BEYOND COMMUNITY THEATRE DEAD-END PRACTICE THROUGH THE AYE GBEDE TEMPLATE

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Abstract

Community Theatre remains an important participatory communication approach for grassroots development in Africa. However, a number of Theatre for Development (TfD) interventions terminate after theatrical performance and post-performance dialogue, limiting their capacity to translate community participation into sustainable development action. This paper examines how the integration of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Community Theatre, and Community Action Planning (CAP) can extend TfD beyond awareness creation towards implementation, monitoring, and community ownership. Drawing on the thirteen-day Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop conducted in Kogi State, Nigeria, in January 2016, the study adopts a qualitative participatory case-study approach involving community entry, stakeholder engagement, social and resource mapping, transect walks, historical timelines, problem-tree analysis, pairwise ranking, theatrical performance, participatory dialogue, and Action Planning. Findings reveal that community members collectively identified and prioritised three development challenges, which include lack of a functional market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure. Beyond dramatising these concerns, participants developed Community Action Plans specifying implementation activities, stakeholder responsibilities, resource requirements, and monitoring mechanisms. Building on these findings, the paper conceptualises the Dead-End Phenomenon as the methodological discontinuity occurring when Community Theatre ends with dialogue without progressing to organised action. It consequently proposes the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework, which connects participatory research, dialogue, Action Planning, implementation, monitoring, and community ownership within a continuous development cycle. The paper argues that Community Theatre can transcend awareness creation to function as an implementation-oriented methodology for participatory governance and sustainable grassroots development.

Keywords: *Community Theatre; Theatre for Development; Participatory Learning and Action; Community Action Planning; BDECT Framework; Sustainable Development*

Background

The pursuit of sustainable development has increasingly shifted from centrally planned, expert-driven interventions towards participatory approaches that recognise communities as active partners in identifying, analysing, implementing, and sustaining their own development initiatives. This paradigm shift reflects growing dissatisfaction with development models that treated local people primarily as beneficiaries of externally designed programmes rather than as producers of

development knowledge and agents of social transformation. Contemporary development scholarship now recognises that sustainable development depends fundamentally upon participation, local ownership, collaborative governance, social learning, and institutional partnerships (Manyozo, 2020; Servaes, 2020; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). Within this evolving development paradigm, communication has also undergone significant conceptual transformation. Earlier communication models viewed development communication principally as the dissemination of information from experts to target audiences through mass media and extension systems. Contemporary scholarship, however, increasingly conceptualises communication as a participatory process through which communities collectively generate knowledge, negotiate meanings, identify priorities, mobilise resources, and coordinate development action (Servaes, 2020; Melkote, 2021). Communication therefore becomes not merely a channel for transmitting development messages but a democratic process that strengthens inclusion, dialogue, accountability, and community ownership.

One of the most enduring expressions of participatory communication is Community Theatre, widely known in Africa as Theatre for Development (TfD). Community Theatre differs fundamentally from conventional theatre in both purpose and methodology. Whereas conventional theatre primarily seeks artistic excellence and entertainment, Community Theatre employs dramatic performance as a participatory medium through which communities critically examine their social realities, communicate indigenous knowledge, strengthen collective identity, and facilitate social change. It is theatre created with the people, by the people, and for the people, drawing extensively on indigenous performance traditions, storytelling, songs, dance, proverbs, rituals, and local cultural practices (Boal, 1979; Mda, 1993). Thus, across Africa, Theatre for Development emerged during the post-independence period as an alternative to modernization-oriented communication strategies that frequently excluded rural communities from development planning. Instead of positioning development experts as the sole producers of knowledge, Theatre for Development encouraged communities to become active participants in identifying their own development priorities and collectively generating culturally appropriate solutions (Mlama, 1991; Kerr, 1995). Contemporary studies continue to affirm the relevance of participatory theatre in addressing issues such as public health, environmental sustainability, peacebuilding, youth empowerment, gender equality, agricultural development, and democratic participation (Manyozo, 2020; Okeke & Ofoedu, 2022; Forcer et al., 2022). Applied theatre scholarship has likewise expanded the understanding of participatory performance beyond entertainment to include community engagement, collaborative inquiry, and social intervention. Gallagher et al. (2021) argue that community-engaged theatre creates democratic spaces where participants collectively investigate social issues while strengthening relationships among diverse stakeholders. Similarly, Jiang and Alizadeh (2023) demonstrate that community-based theatre contributes to rebuilding social connectedness by encouraging critical reflection, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. These perspectives reinforce the argument that Community Theatre functions simultaneously as an educational process, a communication strategy, and a participatory

mechanism for social transformation. Despite these achievements, questions regarding the sustainability of Theatre for Development interventions continue to occupy an important place within contemporary scholarship. Numerous Community Theatre projects successfully facilitate awareness creation, community dialogue, and behavioural change during workshop periods but often conclude immediately after theatrical performance and facilitator evaluation. As a result, the enthusiasm generated through participatory theatre frequently diminishes because communities lack structured implementation strategies, stakeholder coordination mechanisms, and participatory monitoring systems capable of translating dialogue into sustained development action (Mabetha et al., 2023; Lopez Piggott et al., 2025). This persistent limitation suggests that the principal challenge confronting Community Theatre is methodological rather than philosophical. Existing Theatre for Development practice has become increasingly effective at generating community participation, yet comparatively less attention has been devoted to integrating participatory communication with implementation planning, institutional collaboration, and long-term sustainability. Consequently, a methodological discontinuity often exists between community diagnosis and organised development action.

Recent participatory development research provides important insights into addressing this challenge. Studies on Participatory Action Research demonstrate that communities become more effective development actors when they participate not only in identifying problems but also in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating agreed interventions (Mabetha et al., 2023; Lopez Piggott et al., 2025). Similarly, contemporary Participatory Learning and Action approaches emphasise iterative cycles of collective investigation, planning, action, reflection, and adaptation, thereby strengthening community ownership and resilience (Seal et al., 2023; King et al., 2024). These developments suggest that Community Theatre can achieve greater developmental impact when integrated with broader participatory planning methodologies. It is against this background that the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop was organised in January 2016. Rather than ending with theatrical performance and audience discussion, the workshop deliberately combined Participatory Action Research, Participatory Learning and Action, Community Theatre, and Community Action Planning within a thirteen-day participatory process. Through this integration, community members not only identified their priority development concerns but also prepared practical Action Plans for addressing the absence of a functional market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure. Building upon this empirical experience, the present paper introduces the concept of the Dead-End Phenomenon to describe the tendency of many Community Theatre interventions to terminate after awareness creation without progressing to organised implementation. To address this methodological gap, the study proposes the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework, an implementation-oriented participatory model that repositions theatrical performance as the bridge between participatory diagnosis and sustainable community action. The framework integrates community entry, participatory research, dialogue, Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation, participatory monitoring, community ownership, and sustainable

development into a continuous cycle of grassroots transformation. In doing so, the study contributes a new conceptual and methodological perspective to Theatre for Development scholarship and offers a practical model for strengthening participatory development practice in Nigeria, Africa, and the wider Global South.

The Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop was conceived against the backdrop of an emerging concern among Theatre for Development (TfD) scholars and practitioners regarding the sustainability of participatory theatre interventions. While Community Theatre has consistently demonstrated its effectiveness in stimulating dialogue, raising public awareness, encouraging behavioural change, and mobilising communities around shared concerns, evidence from both practice and scholarship suggests that many interventions achieve only short-term communicative outcomes. Once the workshop ends and facilitators withdraw, the momentum generated through participatory performance often declines because no structured mechanism exists for transforming collective reflection into coordinated community action (Gallagher et al., 2021; Mabetha et al., 2023). This concern is particularly significant in many African rural communities where developmental challenges including inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional coordination, limited access to markets, poor transportation systems, unemployment, and unreliable electricity supply require long-term collaborative responses involving communities, governments, civil society organisations, and development partners. Awareness creation alone cannot resolve these structural challenges. Rather, sustainable solutions require participatory planning, shared responsibility, continuous monitoring, and collective ownership of implementation processes. Recent scholarship on community engagement reinforces this position. Ashley (2024) argues that participatory programmes should not be evaluated solely on the basis of inclusion during project activities but also on their capacity to enable communities to influence decisions and sustain change beyond the intervention period. Likewise, Wood (2025) maintains that sustainable community development depends upon strengthening community power through local leadership, institutional relationships, resource mobilisation, democratic participation, and collective action. These perspectives suggest that participation should be understood as a continuing developmental process rather than a temporary project activity.

The Aye Gbede workshop therefore adopted an expanded methodological approach that deliberately linked community research, participatory analysis, cultural performance, dialogue, Community Action Planning, and implementation readiness. The workshop was not organised as a theatrical event for entertainment or awareness creation alone; rather, it functioned as a participatory development laboratory in which community members collectively investigated their realities, prioritised development challenges, dramatised their findings, deliberated on possible solutions, and prepared practical Action Plans for future implementation. This methodological orientation distinguishes the Aye Gbede project from many conventional Theatre for Development initiatives. Instead of treating theatrical performance as the culmination of participatory engagement, the workshop regarded performance as an intermediate stage connecting community diagnosis with organised development action. Public performance became

a forum for validating research findings, stimulating broader community participation, attracting institutional attention, and generating consensus before the preparation of Community Action Plans. The findings of the workshop demonstrated that participatory theatre can contribute more meaningfully to sustainable development when it is integrated with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Through participatory mapping, transect walks, historical timelines, institutional analysis, pairwise ranking, and problem-tree analysis, community members collectively generated reliable knowledge concerning their social, economic, cultural, and infrastructural realities. This process strengthened local ownership because development priorities emerged from community consensus rather than from external expert assumptions.

Three issues emerged as the community's highest priorities: the absence of a functional market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure. These findings reflected the collective judgement of residents after extensive dialogue and participatory analysis. More importantly, they became the basis for the development of Community Action Plans that identified implementation activities, stakeholder responsibilities, available resources, advocacy strategies, monitoring indicators, and expected outcomes. The workshop therefore demonstrated that Community Theatre can effectively bridge the gap between participatory communication and organised development planning. From a scholarly perspective, this experience raises an important theoretical question: Why do many Community Theatre projects end with awareness creation when the participatory process itself has already generated sufficient community consensus to support implementation? Existing Theatre for Development literature provides extensive discussions of participation, dialogue, conscientisation, empowerment, and behavioural change (Servaes, 2020; Melkote, 2021). However, comparatively little attention has been devoted to explaining the methodological discontinuity that frequently separates participatory diagnosis from organised implementation. This paper addresses that gap by introducing the concept of the Dead-End Phenomenon. The Dead-End Phenomenon refers to the tendency of many Community Theatre interventions to terminate after theatrical performance, audience dialogue, and workshop evaluation without progressing to Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation, participatory monitoring, and sustainability. The concept does not imply that Theatre for Development has failed; rather, it highlights a methodological limitation that constrains the long-term developmental impact of otherwise successful participatory interventions. To overcome this limitation, the paper proposes the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework. The framework reconceptualises Community Theatre as a continuous participatory development cycle comprising community entry, confidence building, Participatory Action Research, Participatory Learning and Action, collective analysis, community prioritisation, theatre creation, public performance, participatory dialogue, Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation, participatory monitoring, evaluation, and community ownership. In this framework, performance no longer represents the endpoint of Community Theatre but rather the transition between community diagnosis and coordinated social action. The

BDECT Framework therefore extends the theoretical and methodological boundaries of Theatre for Development by integrating communication, research, planning, implementation, monitoring, and sustainability within one coherent participatory process. It also responds to contemporary calls for interdisciplinary approaches that connect communication for development, participatory governance, and community-led social transformation (Servaes, 2020; Govender, 2025) both at the grassroots level and urbanized communities.

The significance of this study is thus threefold. First, it contributes a new conceptual lens, the Dead-End Phenomenon for understanding the sustainability challenges confronting Community Theatre. Second, it develops the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework as an implementation-oriented model that integrates Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Theatre (CT), and Community Action Planning (CAP). Third, through evidence from the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop of 2016, the paper demonstrates that participatory theatre can evolve beyond awareness creation to become an effective instrument for collaborative governance, institutional partnership, community ownership, and sustainable grassroots development. Accordingly, this study argues that the future of Theatre for Development lies not simply in producing more participatory performances but in redesigning participatory methodologies so that theatrical engagement culminates in practical community action. By repositioning performance as a catalyst for implementation rather than a conclusion of participation, the Beyond Dead End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework offers a new paradigm for strengthening the developmental effectiveness of Community Theatre in Nigeria, across Africa, and throughout the Global South.

Conceptual Analysis

Community Theatre

Community Theatre is widely understood as a participatory form of theatrical practice through which members of a community collectively examine, interpret, and respond to issues affecting their social, cultural, economic, and political lives. Unlike conventional theatre, which is generally organised for artistic presentation before passive audiences, Community Theatre is created with, by, and for community members. Participation therefore extends beyond spectatorship to include research, script development, performance, dialogue, reflection, and, increasingly, community decision-making. The distinguishing feature of Community Theatre is its commitment to democratic participation. Community members are not merely performers of predetermined scripts but active contributors whose lived experiences constitute the primary source of dramatic content. Indigenous songs, storytelling, dance, proverbs, rituals, mime, oral poetry, and local performance traditions are frequently employed because they reflect the cultural identity of participants while making communication accessible and meaningful (Boal, 1979; Mda, 1993). Contemporary scholarship has further expanded the scope of Community Theatre beyond artistic performance. Gallagher et al. (2021) describe community-engaged theatre as a collaborative process that creates spaces for inquiry, dialogue, and civic participation. Similarly,

Jiang and Alizadeh (2023) argue that community-based theatre promotes social connectedness, critical reflection, and collective problem-solving by encouraging participants to engage directly with issues affecting their communities. These perspectives indicate that Community Theatre.0 functions not only as a performance practice but also as a participatory communication process through which communities generate knowledge, negotiate meanings, and strengthen social cohesion. Within African development practice, Community Theatre has acquired additional significance because it provides opportunities for communities to articulate local realities in culturally appropriate forms. Rather than imposing external narratives, Community Theatre values indigenous knowledge systems and recognises local people as legitimate producers of development knowledge. This participatory orientation aligns closely with contemporary thinking in communication for development, which emphasises dialogue, inclusion, and local ownership as prerequisites for sustainable development (Servaes, 2020). Despite these strengths, conventional Community Theatre practice has often been criticised for ending with theatrical performance and post-performance discussions. Although such activities successfully stimulate awareness and dialogue, they frequently lack structured mechanisms for implementation, stakeholder mobilisation, and long-term monitoring. Consequently, many interventions achieve significant communicative success but relatively limited developmental continuity. This observation provides an important conceptual point of departure for the present study. Accordingly, this paper conceptualises Community Theatre not merely as a participatory performance methodology but as a potential framework for community-led development. The proposed Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework therefore, extends Community Theatre beyond performance to include community research, participatory planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and sustainability.

