



## Theatre for Development as Panacea for Gender Inequality and Sustainable National Development: A Case Study of Mrs. Kuti by Yinka Kareem

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses the issue of national development in relation to gender equality which has hitherto being the bane of Nigerian society in order to have a sustainable national development. The society should ensure more access to education of the girl-child and women which remains the key to women's full participation in various fields of national development and not only that make a woman the leader of a place, you will be producing a nation as the woman preserves a nation. The play Mrs. Kuti considered in this paper x-ray, so many reasons why women should be given equal right in the society because it sees women as image created by God not to be trampled upon or put aside but to be allowed to play her part in the area of development.*

### **Introduction**

In a typical African environment Nigeria inclusive, females are seriously underrated. In the case of Nigeria, females are lowly rated in the community as they are often relegated to the ridiculous level of servitude who are not better than slaves. This has led to retrogression and undermining their chances of benefitting from educational opportunities provided for their male counterparts. They are often treated as people kept in the cooler who are not to be heard in the house. In the northern part of Nigeria females are given out to men as wives as early as when they are eight or ten years of age. The act does not consider physiological and psychological maturity needed before engaging in marital activities.



In the past and in fact in the Yoruba traditional belief, the best role of a woman ends up in the kitchen, for their erroneous reason, they are either not sent to school or not given the best education unlike their male counterparts. Even in the matrimonial homes women are seriously subjected to various inhuman treatments like reckless beating in lovely sexual harassment.

According to Carmely 1989:46, women were created out of man as part of man and so they are inferior to man. We have the record of women prejudices in the Greek world, India, America and the entire Muslim society. It is a universal phenomenon that women are marginalized in the scheme of things and the marginalization and discrimination had led to a colossal waste of brains that could have been of great value to the society.

National development cannot be guaranteed in any social environment where people are not given equal opportunities. The wrong and unchallenged perception and assumption about male domination in all theories of human history that regards femaleness as a subset to maleness is a social malady and a hindrance to national development. It is also a strategy that under develop its human resources.

**Then what is gender equity?** It is the realization of the parity between the female and male members of the society as far as social roles are concerned. This issue is what the chosen play text for the paper tries to address through the theatre.

### **Conceptual Framework on Feminism Ideology**

The origin of feminism comes from the struggle for woman's right. This has taken the shape of revolt against the standing rule of man to be the one ruling and controlling the affairs in all sectors of human endeavour. This idea has made many writers in the theatre like Stella Oyedepo, Bode Osanyin, Tess Onwueme and others to provide ideological dramas which could be regarded as having the idea of revolt undermining mind. The feminist pre-occupation in drama brings to the forefront, heroic female characters and the eulogization of feminine exploits, either



by the women themselves or by the men. Their ideologies are the types that preach change. According to Calbral (1965) cited in Tobrise (1993:105) ideology is

*...a system of idea concerned realities, of rationalizing action, of directing economic and political struggle, of grinding the destiny of a people.*

Feminism as an ideology therefore, embodies some codes, structures which direct feminist in their struggle for authority. Judith Bardwick (1980) cited in Tobrise (1993:105) regards feminism as an *'ideology as well as a psychological revolution by women, in their struggle to define themselves as individuals*. Hooks (p.105) regards the concept as one which should be defined *'as a movement to end sex oppression'*. Feminist writers view feminism as advocating the freedom of women from all forms of oppression. Works of feminists such as Yinka Kareem's Mrs. Kutí, Mishelle Barrett's Women's Oppression Today, Rosalind Coward's Women's Sexuality Today, Stephen Heath's The Sexual Fix, Literary Women by Ellen Moers, Stella Oyedepo's The Wives Revolt and Thinking about Women by Mary Ellman. All these are writers that have been advocating for women's liberation through drama. They are of the ideological stance that the Class ratio should be eradicated Simonede Beauvoir define feminist to be:

*Women or even men too who are fighting to change women condition, in association with the class struggle but independently of it as well without making the changes they strive for totally dependent on changing society as a whole. P.105*

Women are regarded as victims of men's oppression and to gain emancipation, Paul Freire contends that an "Oppressed people in order to become free also needs a theory of action". P.108. this is epitomized in the character of Corper Ngozi in Mrs. Kutí, because the feminist theatre is a form of persuasive communication and the message which emerge from the drama are directly linked to the radical ideology of the women's movement. It is an ideological theory that fights and rebel against ills the people want eradicated from the society.

