "World Health organization" (WHO) and other experts in the area of health had given about the pandemic. He also gives an elaborate perspective about cultural issues and clearing the air by removing the bottle necks that see culture as panacea to the infection of the pandemic HIV/AIDS. On the issue of gender, Tor also deconstructs the fact that both masculine and feminine are liable to contracting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Given the above views, Tor makes it clear that Theatre for Development (TfD) experiences as an approach can help towards the education of the people, through which the people are provided with the adequate knowledge on the ways of contracting the disease, how to prevent contraction and how to manage the disease if contracted. He presents the Sara, the Zaria, the Benue Health Fund and Birnin Kudu experiences respectively, making bare that the people in these communities where part of theatre projects and they were actually the ones that communicated their problems and fears with regards to HIV/AIDS pandemic. Tor submits that men too, do have HIV/AIDS because they also engage in all forms of sexual activities, be it homosexuality, heterosexuality or otherwise. He also says in the conclusion, that cultural misconceptions should be broken and the reality of the pandemic should be the concern of every individual, particularly, Theatre practitioners in the field of TfD.

Tor in article titled "Women's Voice, a Democratic Imperative in Nigeria's Polity: Negotiating Space through Transformative Theatre and Voter Education", makes a case for the female gender. He reveals the fact that women as a people are part of the social structure and as such, are supposed to be part of the political structures in the country. He also lays bare in the article that women's agitation dates as far back as 1920s when the Southern women protested and demanded equality in the Nigerian political sphere. Tor mentions further that apart from the "Aba women's riot", other great women like Queen Amina of Zauzau, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Emotan and many others fought tirelessly for the emancipation of women in Nigeria.

Tor goes on to state in the article that women's orientation gave rise to so many groups such as Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS) whose mandates was to demand social justice for women in all areas of engagements including politics. Even at this, the article states that the marginalization of women in democratic practice remains troubling and it calls for possible ways of mitigating the barriers. The paper also makes it clear that the role of women in the developmental processes of any nation on earth is sacrosanct and that of Nigeria in particular, wants to make tangible progress, she must give women equal opportunities for them to thrive and excel even in politics. The article

discusses very passionately the labeling of women as weaker sex in the political space and of course, the indigenization of every political region of the country has grossly affected effectiveness of democratic participation of women. Hence, the clarion calls by Tor in this article to ensure that women are given the voice and made visible in politics. Tor's position is that when women are empowered, they will begin to have control over their lives and this will have multiple effects on the democratic process.

He established in the article that transformative theatre has the capacity to make both male and female realize the need to provide opportunities for one another democratically, in order to have a workable democratic practice that can be all encompassing. In justifying how imperative transformative theatre could be, Tor provides evidence from the Panyam experiences where transformative theatre encounters were deployed as a means of providing the right voter education, democratic orientation and the likes. He goes further to show pictorial images of some of the dramatic scenes that were enacted in Panyam community and the possible dialogues that ensue thereafter. Tor concludes the article by stating that through the transformative theatre engagements with Panyam community, the women got the opportunity to learn about democratic practice and at the same time, were given a voice.

In a chapter titled "Citizenship Engagement and Election in Nigeria: Learning Democracy through Transformative Theatre and Soccer", Tor exposes the fact that contemporary democratic transition in Nigeria after several years of military dictatorship began in 1999. Tor brings to the fore the narratives that characterized the year 2003 general elections in Nigeria, which incidentally was the first election to mark a transition from one civilian government to another. Tor articulates in the chapter that the reports from both local and international election observers showed that the election was characterized by several irregularities ranging from election rigging, vote buying, political thuggery, unavailability of election materials, leadership failure and prebendal politics as challenges of Nigeria's democratic practice.

Tor goes on to articulate in the chapter that following the reports and of course, the need to strengthen democratic practice in Nigeria,

civil society activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups and many other international agencies have continued to engage the citizens through civic education, so as to promote better democratic practice in Nigeria. Tor makes it clear that this level of education will help build the trust about the lopsided nature of democratic practice in Nigeria because most women groups in Nigeria would argue that democracy in Nigeria is not for every citizen since they are not given the rights to political participation.

According to Tor, he is projecting Transformative Theatre as an optimal tool towards the discourses around political education and civic literacy. He makes it clear that transformative Theatre has the capacity to provide the right knowledge and awareness about political happenings in Nigeria. For Tor, through the engagement with the people across communities in Nigeria via the transformative theatre medium, the people will begin to develop the right orientation that is needed for functional and all-inclusive political participation in Nigeria. He goes on to say that many civil society initiatives like Youth, Adolescent, Reflection and Action Centre (YARAC) and other theatre groups have done a great work by deploying the transformative theatre approach to educating the people on voter education, political apathy and political violence in Nigeria.

Tor also makes a case for the use of soccer as a medium for discussing transformative democracy or better still, political education. He makes known that the concept of 'Soccer for Democracy' began about two decades ago and it has remained functional in political education. He reveals that, researchers discovered that a preponderance of young people are soccer lovers and as such, practitioners in the field of Theatre and of course, civil society activists have taken the opportunity to engage with these young population right on the pitch of play. He makes it clear that soccer, just like politics, is a game of numbers and as such, the citizens get to learn that they have to be well-organized like a football team to be able to score a point in politics. Tor also brought to the consciousness of the people through this paper that just like the harsh environment that football is played, it is the same with democratic practice and by this, citizens need to have a good knowledge of political practice and how to resolve the issues.

Tor concludes by stating the fact that the problems of democratic practice in Nigeria are many and daunting with both local and global dynamics. But in this chapter, Tor projects transformative Theatre and soccer as mediums of improving political participation. For Tor, this medium if amply utilized, will provide citizens with requisite education and the way forward.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, we have been able to carry out an extensive review of some selected articles of Professor Tor lorappu, particularly those that deal with social justice, capacity building and human development in Nigeria. It is clearly established that Professor Tor lorapuu is indeed a renowned researcher whose concern is to advance the cause of social justice, social transformation, capacity building and human development. It is imperative to note that Tor has handled various thematic concerns that bother on social happenings within the society very lucidly. Each of the articles is built on the premise of ensuring that the citizens are well-informed or better still, given a sense of belonging in the society. To Tor, it is well established that when people are well informed about the happenings around them, they are better positioned to develop and of course, be transformed.

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