Theatre for Development (TfD)

Although Community Theatre and Theatre for Development are closely related, they are not entirely synonymous. Community Theatre is a broad concept encompassing diverse forms of participatory performance within communities, whereas Theatre for Development specifically refers to the deliberate application of theatre as a strategy for promoting social and community development. Theatre for Development emerged in Africa during the post-independence period as an alternative to top-down communication models that treated rural populations as passive recipients of development information. Scholars and practitioners questioned the effectiveness of externally designed development programmes that neglected indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and local participation. Theatre therefore became an interactive medium through which communities could identify problems, analyse their causes, debate alternatives, and participate actively in the development process (Mlama, 1991; Kerr, 1995). The philosophical foundations of Theatre for Development are deeply rooted in Freire's concept of dialogical education and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Both perspectives reject passive learning and emphasise participation, critical consciousness, and collective action as prerequisites for social transformation.

Consequently, Theatre for Development has been widely employed across Africa to address issues including public health, literacy, environmental conservation, conflict resolution, gender equality, democratic participation, agricultural extension, youth empowerment, and community mobilisation. Recent scholarship demonstrates that Theatre for Development continues to evolve in response to changing development priorities. Okeke and Ofoedu (2022), examining an applied theatre intervention in southeastern Nigeria, argue that participatory theatre should function as an interventionist model through which communities collectively investigate problems and generate locally appropriate solutions. Likewise, Forcer et al. (2022) demonstrate that arts-based participatory approaches combining theatre, dance, storytelling, and improvisation can strengthen community engagement while facilitating dialogue around complex social issues. These studies reinforce the continuing relevance of Theatre for Development within contemporary participatory development practice. Nevertheless, a review of the literature also reveals an important methodological limitation. Most Theatre for Development projects continue to evaluate success in terms of participation levels, audience response, awareness creation, or behavioural change. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to assessing whether communities subsequently implement agreed actions, mobilise institutional support, monitor progress, or sustain development initiatives after facilitators leave. Consequently, the developmental effectiveness of Theatre for Development is often constrained by the absence of structured implementation mechanisms. The present study therefore argues that Theatre for Development should no longer be viewed solely as a communication strategy. Rather, it should be conceptualised as an implementation-oriented participatory development methodology capable of linking community diagnosis with organised collective action. This reconceptualisation forms one of the central propositions of the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is a family of participatory methodologies designed to enable communities to investigate, analyse, prioritise, and respond to their own development realities. Originating from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), PLA represents a significant departure from conventional research methods in which external experts dominate knowledge production. Instead, it recognises community members as experts on their own circumstances and encourages collaborative learning through visual, interactive, and experiential techniques (Chambers, 1994, 1997). PLA is distinguished by its emphasis on learning with communities rather than learning about communities. Facilitators encourage participants to generate and analyse information collectively through techniques such as social mapping, resource mapping, transect walks, historical timelines, seasonal calendars, wealth ranking, institutional mapping, Venn diagrams, problem-tree analysis, pairwise ranking, and matrix scoring. These tools make knowledge visible, encourage dialogue, and strengthen consensus-building while enabling community members to identify priorities from their own perspectives. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that PLA remains highly relevant within contemporary community development

practice. Seal et al. (2023) found that iterative PLA cycles improved community engagement, collective decision-making, and behavioural change within health interventions. Similarly, King et al. (2024) reported that participatory learning approaches strengthened local capacity, enhanced social support systems, and promoted collective ownership of community initiatives. These findings confirm that PLA should not be understood merely as a data collection technique but as a participatory process that facilitates continuous cycles of investigation, planning, action, reflection, and adaptation. Within the context of the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop, PLA provided the methodological foundation for community diagnosis. Through participatory mapping, institutional analysis, transect walks, historical timelines, pairwise ranking, and problem-tree analysis, community members collectively identified the absence of a functional market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure as their highest development priorities. The use of PLA therefore strengthened the legitimacy of the findings because the identified priorities emerged through community consensus rather than external prescription. More importantly, this study extends the application of PLA beyond diagnosis. Conventional participatory development projects often conclude PLA activities after identifying community priorities. In contrast, the Aye Gbede project integrated PLA directly into theatrical production, community dialogue, and Community Action Planning. Thus, Participatory Learning and Action became not merely a research methodology but the first stage of a continuous participatory development cycle culminating in implementation and sustainability.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative research methodology that integrates systematic inquiry with collective action to address problems identified by the people most affected by them. Unlike conventional research approaches, where researchers function as external observers and participants merely provide data, PAR positions community members as co-researchers who actively participate in defining research problems, generating knowledge, implementing actions, evaluating outcomes, and refining subsequent interventions. Consequently, knowledge production and social action become mutually reinforcing processes rather than separate activities. The intellectual foundations of PAR are closely associated with Paulo Freire's concept of praxis, which emphasises the inseparable relationship between critical reflection and transformative action (Freire, 1970). From this perspective, research should not merely explain social realities but should empower communities to transform them. Recent scholarship continues to affirm this orientation. Mabetha et al. (2023), drawing on a participatory health governance project in rural South Africa, demonstrate that PAR strengthens community agency by enabling citizens, researchers, and public institutions to jointly identify priorities, generate evidence, co-produce Action Plans, implement agreed interventions, and monitor progress through iterative cycles of reflection and action. Similarly, Lopez Piggott et al. (2025), in a Liberian participatory health study, found that community engagement as co-researchers enhanced trust, ownership, institutional collaboration, and the long-term sustainability of interventions. Within the context of

Community Theatre, PAR offers significant methodological advantages. It transforms theatre participants from performers into investigators of their own realities, thereby ensuring that dramatic narratives are grounded in authentic community experiences rather than external assumptions. More importantly, PAR extends participation beyond data generation to include collective planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In the Aye Gbede project, this orientation enabled community members to investigate their development realities, validate findings through theatrical performance, prepare Community Action Plans, and identify stakeholders responsible for implementation. Consequently, PAR functioned as the methodological bridge linking research, communication, planning, and action.

Community Action Planning (CAP)

Community Action Planning (CAP) refers to a structured participatory process through which communities translate identified development priorities into practical implementation strategies. While participatory research enables communities to understand their realities, Community Action Planning provides the operational mechanism for deciding what should be done, who should do it, when it should be done, how it should be done, and how progress should be monitored. Action Plans typically specify development objectives, implementation activities, stakeholder responsibilities, available community resources, external resource requirements, implementation timelines, monitoring indicators, and expected outcomes. They therefore transform collective aspirations into practical programmes capable of guiding community action and institutional collaboration. Recent participatory development studies underscore the importance of Action Planning as the point at which community participation moves from diagnosis to implementation. Mabetha et al. (2023) demonstrate that co-produced Action Plans enhance accountability because communities and public institutions jointly define priorities and responsibilities. Likewise, Wood (2025) argues that sustainable community development depends upon organised collective action supported by local leadership, institutional partnerships, democratic participation, and resource mobilisation. These findings suggest that Community Action Planning is indispensable for sustaining development initiatives beyond initial participatory engagement. Despite its importance within community development practice, CAP has received relatively limited attention in Theatre for Development scholarship. Many Community Theatre interventions culminate in post-performance discussions and recommendations without providing structured frameworks for implementation. Consequently, communities often possess shared understanding of development problems but lack organised strategies for addressing them. The Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop addressed this methodological gap by incorporating Community Action Planning as a compulsory stage immediately after theatrical performance. Separate Action Planning Committees prepared implementation strategies for the community's three priority concerns, lack of a functional market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure. This innovation distinguished the

project from conventional Theatre for Development practice and laid the empirical foundation for the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