### **Theatre for sustainable development**



Theatre has the potential of enhancing national development because it is an expression of a particular community interests. Community theatre as a form of theatre for conscientization is held accountable to the ideal theatre as an art form and not just a form of recreation and social intercourse but that it seemingly reveals theatre as a diversion from social gathering place to a more known independent outfit yearning for the emancipation of the populace from marginalization.

The aim of theatre for development according to Willer and Feiner (2001:25) is to increase opportunities for marginalized and oppressed group to represent themselves and the world around them as a means of asserting their own identity and achieving cultural, social, economic and political equity. Theatre for development integrates people at the grass root to do it themselves by involving them in the drama. Since theatre for development is the practice by which theatre is put at the service of the disadvantaged rural and urban poor, community theatre is now used to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor for the purpose of discussing and working out strategies for dealing with their social, economic and political problems. This theatre speaks to the people in their own language and idioms. It is the practice which builds the people artistic mode of expression, the people are allowed to control the dramaturgical process and provide material for the drama. Theatre for development functions as a medium of articulating problems of the poor by the poor and for the poor.

Theatre is the best medium of preaching development to human and its environment. Theatre for development gives insight into the human mind so that in looking at men the gaze becomes an x-ray that penetrates behind the mesh and layers of actor skin to see the naked man and humanity in him.

Hundreds, if not thousands of organizations and initiatives have used theatre as a development tool, for education or propaganda as therapy, as a participatory tool or as an exploratory tool in development and since sustainable development is a source that aims to meet the survival of a community on a continuous basis, there is the need to bring women into so many aspect of social



change in the nation. Adeniran said that *development itself involves bringing about meaningful transformation in the lives of people in such a way that there is no wide gap between one section of the society and another.*

According to Thomas (2000) cited in Familugba (2009:19), development “is an all encompassing change and not just an improvement in one aspect: a process where change and improvement is continuous”. However, sustainable development suggest an enduring remarkable, non-terminal improvement in the quality of life, standard of living and life chances of the people. Such development must be capable of surviving generation of a long period of time. Sustainable development is supposed to be all embracing as there are other non-economic variables involved in the issue of sustainable development which cannot be wished away without dire consequences. Awoyemi (2011) said development is a process involving a departure from the past to the new situation which is reflected in the human, economic, social, educational and political aspect of a nation. This suggest that for a nation to move forward they have to come out of their old prejudice of mans dominance on woman and see the women as beings created by God to play their part in this generation in which they are created. This has been the reason why the playwright of Mrs. Kutu Yinka Kareem adopted and adapted the life styles and struggles of Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti into a play for women emancipation.

### **Brief history of Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti**

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was born on 25<sup>th</sup> October in 1900 in Abeokuta. She attended the Abeokuta Grammar School for Secondary education and later went to England for further studies. She returned to Nigeria and became a teacher on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1925. She married the Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti. She received the national honor of Membership of the order of Nigeria (MON) in 1965. The University of Ibadan bestowed upon her the honorary doctorate of Laws in 1968. She also held a seat in the Western House of Chiefs of Nigeria as an Oloye of the Yoruba people throughout her career. She and Elizabeth Adekogbe provided



dynamic leadership for women's right in the 50's, she founded an organization for women in Abeokuta with a membership of 20,000 individuals including both literate and illiterate women. Ransome Kuti launched the organization into public consciousness when she rallied women against price controls which were hurting the female merchants at the Abeokuta market. She led a protest against native authorities especially against the Alake of Egbaland. She presented documents alleging abuse of authority by the Alake who had been granted the right to collect taxes by his colonial suzerain government of the United Kingdom. She also oversaw the successful overhaul of separate tax rates for women in 1953. She founded the Federation of Nigeria Women Societies which subsequently formed an alliance with The Women International Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti campaigned for women's votes, she was for many years a member of the ruling national council of Nigeria. She founded the Commoner People Party in an attempt to challenge the ruling NCNC ultimately denying them victory in her area. She was one of the delegates that negotiated Nigeria's independence with the British government. She died on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1978.

