

Little Drops to Make a Change

By *Ibim Semenitari*

*“Do the little things. In the future,
when you look back, they would have made
the greatest change.”*

- *Nike Thaddeus*

Protocols

It is with immense pleasure and profound pride that I welcome you all to the fourth and final command performance of **Little Drops**, the brilliant stage play by Niger Delta playwright, Professor Ahmed Yerima.

Eight days ago in Abuja, we began this truly inspiring journey, for two quite important reasons: one, to celebrate the International Women’s Day, whose campaign, **Pledge for Parity**, has already gathered millions of signatories around the world; and, two, to bring, once more, to national and international consciousness, the dire and abject circumstances in which this great region, sadly, continues to wallow.

They were – and remain – important in equal measure. This is particularly so, because throughout history women, have been known to be doers and not mere talkers, proving themselves great catalysts for societal change. As Lebanese philosopher and author, Charles Malik, once said: “The fastest way to change society is to mobilize the women of the world.” And we do want to play our role, both as thespians on stage and as actors in the boardrooms and corridors of power and influence, in classrooms and laboratories of learning and knowledge, as well as in the street corners and conscience of the world.

This play achieves this most eloquently. It provides us, with startling and brilliant metaphor, a most enchanting pathway through which we can begin to resolve the twin inequities of gender and development, both infrastructural and human, which the Niger Delta has suffered for far too long. Told from the perspective of four women, caught in the crossfire of the armed conflict in the region, we come face to face with the different aspects of the tragedy of our beloved Niger Delta.

This tragedy, of long years of neglect, of infrastructural decay, of poverty, of environmental degradation, of abuse, both wanton and preconceived, was the reason the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, was established in the first place. Our mandate is to facilitate the sustainable development of the Niger Delta, into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, politically peaceful and ecologically regenerative. Since 2001, NDDC has worked to achieve this with varying degrees of success.

To articulate this mandate and provide a clear and defined roadmap to sustainable development, the Commission facilitated the development of the Niger Delta Regional Development Masterplan. The Masterplan, in exploring 27 sectors, ranging from biodiversity to agriculture, from physical infrastructure to women issues, indeed, every aspect of human activity, provides an integrated and integrative action plan for true sustainable development. It is one we all must embrace, working together as partners, building this region we all love into one that satisfies the yearning of its people, which restores their faith and hope in government and constituted authority, a region of which we all must be eminently proud.

Besides Abuja, we have carried this message, through the presentation of this stage play, to Port Harcourt and Benin. Today, in Calabar, our Canaan City, we reaffirm this message, and renew our call for all to work, without flagging, without division and distraction, as partners, our hands bound together as a garland, imbued with love for our dear Niger Delta and a hunger for its survival, to create and build a region of our dreams. And bequeath same to our children and the generations to come.

The burden of development is, indeed, great. Recognising this, the Federal Government identified important stakeholders that must work together, as development partners, to move the region forward. These partners, working with the NDDC, under the new standards of probity, due process, proper application of funds, clarity of vision and engagement, which President Muhammadu Buhari has ushered in, will help ensure greater synergy and accelerated growth.

As we rebuild every facet of our national life, especially the Niger Delta and the North-East regions, as we set Nigeria on the path to change, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, the marginalization of women, too, must change. Women, all over Nigeria, have shown great capacity to drive the course of development. In more and more homes of the Niger

Delta, they have assumed roles of bread-winners, holding society by the scruff of neck and demanding to be taken seriously.

While today will be the last leg of this inspiring relay, the race is by no means ending here today. The campaign to gender equality continues. According to the World Economic Forum, we still have 117 years, 11 months, three weeks, four days and about 15 hours before men and women would assume parity in the workplace, the school, politics and governance and in all spheres of human endeavor. That is a long way hence. But we are determined to achieve it. And importantly so, because as Mary Wollstonecraft declared in her stirring tract, **“A Vindication of the Rights of Woman”**, “Virtue can only flourish among equals.”

The work to facilitate the sustainable development of the Niger Delta region also continues for us all, not just for the Niger Delta Development Commission, but for every stakeholder; indeed, for every Nigerian, because the Niger Delta remains the goose that lays the golden egg of this great country. The Niger Delta is too important to be neglected. Today, the Gulf of Guinea presents a better operating environment than the Middle East and it is important, even in the face of adverse oil economics, to take full advantage and make it the hub of global oil and gas business.

The Niger Delta torment, her needs, her sores and bruised spirit, some aspects which are so brilliantly captured in this play, must continue to remain an item in the national agenda, a constant narrative in national and international discourse, demanding and requiring healing. In doing that, we must also begin to think more on helping to rebuild the lives of women and children who are unscripted victims of the conflicts in the Niger Delta. As one of the characters in today’s play declares succinctly: “They fight their wars, yet we and our children are left with the scars...”

On our part, NDDC is determined to continue to encourage and support them, to improve the living conditions of our people and alleviate their suffering. What we present today, therefore, is as much entertainment and drama, as it is a campaign to bring, once more, to national conscience, the anguish and travails of the women, children and people of the Niger Delta. It is part of programmes which we have lined up to raise awareness, encourage industry among the people and improve human capacity.

To this end, we have concluded arrangements to begin the Girls in Engineering, Mathematics and Science (GEMS) programme, as well as institute the Queen Kambasa Awards for Excellence. GEMS aims to encourage

young girls in the region to embrace science and technology, as well as to provide quality manpower that will enable them participate in the predominant oil and gas sector of the region, while the Queen Kambasa Awards recognize the first known queen of the Niger Delta. In her honour, NDDC aims to recognize and reward achievement of Niger Delta women in different spheres and, in doing so, inspire women to excel in whatever they do. It is important to create role models for our young women and girls by showing them the path to excellence.

On that note, I invite you all to sit back and enjoy this great show, let your hearts listen to its urgent call, let your conscience be stirred so we all can move into action, towards making our society one where virtue can flourish. We must do the little things, so that in the future, when we all look back, they would have made the greatest change.

I am immensely grateful to all who have been part of this great journey. I am very delighted and grateful that Her Excellency, Mrs. Linda Ukwuye Ayade, First Lady of Cross River State, took time off her incredibly busy schedule to honour us today with her presence and time. I am equally grateful to Her Excellency, Mrs Aisha Buhari, who joined her immeasurable voice to this campaign in Abuja, and for the greatness of her support. May we all join our collective voice in advancing the course for which we are all gathered here today.

Most importantly, I thank Almighty God for preserving us on all our separate journeys and for granting us the grace to witness this day.

Thank you and God bless you all.

BEING SPEECH DELIVERED BY **MRS. IBIM SEMENITARI**, AG. MANAGING DIRECTOR/CEO, NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, **NDDC**, AT THE COMMAND PERFORMANCE OF THE STAGE PLAY, **LITTLE DROPS**, ON MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2016, AT TRANSCORP HOTEL, CALABAR.