Sustainable Community Development

Sustainable Community Development refers to a continuous participatory process through which communities improve their social, economic, cultural, environmental, and institutional wellbeing while strengthening their capacity to sustain development initiatives independently over time. Contemporary development thinking emphasises that sustainability extends beyond the completion of projects or the provision of infrastructure. Rather, it depends upon local ownership, inclusive governance, institutional partnerships, capacity development, accountability, and continuous community participation (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022; World Bank, 2023). Recent scholarship increasingly views sustainable community development as a function of community resilience and collective agency. Wood (2025) argues that communities become sustainable when they possess the organisational capacity to mobilise resources, build partnerships, exercise democratic leadership, and coordinate collective action. Similarly, Govender (2025) emphasises that communication for development should strengthen institutional relationships and community capacities capable of sustaining social transformation beyond externally funded interventions. Within this study, sustainable community development is understood as the ultimate outcome of an expanded Community Theatre process. Sustainability is achieved when communities move beyond awareness creation to assume responsibility for planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and continuously improving locally initiated development programmes. The emphasis therefore shifts from project completion to community capability, ownership, and long-term resilience. The Aye Gbede workshop reflects this understanding by positioning Community Action Plans not as the conclusion of participatory engagement but as the beginning of an ongoing community-led development process. Consequently, sustainability becomes a product of organised participation rather than external support alone.

Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework

The foregoing conceptual analysis demonstrates that Community Theatre, Theatre for Development, Participatory Learning and Action, Participatory Action Research, Community Action Planning, and Sustainable Community Development are closely interconnected yet have often been treated as separate methodological traditions. Community Theatre and Theatre for Development have successfully institutionalised participation, dialogue, and cultural performance as instruments of social transformation. Participatory Learning and Action has strengthened community diagnosis through collaborative knowledge generation. Participatory Action Research has integrated inquiry with collective action, while Community Action Planning has provided practical mechanisms for organising implementation. Sustainable Community Development, in turn, represents the long-term objective towards which these participatory processes are directed.

Despite their complementary nature, existing Theatre for Development practice rarely integrates these concepts into one coherent implementation-oriented framework. The dominant methodological sequence in many Community Theatre projects remains: Community Entry → Community Research → Theatre Creation → Public Performance → Post-Performance Discussion → Workshop Evaluation → Facilitator Exit. Although this sequence frequently generates awareness and stimulates community dialogue, it often terminates before structured implementation begins. The result is what this study conceptualises as the Dead-End Phenomenon, a methodological discontinuity between participatory diagnosis and organised development action. The Dead-End Phenomenon does not suggest that Community Theatre has failed as a participatory communication strategy. Rather, it identifies the absence of systematic mechanisms linking community dialogue with Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation, participatory monitoring, and sustainability. This conceptual gap provides the rationale for developing a new implementation-oriented framework. The Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework proposed in this paper addresses this gap by integrating the six concepts examined above into one continuous participatory development cycle comprising: Community Entry → Confidence Building → Participatory Action Research (PAR) → Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) → Community Analysis and Prioritisation → Community Theatre Creation → Public Performance → Participatory Dialogue → Community Action Planning (CAP) → Stakeholder Mobilisation → Implementation → Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation → Community Ownership → Sustainable Community Development. Within this framework, Community Theatre is no longer regarded as the endpoint of participation but as the critical transition between participatory diagnosis and organised collective action. Public performance validates research findings, broadens community dialogue, attracts institutional attention, and builds consensus before Action Planning and implementation commence. The framework therefore extends the communicative function of Community Theatre into the domains of participatory governance, collaborative planning, institutional engagement, monitoring, and sustainability. The BDECT Framework also redefines the role of community members. Rather than functioning solely as performers or audience members, participants become co-researchers, planners, implementers, monitors, evaluators, and custodians of community development. This expanded understanding of participation reflects the principles of Freirean praxis, participatory communication, collaborative governance, and empowerment while providing a practical methodological model for contemporary Theatre for Development practice. Accordingly, the conceptual contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that sustainable Community Theatre requires more than participation during performance. It requires an integrated methodology that deliberately connects participatory research, dialogue, Action Planning, implementation, monitoring, and community ownership within one continuous cycle of grassroots development. This reconceptualisation forms the intellectual foundation of the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework and constitutes the principal conceptual innovation advanced in this paper.

Framework of The Study

The Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework proposed in this paper reconceptualises Community Theatre as a continuous participatory development cycle rather than a linear sequence ending with theatrical performance, and terminating at Post-Performance Discussion without a feasible supplementary action. The framework consists of the following interconnected stages: Community Entry → Confidence Building → Participatory Action Research (PAR) → Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) → Community Analysis and Prioritisation → Community Theatre Creation → Public Performance → Participatory Dialogue → Community Action Planning (CAP) → Stakeholder Mobilisation → Implementation → Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation → Community Ownership → Sustainable Community Development. Unlike conventional Community Theatre or Theatre for Development models, where performance frequently represents the conclusion of participation, the BDECT Framework positions performance at the centre of a broader implementation process. Public performance serves four critical functions. First, it validates the findings generated during participatory research. Second, it expands community dialogue by encouraging wider stakeholder participation. Third, it builds consensus regarding development priorities and implementation strategies. Fourth, it creates opportunities for engaging government agencies, civil society organisations, development partners, and other institutions capable of supporting implementation.

The framework further proposes that Community Action Planning constitutes the decisive transition from communication to development. Through Action Planning, communities convert collectively identified priorities into structured implementation programmes specifying objectives, activities, stakeholder responsibilities, timelines, available resources, monitoring indicators, and expected outcomes. In this way, theatre becomes an instrument of participatory planning rather than merely a medium of awareness creation. Participatory monitoring and evaluation represent another distinctive feature of the framework. Instead of evaluating only the quality of theatrical performance or audience response, the BDECT Framework encourages continuous assessment of implementation progress, stakeholder collaboration, institutional responsiveness, community participation, and sustainability. Monitoring thus becomes a learning process through which communities periodically review achievements, identify emerging challenges, and adapt implementation strategies where necessary. At the centre of the framework is the concept of community ownership. Sustainable development is achieved not when external facilitators successfully complete projects but when communities acquire the organisational capacity, institutional relationships, and collective commitment required to sustain development initiatives independently. Community ownership therefore becomes both the process and the outcome of participatory development.

In terms of contribution, the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework advances Theatre for Development scholarship in several important respects. First, it introduces the Dead-End Phenomenon as a new conceptual explanation for the sustainability limitations observed in many Community Theatre interventions. This concept provides scholars with an

analytical lens for examining why successful participatory theatre projects sometimes fail to produce enduring developmental outcomes. Second, the framework broadens the theoretical scope of Community Theatre by integrating four complementary theoretical traditions, Critical Pedagogy, Theatre of the Oppressed, Participatory Communication Theory, and Empowerment Theory into a unified implementation-oriented model. Rather than treating these theories independently, the framework demonstrates how they interact throughout the participatory development process. Third, the framework extends the methodological boundaries of Theatre for Development by integrating Participatory Action Research, Participatory Learning and Action, Community Theatre, Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation, participatory monitoring, and community ownership within one coherent participatory cycle. This integration provides a practical methodology through which participatory communication can generate measurable development outcomes. Finally, the framework contributes to the broader fields of Applied Theatre, Development Communication, Community Development, Participatory Governance, and Sustainable Development. It demonstrates that Community Theatre is not merely an educational or communicative strategy but also a participatory planning and governance mechanism capable of strengthening democratic participation, institutional collaboration, and grassroots development.