**Synopsis of the Play: Mrs. Kuti**

The play started with some female secondary school students protesting against the government carrying placards with the inscription '*No to gender inequality*', they said, no to female marginalization and enough of placing women at the back in the helm of affairs. The second movement reveals an NYSC director talking to Corper Ngozi who was alleged of leading the protest, her service year was extended and she was transferred to a remote village called Ijakadi. In Ijakadi village, Corper Ngozi and principal were discussing and met some boys discussing on the issue of disabled people that, is it Jehovah that created them or Obatala? And they called on Omowon a boy with both male and female genital to ask him if he was created by Jehovah or Obatala, the boy was embarrassed and started crying. Bolanle quarreled with the king of boys for asking such question from Omowon, they fought and Bolanle beat the hell out of the king of boys and his friends mocked him that a girl could beat someone like him without stress.



The case was reported to the Ogboni Chamber, she was asked to go and make an appeasement to the ancestor because it is forbidden to beat the king of boys. Iyalode advised the market women to enroll their female children and themselves for extra mural class with Corper Ngozi and that Corper Ngozi also wish to organize Community Theatre for both boys and girls. In the course of the extra moral class, they do rehearsal for the play which Mrs. Kuti planned to stage in the school hall and Mrs. Kuti made an arrangement on how Omowon would be operated upon, the operation was successfully done. She taught the women the three slogans of kanbabism or literary for women. She told them that women has the right to key positions in the community. She therefore encouraged the women to mobilize their men to change their attitude towards women.

A performance is to come up and the principal of Ijakadi Community High school is asked to come and watch it because he is their patron but mid way he stopped the rehearsal, he asked the students to go and face their studies rather than to take part in a lawless play which is inimical to the wellbeing of the students and he said they should not use the school hall any longer for the performance. The female artistes with Corper Ngozi, Erelu Iyalode and some other women arranged the market square for the performance but the principal liased with the king of boys with some boys to disrupt the performance with the Oro cult. The women decides to fight back and they went into the street in anger, removed their head gears and tie it to their waist ready for a fight with any man that comes their way; that they will put an end to all the discrepancies in the community against the women. It was with the intervention of some chiefs from the Ogboni cult that the women were pacified and were asked to go and stage their play in the school hall.

### **Conceptual Analysis of Mrs. Kuti in Relations to TFD**

Theatre for development is a theatre that is put at the service of the disadvantaged rural and urban people, it speaks to the people in their own language and idioms, it deals with issues of direct relevance to their own alone. This play is a replica of the importance of TFD because it is aimed at empowering the community women, it want the women to be given more voice at the



top that the role of the women does not end in the kitchen. According to Awoyemi (2011) ‘theatre for development is the process which seeks to instill confidence in the deprived rural woman who has for too long been ignored in the development planning and execution. It is a process that asserts the dignity of man/woman irrespective of material station (55). It is in view of this that this play has taken its discourse. The play has its setting in Western part of Nigeria (Abeokuta) it is a satire that exposes the taxation exploitation and women marginalization. The conflict is a fight against gender inequality. This can be seen in the quarrel between Bolanle and the boys (pg. 12-13) though she proved it to them with a fight with the kings of boys in which she won the fight to let them know that *‘what a man can do a woman can also do it better’* the boys were also discriminating against Omowon, a character in the play that has both male and female organ, they see Omowon as female, they do make jest of omowon and do relegat Omowon as if Omowon is not a being created by God, this was also Bolanle’s argument with the boys; juxtaposing this with the situation in the society. You discover that this has been the myth of men that women are feeble, weak to hold any viable political position, that women are created to be at the back seat but we have women who has been leaders of nations, like Ellen Johnson – Sir Leaf who is the president of Liberia, Queen Elizabeth serves as Queen of England, come to think of it, women have always been the success behind any company, women are the ones that will go to any length to promote a company, think of Banks Insurance Companies and the likes. Corper Ngozi epitomized the role Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti played in Egbaland to deliver the women from men’s exploitation, she believed in herself that she can do it and she single handedly did it, she gained herself recognition locally, nationally and internationally despite the fact that Corper Ngozi met with a lot of challenges, she stood her ground took theatre for development to the rural women, enlightening, sensitizing and educating the minds of the women on the need to advocate their own freedom. She brought them together, sought their consent on the march for freedom because she cannot do it alone. Theatre for Development TFD is a collaborative project, it is highly interactive, and no TFD organized will ever come to impose