A conceptual representation of the BDECT Framework for purposes of clarity may be represented diagrammatically as follows:

Community Entry
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Confidence Building
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Participatory Action Research (PAR)
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Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)
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Community Analysis & Prioritisation
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Community Theatre Creation
↓
Public Performance
↓
Participatory Dialogue
↓
Community Action Planning (CAP)
↓
Stakeholder Mobilisation
↓
Implementation
↓
Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation
↓
Community Ownership
↓
Sustainable Community Development

This conceptual sequence encapsulates the principal argument of the present study: Community Theatre should not terminate with performance but should progress through structured planning, implementation, monitoring, and community ownership to achieve sustainable grassroots development.

The Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop

The Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop was conceived as an experimental Theatre for Development (TfD) intervention designed not only to facilitate community dialogue but also to test the practical integration of Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Theatre (CT), and Community Action Planning (CAP) within a single participatory development process. Conducted over thirteen consecutive days in January 2016 at Aye Gbede in Ijumu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, the workshop sought to determine whether Community Theatre could move beyond its traditional emphasis on awareness creation to become a practical framework for implementation-oriented community development. The workshop was organised by facilitators from the Department of Theatre Arts, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, working in collaboration with the Aye Gbede traditional institution, the Community Development Association (CDA), youth organisations, women's groups, farmers, artisans, traders, religious leaders, and other community stakeholders. Notable among the Community Theatre facilitators that facilitated students from the Department of Theatre Arts, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Ayingba, included Dr. Godwin Onuche, the current Head of Department as at the time of this study, Professor James Atu Alachi, Professor David Awam Menegbe, Professor Sunday Williams Onogu, Dr. Jonathan Okpanchi, and Associate Professor Sunday Ogbu Igbaba. Rather than imposing predetermined development priorities, the facilitators adopted a participatory methodology that enabled community members to investigate their own realities, identify and prioritise their development challenges, validate findings through cultural performance, and collectively prepare Community Action Plans. Consistent with the proposed Beyond Dead End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework, the workshop was organised as a continuous participatory cycle comprising community entry, confidence building, participatory research, community diagnosis, theatrical creation, public performance, participatory dialogue, Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation readiness, and evaluation. Each stage built upon the previous one, ensuring that participation extended beyond theatrical performance to include practical development planning.

Community Entry and Stakeholder Engagement

Community entry represented the foundation of the workshop. In participatory development practice, successful interventions depend upon trust, legitimacy, and respect for existing community institutions. Consequently, the facilitators began by conducting courtesy visits to the traditional ruler, members of the Council of Chiefs, executives of the Community Development Association (CDA), leaders of women's organisations, youth associations, religious

institutions, farmers' groups, artisans, and other influential members of the community. These preliminary consultations served several important purposes. First, they introduced the objectives and participatory philosophy of the workshop, emphasising that community members would define their own priorities rather than receive externally prescribed solutions. Second, they secured the approval and support of traditional and community leaders whose legitimacy was essential for broad-based participation. Third, they established mutual trust between facilitators and residents, thereby creating an enabling environment for subsequent participatory activities. Unlike conventional development interventions in which external experts often dominate project design, the facilitators deliberately positioned themselves as partners in learning rather than providers of ready-made solutions. Community leaders were encouraged to mobilise residents across age, gender, occupational, and religious groups so that participation reflected the diversity of the community. This approach is consistent with Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasises dialogue, collaboration, and shared ownership of development processes (Servaes, 2020). It implies that full and active participation of the community participants is pivotal throughout the drama-making process of the community research.

Confidence Building and Community Mobilisation

Following community entry, attention shifted to confidence building and community mobilisation. Establishing trust among participants was considered essential because meaningful participation depends upon openness, mutual respect, and the willingness of individuals to share experiences without fear of exclusion or domination. Several participatory activities were organised to strengthen interpersonal relationships before formal research commenced. Community meetings, informal discussions, cultural exchanges, storytelling sessions, and introductory interactive exercises enabled participants to become familiar with one another while creating a relaxed atmosphere for dialogue. Particular efforts were made to ensure the participation of women, youths, elderly persons, farmers, traders, artisans, teachers, religious leaders, and representatives of community-based organisations. This stage also sought to reduce traditional barriers to participation. Community Theatre frequently attracts outspoken individuals while marginalising quieter members of society. Facilitators therefore adopted inclusive facilitation techniques that encouraged every participant to contribute ideas irrespective of age, gender, educational background, or social status. This democratic orientation reflected Freire's principle that authentic dialogue requires equality among participants and Boal's conception of theatre as a space where every individual becomes an active contributor rather than a passive observer (Freire, 1970; Boal, 1979). By the conclusion of this phase, participants had developed sufficient confidence to engage openly in subsequent research and planning activities. Community ownership of the workshop was already evident, as residents increasingly regarded the intervention as their project rather than an externally organised project.

Participatory Action Research and Participatory Learning and Action

The core methodological phase of the workshop combined Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) to facilitate community diagnosis. Rather than relying on questionnaire surveys or externally designed needs assessments, participants investigated their own realities through collaborative inquiry using a range of participatory techniques. Community members worked in mixed groups representing different sectors of the community. Facilitators guided the process while deliberately avoiding domination of discussions or interpretation of findings. Participants themselves generated, analysed, validated, and interpreted information concerning their social, cultural, economic, and infrastructural conditions. The principal PLA tools employed during this phase included Social Mapping; Resource Mapping; Transect Walks; Historical Timelines; Seasonal Calendars; Daily Activity Schedules; Institutional Mapping (Venn Diagrams); Problem-Tree Analysis; Pairwise Ranking; and Matrix Scoring. Each technique contributed unique insights into community life. Social mapping enabled participants to identify residential patterns, public facilities, natural resources, and infrastructural distribution. Resource mapping revealed available community assets, including agricultural land, human resources, indigenous institutions, and cultural resources. Transect walks provided opportunities for direct observation of environmental and infrastructural conditions. Historical timelines traced significant developmental events within the community, while seasonal calendars highlighted fluctuations in agricultural activities, income, labour demands, and community challenges throughout the year. Institutional mapping enabled participants to examine relationships among traditional institutions, Community Development Associations, religious organisations, government agencies, educational institutions, and external development actors. Problem-tree analysis explored the root causes and consequences of identified development challenges, while pairwise ranking and matrix scoring facilitated systematic prioritisation of community needs.

The use of these participatory tools ensured that development priorities emerged from collective community analysis rather than external expert judgement. Consistent with Chambers' participatory philosophy (Chambers, 1997), knowledge was generated with the community rather than about the community. Similarly, the PAR orientation ensured that research was not undertaken merely for academic documentation but as the foundation for future collective action (Mabetha et al., 2023). Invariably, the drama-driven community research is not an end in itself as an academic exercise, but leverages further action towards meaningful, feasible and sustaionable community development implementation.

Community Diagnosis and Prioritisation of Development Needs

Information generated through the PAR and PLA exercises was subsequently subjected to collective analysis during plenary discussions and focus group sessions. Participants examined the causes, consequences, urgency, feasibility, and developmental significance of each identified issue before proceeding to systematic prioritisation. Although numerous concerns emerged, including youth unemployment, inadequate healthcare facilities, educational challenges, and

water supply, community members collectively agreed that three issues required immediate attention because of their extensive social and economic implications, and these include the absence of a functional community market; inadequate electricity supply; and poor road infrastructure. The absence of a community market was identified as the highest development priority because it directly affected agricultural marketing, household income, commercial activities, and employment opportunities. Farmers explained that they were compelled to transport agricultural produce to distant markets, thereby increasing transportation costs, reducing profits, and limiting local economic growth. Electricity emerged as the second priority because unreliable power supply constrained domestic activities, educational opportunities, commercial enterprises, and small-scale industries. Participants emphasised that improved electricity would stimulate economic productivity while enhancing the quality of life within the community. Poor road infrastructure constituted the third major concern. Participants observed that deteriorating roads restricted access to markets, healthcare services, educational institutions, and neighbouring communities, particularly during the rainy season. Farmers were especially affected because transporting agricultural produce became increasingly difficult, resulting in post-harvest losses and higher transportation costs. The prioritisation process itself represented an important methodological achievement. Rather than allowing facilitators or external agencies to determine development priorities, community members reached consensus through participatory analysis and democratic decision-making. Consequently, the selected priorities reflected genuine community aspirations and enjoyed broad legitimacy among participants. These prioritised findings subsequently provided the thematic foundation for the theatrical production developed during the workshop. More importantly, they became the empirical basis for Community Action Planning, thereby illustrating the transition from participatory diagnosis to implementation-oriented Community Theatre that characterises the Beyond Dead End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

Community Theatre Creation and Rehearsals

Having collectively identified and prioritised the community's development challenges, the workshop progressed to the creative phase of Community Theatre production. Unlike conventional theatre, where playwrights and directors determine dramatic content before rehearsals commence, the Aye Gbede workshop adopted a participatory devising approach in which the dramatic narrative emerged directly from the findings generated during Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). Participants were organised into mixed working groups comprising farmers, traders, artisans, women, youths, elders, religious leaders, and other community representatives. Facilitators guided the creative process without imposing scripts or predetermined artistic interpretations. Instead, participants shared personal experiences relating to the absence of a functional market, irregular electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure. These lived experiences were transformed into dramatic episodes through improvisation, storytelling, role play, indigenous songs, dance, chants, mime, satire, and symbolic

performance. The rehearsal process itself became an extension of participatory research. As scenes evolved, participants continuously discussed the underlying causes of community problems, corrected inaccuracies, refined dramatic representations, and ensured that the performances reflected the collective realities of Aye Gbede. Theatre therefore functioned not only as artistic expression but also as a participatory learning environment in which community members deepened their understanding of the structural dimensions of local development challenges. This collaborative approach aligns with contemporary Applied Theatre scholarship, which regards rehearsal as a process of shared inquiry rather than merely preparation for public performance (Gallagher et al., 2021). It also reflects Boal's (1979) concept of the "spect-actor," whereby participants become active creators of knowledge through performance.

Public Performance and Participatory Dialogue

The public performance constituted one of the most visible and socially significant stages of the workshop. Community members, traditional rulers, local opinion leaders, women and youth groups, neighbouring communities, representatives of government institutions, and invited stakeholders attended the event. The dramatic presentation depicted the community's three priority concerns: the absence of a functional market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure. Rather than presenting abstract development messages, the performance illustrated how these challenges affected the everyday lives of farmers, traders, students, women, artisans, and families. Through humour, music, dance, satire, symbolism, and dramatic conflict, the actors transformed empirical findings into culturally meaningful narratives that encouraged audience identification and reflection. Following the performance, facilitators organised a structured participatory dialogue rather than a conventional question-and-answer session. Audience members were invited to validate the issues presented, offer additional perspectives, identify overlooked concerns, and propose possible solutions. The dialogue demonstrated overwhelming agreement that the dramatic representations accurately reflected community realities. Importantly, discussion was deliberately redirected from identifying problems to considering practical responses. Participants examined available community resources, institutional support, leadership structures, and opportunities for collective action. Consequently, the public performance became not the conclusion of participation but the transition between community diagnosis and organised planning. This stage conceptualises communication as a collaborative process of dialogue, consensus-building, and collective decision-making rather than one-way information dissemination (Servaes, 2020; Melkote, 2021). It presupposes that communication becomes a medium for collective effort in the development process.

Community Action Planning (CAP)

The preparation of Community Action Plans (CAPs) represented the most innovative aspect of the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop and the principal feature distinguishing it from many conventional Theatre for Development interventions. Immediately after the

participatory dialogue, participants were organised into three thematic Action Planning Committees corresponding to the prioritised development issues which include Community Market Development Committee; Electricity Improvement Committee; and Road Infrastructure Committee. Each committee was tasked with preparing a practical implementation plan addressing its assigned development priority. Facilitators encouraged participants to move beyond general recommendations by identifying specific implementation activities, responsible stakeholders, locally available resources, external resource requirements, implementation timelines, monitoring indicators, and expected outcomes. Participants recognised that the absence of a central market constrained agricultural production, reduced commercial opportunities, and increased transportation costs. The committee therefore proposed actions including community mobilisation, land identification, advocacy to the Local Government Council, engagement with elected representatives, mobilisation of communal labour, and phased construction of market infrastructure. The electricity committee recommended strengthening collaboration between the community, electricity distribution authorities, local government institutions, and political representatives. Participants also proposed establishing a community electricity committee to coordinate advocacy, monitor infrastructure maintenance, and encourage community participation in future improvement initiatives. The road committee identified sustained advocacy, collaboration with government agencies, periodic community maintenance efforts, mobilisation of local resources where feasible, and continuous monitoring of government commitments as essential strategies for improving road accessibility. The preparation of these Action Plans transformed participatory dialogue into organised development planning. In contrast to conventional Community Theatre projects, where discussions frequently conclude without implementation strategies, the Aye Gbede workshop produced structured plans capable of guiding subsequent community action.

Stakeholder Mobilisation and Implementation Readiness

The Action Planning process also facilitated systematic stakeholder mobilisation. Participants recognised that sustainable implementation required cooperation among multiple institutions rather than reliance upon government alone. Key stakeholders identified included the Traditional Council; the Community Development Association (CDA); women's organisations; youth associations; religious institutions; Local Government authorities; relevant State Government ministries; elected political office holders; civil society organisations; educational institutions; and development partners. Responsibilities were discussed in relation to each stakeholder's comparative advantage. Community members accepted responsibility for mobilisation, advocacy, communal labour, and local resource contributions, while government agencies were expected to provide technical expertise, infrastructure support, and policy interventions. This collaborative orientation strengthened community ownership while encouraging institutional accountability. The workshop therefore broadened participants' understanding of development. Rather than perceiving development solely as a governmental

responsibility, participants increasingly viewed it as a shared enterprise requiring partnership, mutual accountability, and collective action.

The workshop concluded with participatory evaluation sessions involving facilitators, community leaders, and participants. Evaluation extended beyond assessing the artistic quality of the theatrical performance to include reflection on the effectiveness of the participatory methodologies employed, the inclusiveness of community participation, the quality of dialogue, the practicality of the Action Plans, and the prospects for implementation. Participants generally expressed satisfaction with the participatory nature of the workshop and emphasised that the integration of research, theatre, and Action Planning distinguished the intervention from previous community programmes. They observed that, for the first time, development priorities had emerged through collective analysis and had been accompanied by clearly defined implementation strategies. Facilitators also reflected on lessons learned, including the importance of early stakeholder engagement, inclusive facilitation, community ownership of research findings, and systematic integration of participatory planning into Community Theatre methodology. These reflections informed the conceptual development of the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

The Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop demonstrates how the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework can be operationalised in practice. Each stage of the workshop corresponded directly with one component of the framework: Community Entry established legitimacy and trust through collaboration with traditional institutions and community organisations; Confidence Building strengthened relationships and promoted inclusive participation. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) enabled community members to investigate and analyse their own realities; Community Analysis and Prioritisation generated consensus regarding development priorities; Community Theatre Creation transformed empirical findings into culturally meaningful dramatic narratives; Public Performance validated research findings and broadened community participation; Participatory Dialogue generated consensus concerning development responses; Community Action Planning (CAP) translated dialogue into structured implementation strategies; Stakeholder Mobilisation established institutional partnerships necessary for implementation; Participatory Evaluation reviewed both process and implementation readiness; and Community Ownership emerged through the collective preparation of Action Plans and shared responsibility for future development initiatives.