his /her ideology on a target community but will rather work on the existing ideology to bring out the best out of the people. It is because Corper Ngozi was able to sell her ideology to the women in a diplomatic way, which made the work easy. Not only that, when the performance was kicked against by the principal of Ijakadi High School because of the content of the play, he knew fully well that if the women should stage the play, it will be an eye opener to other women in the community and it will make them to want to always stand for their right at home, at places of decision making for they will no more see themselves as second fiddle but as a stakeholder or generating their own themes.

The mindset of Corper Ngozi to use TFD as a weapon of mobilization, articulation and execution in Ijakadi Community is evidenced in how she was able to first identify their problem just like what Abah (1990:15) clarifies as *"One of the very fundamental aspects of rural development is problem identification. The success or failure of any community theatre project hinges on proper identification and choice of the most bittinng problem for attention"*.

Uncovering community issues are the aim of TFD with the objective of solving it. Lack of proper and adequate education to the women is found as one of the major problems the people in Ijakadi were facing and as God will have it, one situation led to the other. The women got angry with the principal's action of organizing Oro cult to disrupt their performance which is believed that women are not suppose to see, *"Aiwo"*, the women refused to be intimidated and decides to pick up a street fight with the men; it becomes an issue of *'kkobinrin ta torin, kokunrin tatorin, eni kan ni lati lomi lehin ese jura won lo'* (if the man and the woman contend on critical issues, the women will always have an added advantage against the men). Women are mothers of the nation, preserver of life, epitome of progress, success and good luck. The Ogboni chiefs knew this that if the women should get angry on an issue the whole community will be on fire in a twinkle of an eye, so the women were pacified and were asked to go and stage their play in the school hall. This action put an end to a lot of discrepancies the women have been facing for a long time. From the perspective of what happened in Egbaland in the days of Mrs. Funmilayo



Ransome Kuti, the women were exempted from paying taxes, no more molestation from them and no more women marginalization.

The role of TFD is to see to it that things works out well in a target community and it has been working out well, a lot of TFD outreaches, were embarked upon in our environment and it has been wonderful, we went to a community in Akure North, Igoba in Ondo State in 2008, we were able to discover that the Electrification of electric poles was their problem and we went to the Local Government Chairman and to the NEPA's office (PHCN) with a lot of investigations, by the time we were to stage our play on it, the electrification was done even before we left the place. Another incident was that of lack of secondary school in Ado Local Government Area in one small village called Ayo-Aduloju. We carried out our investigation on why that place has not been given a secondary school only to discover that the money has been given to the leaders of that community but the money was shared, the chairperson then took it on herself to probe them because we were the one that let the cat out of the bag and the money was returned and the school has been built just to mention a few of the success we had on the field. The role of TFD cannot be underestimated therefore attention and support should also be given to this programme by stakeholders in the community at the Local and State level to enhance National development.

**The need for gender equity as a way of enhancing sustainable national development.**

Since half of the world population of almost 6.5billion people are women (United Nations report, 2005) and about 49percent of Nigeria's population of about 88million people in 1991 were women. There is the need to redress the gender imbalance between men and women in Nigeria. The government has been called upon to engage more women in key positions in governance for national development (Prof. Adebisi Daramola, 2015). He said, as a nation with sincere determination to meet the benchmark of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) in 2015 and also becoming one of the best 20 economies in year 2020, the contributions of women towards the realization of the target should not be underrated.