The Aye Gbede experience therefore demonstrates that Community Theatre need not terminate with performance and audience discussion. Instead, theatrical performance can function as the critical transition between participatory diagnosis and organised implementation. By integrating research, communication, planning, implementation readiness, stakeholder collaboration, and participatory evaluation within one continuous process, the workshop provides empirical validation for the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework. Accordingly, the organisation of the Aye Gbede Thirteen-Day Community Theatre Workshop

illustrates a significant methodological advancement in Theatre for Development. It provides practical evidence that Community Theatre can evolve from a predominantly awareness-oriented communication strategy into an implementation-oriented participatory development framework capable of strengthening community ownership, collaborative governance, and sustainable grassroots transformation.

Community Research Findings

The empirical findings presented in this section were generated through the systematic application of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) during the thirteen-day Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop conducted in January 2016. Unlike conventional needs assessments in which external researchers determine community priorities, the workshop enabled community members themselves to investigate, analyse, validate, and prioritise their own development concerns using participatory methodologies. Consequently, the findings presented here reflect the collective knowledge and lived experiences of the people of Aye Gbede rather than externally imposed interpretations. The significance of these findings extends beyond documenting community conditions. They provided the empirical foundation for the development of theatrical performances, informed the preparation of Community Action Plans, and ultimately shaped the Beyond Dead End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework proposed in this study. The findings are therefore presented not merely as descriptive observations but as evidence demonstrating how participatory research can generate community ownership and facilitate implementation-oriented development.

The workshop established that agriculture constituted the dominant economic activity in Aye Gbede. The majority of participants depended on farming as their primary source of livelihood, producing crops for both household consumption and commercial purposes. In addition to farming, residents engaged in petty trading, artisanship, transportation services, and other small-scale entrepreneurial activities that complemented household income. Despite the considerable agricultural potential of the community, participants consistently identified serious constraints affecting local economic development. Foremost among these was the absence of a functional community market. Farmers reported that harvested produce often had to be transported to neighbouring towns for sale, resulting in increased transportation costs, post-harvest losses, delayed marketing, and reduced household income. Women traders further explained that the absence of a permanent market limited commercial activities, reduced customer patronage, and discouraged local investment. These findings suggest that economic underdevelopment in Aye Gbede was not primarily attributable to the absence of productive capacity but rather to inadequate supporting infrastructure and limited institutional coordination. This observation aligns with contemporary participatory development literature, which argues that communities frequently possess significant local resources but require improved institutional arrangements to maximise their developmental potential (Servaes, 2020; Wood, 2025). Absence of a functional community market was identified as one of the prioritized community needs. Participants unanimously

regarded the absence of a central market as the community's most pressing development concern. Farmers and traders explained that agricultural produce was frequently transported to distant markets, increasing transportation costs and reducing profitability. The absence of a local market also discouraged commercial investment and limited opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship. Inadequate Electricity Supply. Irregular electricity supply constituted the second major infrastructural challenge. Participants observed that inadequate electricity affected households, educational institutions, commercial enterprises, artisans, and small-scale industries. Young people emphasised that improved electricity would enhance educational opportunities, while traders highlighted its importance for business expansion. Poor Road Infrastructure. Poor road conditions were identified as the third priority concern. Participants explained that deteriorating roads hindered transportation of agricultural produce, increased vehicle operating costs, restricted access to healthcare facilities and schools, and reduced interaction with neighbouring communities, particularly during the rainy season. Collectively, these findings indicate that infrastructural deficiencies were interconnected rather than isolated problems. Improving roads would facilitate agricultural marketing; establishing a community market would stimulate local commerce; while improved electricity would enhance household welfare and economic productivity.

Prioritisation of Community Development Needs

Following extensive analysis using problem-tree analysis, pairwise ranking, and matrix scoring, participants collectively prioritised the following development concerns: Lack of a functional community market; Inadequate electricity supply; and Poor Road Infrastructure. Although other concerns including healthcare, youth unemployment, water supply, and educational facilities were also identified, participants concluded that addressing these three priorities would produce the greatest multiplier effects for community development. The prioritisation process itself represents one of the most significant findings of the workshop. Unlike conventional needs assessments where external consultants determine priorities, community members reached consensus through democratic participation and collective analysis. This strengthened local ownership because participants recognised the prioritised issues as their own collective decisions. The findings also demonstrate the practical value of integrating Participatory Learning and Action with Community Theatre. Rather than relying on assumptions regarding community needs, the workshop generated evidence-based priorities that subsequently informed theatrical production and Community Action Planning.

Interpretation of the Findings

Viewed through the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study, the findings reveal several important insights. From the perspective of Critical Pedagogy, community members demonstrated the capacity to analyse their own realities critically and generate locally appropriate development priorities through participatory dialogue (Freire, 1970). Theatre of the Oppressed is

reflected in the transformation of participants from passive observers into active investigators of their own social conditions (Boal, 1979). Similarly, Participatory Communication Theory explains how dialogue, consensus-building, and collaborative learning enabled participants to identify shared priorities and strengthen institutional relationships (Servaes, 2020). Finally, Empowerment Theory is evident in the emergence of community ownership as residents collectively generated knowledge, prioritised development concerns, and prepared to assume responsibility for subsequent Action Planning (Zimmerman, 2000). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the Aye Gbede workshop successfully moved beyond conventional participatory diagnosis. The integration of PAR and PLA generated reliable community knowledge while simultaneously strengthening local capacity for collective action. This transition from research to planning constitutes the first empirical validation of the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

Translating Community Research into Cultural Performance

A defining feature of the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop was the deliberate transformation of empirical research findings into participatory cultural performance. Unlike conventional theatrical productions that rely on pre-written scripts, the dramatic performance presented during the workshop evolved directly from the community's own experiences as documented through Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). Consequently, theatre became an extension of community research rather than a separate artistic activity. Participants collectively converted the three prioritised development issues, the absence of a functional community market, inadequate electricity supply, and poor road infrastructure into dramatic episodes that reflected everyday realities within Aye Gbede. Through improvisation, storytelling, indigenous songs, dance, mime, role play, satire, proverbs, and symbolic representation, the community reconstructed familiar situations that resonated strongly with the audience. For example, one dramatic sequence portrayed farmers returning from the farm with abundant produce but facing enormous difficulties transporting their harvest because of impassable roads. Another depicted traders lamenting the absence of a central market where local agricultural products could be sold. A third illustrated the frustration experienced by artisans, students, and households resulting from irregular electricity supply. These scenes were not fictional inventions but theatrical representations of issues previously identified through participatory research. This integration of research and performance illustrates one of the major innovations of the Aye Gbede project. Theatre functioned simultaneously as a medium for validating community knowledge, strengthening collective identity, stimulating dialogue, and preparing participants for organised community action.

The public performance attracted broad community participation, including traditional rulers, members of the Community Development Association (CDA), women and youth groups, farmers, traders, artisans, religious leaders, neighbouring communities, and invited government representatives. Following the performance, facilitators organised a structured participatory

dialogue during which audience members reflected on the issues presented. Participants unanimously affirmed that the dramatic narratives accurately represented the lived realities of Aye Gbede. Additional observations were contributed, minor clarifications were made, and broad consensus emerged regarding the urgency of addressing the three identified development priorities. From a methodological perspective, this stage served as a process of community validation. Rather than relying solely on researchers to verify findings, the wider community collectively examined, confirmed, and enriched the research outcomes through open dialogue. This strengthened the credibility and legitimacy of the findings while expanding community ownership of the development agenda. The participatory dialogue also reflected Freire's notion of dialogue as the foundation of transformative action and Boal's conception of theatre as a democratic space where citizens critically examine their social realities before acting collectively (Freire, 1970; Boal, 1979). Accordingly, self-evaluation precedes self-efficacy, as the issues raised during the community research are of the people, for them to take collective action in making choices and finding solutions to their problem(s).