Every attention should be paid to gender equity in all facets so as to utilize available human resources for nation building and development. Women should be encouraged to pursue courses like Theatre Arts because this course is a tool that articulates the minds of the people to the government and it brings out the skills or potentials in women and it helps them to have better bargaining and decision making power in the home. It makes them a better mother and it helps them to have improved relationship with their spouse.

Entrepreneurship scheme should be established for women and youths because women are naturally passionate. The woman set up early child care development and education centres, they are trained as care givers. Women also can work as centre proprietors or as food vendors in child care centres providing children with meals that are balanced. This is also contributions to national development for women as good manager of resources.

There is the need for drastic legislation that would protect women from men's harassment. Brutality, barbaric killing and sexual assault of women and children in the country should stop. People should respect the sanctity of life and allow peace to reign in the country.

There should be a strict legislation against early marriage and child labour to ensure meaningful implementation of the universal basic education programme and there should be conscious effort in promoting women's right and gender issues because as rightly said by a one-time first lady Mrs. Maryam Babangida in the Guardian of February 26, 1992 that an all embracing emancipation of women will involve a new education, a new information system and a new social orientation and cultural revolution especially of those attitudes and values relating to her political and economic marginalization before they can contribute meaningfully to national development. For quite a long time, women were terribly behind in education. If a woman is educated she will have a philosophical approach to moral education; literate women attract the admiration of their husbands as observed by Adekoya (1998), when the men are out of the house, they remain convinced that their homes are well protected and administered because the woman can stand on their own and exercise good sense of balance of values. In such families, there will



be the highest level of fidelity between the husband and wife, highest level of stability, highest level of good child upbringing and less level of divorce.

If corporations are to benefit fully from the capabilities of qualified women, professionals, Directors and managers, certain workplace attitudes and behavior must change to prevent the expression of partiality and gender bias because such attitudes are anti-progress.

Regular seminars/training sessions, women empowerment programmes should be embarked upon to enhance productivity of the rural women. In fact government should make sure that women are their pivot concern in the agriculture programmes under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) and it should be backed up financially.

Women should target their programmes towards inspiring women to achieve economic independence, by doing so, women will be liberated from economic quagmire to a comprehensive economic comfort that will enable them make decisions that affect them. Our women needs to be inspired not only to accept change in their activity and actions, thought and psyche but to also become a change agent because the pursuance and realization of gender equity in different aspects of human life is fundamental to healthy societies and economies.

Equitable women representation in government at all levels is also a way out. Although, in Nigeria today, we can say economic and political power do not reside in men alone though the ratio is alarmingly poor, we have the names of some women who had contributed to national development like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Madam Tinubu, Queen Amina, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo. Mrs. Latifat Okunnu was deputy governor of Lagos State, Ambassador Judith Attah was a Minister of Women Affairs in the 1990s, Erelu Olusola Obada, Obiageli Ezekwesili, Florence Ita Giwa, Abike Dabiri, Okonjo Iweala, Allyson Madueke, Late Dora Akunyili and lots more. Women and girls are encouraged to role model these successful women of our generation that had contributed immensely to national development and also about 50% seats should be given to women in governance so as to move the nation forward.

## **Conclusion**



The role of women in the society cannot be underestimated though the issue of gender imbalance will continue to be topics of discourse among scholars. This is because all along women are being marginalized since they are being denied equal opportunities with men. They are often subjected to negative stereotype perception, harassed, exploited and are sexually abused. Women are only allowed to play second fiddle roles as member of subordinate class. Though the world's attention has lately been focused on this oppression against women such that quick women emancipation and empowerment are the slogans all over the world today, therefore, women should reposition themselves strategically so as to address the teeming challenges facing them as nation builders, they should live up to expectation to effect positive change in the country, so as to be fully integrated into national development.

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