Community Action Planning: From Dialogue to Collective Action

The transition from participatory dialogue to Community Action Planning (CAP) represents the most significant empirical contribution of the Aye Gbede workshop. In many Theatre for Development projects, public discussion constitutes the final stage of participation. The Aye Gbede workshop deliberately departed from this tradition by requiring participants to convert dialogue into practical implementation strategies. Three Action Planning Committees were established, each corresponding to one of the prioritised development concerns. Community Market Action Plan. The committee responsible for market development recommended: identification and allocation of suitable land; mobilisation of communal labour; advocacy to the Local Government Council; engagement with elected representatives; phased market construction; mobilisation of financial contributions from community members; collaboration with private-sector partners where feasible. Expected outcomes included increased agricultural marketing opportunities, improved household income, employment generation, expanded commercial activities, and strengthened local economic development. The Electricity Improvement Action Plan involved the electricity committee that proposed: establishment of a community electricity committee; sustained engagement with electricity distribution authorities; advocacy to relevant government agencies; mobilisation of community support for maintenance; periodic monitoring of electricity infrastructure; continuous stakeholder engagement. Expected outcomes included improved business productivity, enhanced educational opportunities, expansion of small-scale enterprises, and improved household welfare. The Road Infrastructure Action Plan in the road infrastructure committee that recommended advocacy to Local Government and State Government authorities; collaboration with elected political representatives; periodic community maintenance initiatives; mobilisation of local resources where appropriate; establishment of community monitoring mechanisms. Expected outcomes included improved transportation,

enhanced market accessibility, reduced post-harvest losses, improved healthcare access, and stronger economic integration with neighbouring communities. These Action Plans transformed collective aspirations into organised implementation strategies, thereby distinguishing the workshop from conventional awareness-oriented Theatre for Development interventions. An important outcome of the Action Planning process was the emergence of clearly defined stakeholder responsibilities. Community members accepted responsibility for mobilisation, advocacy, communal labour, and local resource contributions. Traditional institutions committed themselves to providing leadership and facilitating coordination among different community groups. The Community Development Association undertook responsibility for monitoring implementation and maintaining communication with government agencies. Participants also identified Local Government authorities, State Government ministries, elected representatives, civil society organisations, universities, faith-based organisations, and development partners as strategic collaborators whose support would be required during implementation. This redistribution of responsibility represented a significant shift in community perception. Development was no longer viewed exclusively as the responsibility of government but as a collaborative enterprise involving both community initiative and institutional partnership. Such an orientation reflects contemporary thinking in participatory governance and sustainable development, which emphasises shared responsibility and collective ownership (UNDP, 2022; Govender, 2025). Another important innovation emerging from the workshop was the recognition that implementation required continuous monitoring rather than one-time intervention. Participants proposed that the Community Development Association, traditional institutions, youth organisations, women's groups, and other community structures should periodically review implementation progress, document achievements, identify challenges, and revise Action Plans where necessary. This approach transformed monitoring from an externally imposed evaluation exercise into a community-owned learning process. Monitoring became a mechanism for accountability, institutional learning, adaptive management, and sustained participation. Contemporary participatory development scholarship supports this orientation. Mabetha et al. (2023) argue that participatory monitoring strengthens accountability because communities remain directly involved in reviewing implementation outcomes. Likewise, Lopez Piggott et al. (2025) demonstrate that continuous community engagement significantly enhances ownership, institutional trust, and sustainability.

The Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop provides strong empirical support for the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework proposed in this paper. First, the workshop demonstrated that Community Theatre can effectively integrate Participatory Action Research, Participatory Learning and Action, Community Theatre, and Community Action Planning within one coherent participatory methodology. Rather than functioning as separate activities, these approaches reinforced one another throughout the workshop. Second, the workshop showed that theatrical performance should not be regarded as the endpoint of participation. Instead, performance functioned as the critical transition between community

diagnosis and organised implementation. Public performance validated research findings, broadened community dialogue, strengthened stakeholder participation, and prepared participants for Community Action Planning. Third, the workshop demonstrated that Community Action Planning provides the operational bridge between participatory communication and sustainable development. The preparation of structured Action Plans ensured that community dialogue generated practical implementation strategies rather than remaining at the level of awareness creation. Fourth, the workshop strengthened community ownership by enabling participants to investigate their own realities, prioritise development concerns, prepare Action Plans, identify stakeholder responsibilities, and establish mechanisms for participatory monitoring. Community members became co-researchers, performers, planners, implementers, and custodians of their own development process. Finally, the workshop illustrates that sustainable Community Theatre requires continuous interaction among research, communication, planning, implementation, monitoring, and institutional collaboration. These interconnected stages constitute the defining characteristics of the Beyond Dead End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop demonstrate that the integration of Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Theatre (CT), and Community Action Planning (CAP) significantly extends the developmental potential of conventional Theatre for Development (TfD). Rather than functioning merely as a communication strategy for awareness creation, Community Theatre emerged as a comprehensive participatory development process capable of facilitating community diagnosis, collective learning, implementation planning, stakeholder mobilisation, and sustainable community ownership. This discussion interprets the findings within the context of contemporary scholarship on Theatre for Development, Applied Theatre, Development Communication, Participatory Learning and Action, Participatory Action Research, and participatory governance. It further demonstrates how the Aye Gbede experience contributes to the conceptual development of the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework. One of the most significant findings of the Aye Gbede workshop is that community participation extended beyond consultation to become a process of participatory knowledge production. Participants did not merely provide information to external researchers; they actively investigated their own realities, analysed community conditions, validated findings, prioritised development concerns, and generated practical solutions. This finding supports Freire's (1970) conception of dialogue as a collaborative process through which people critically examine their lived experiences while generating knowledge capable of transforming their realities. It also reinforces Participatory Communication Theory, which argues that sustainable development depends upon communities becoming co-creators rather than passive recipients of development knowledge (Servaes, 2020; Melkote, 2021). Recent empirical studies similarly demonstrate that meaningful participation involves collaborative knowledge production rather than information extraction. Gallagher et al.

(2021) describe community-engaged theatre as a participatory process through which communities collectively investigate social issues while strengthening civic engagement. Likewise, Mabetha et al. (2023) found that Participatory Action Research enabled communities in rural South Africa to generate evidence, negotiate priorities, and collaborate with public institutions in planning and implementing local interventions. The Aye Gbede findings extend this literature by demonstrating that Community Theatre can institutionalise participatory knowledge production through the systematic integration of PAR and PLA. Theatre therefore becomes not simply a medium for communicating existing knowledge but a participatory mechanism through which new community knowledge is collectively generated, interpreted, validated, and applied.

Another major finding concerns the successful integration of Participatory Action Research and Participatory Learning and Action into Community Theatre methodology. Traditionally, many Theatre for Development projects have utilised community research primarily as a preliminary stage preceding script development and performance. In contrast, the Aye Gbede workshop employed PAR and PLA throughout the participatory process. Community members participated continuously in data generation, community mapping, institutional analysis, problem identification, prioritisation, theatrical creation, Action Planning, and evaluation.

This finding is consistent with contemporary participatory development scholarship, which increasingly views research as an iterative process linking investigation, action, reflection, and adaptation (Mabetha et al., 2023; Lopez Piggott et al., 2025). The workshop further demonstrates that PLA tools including social mapping, transect walks, problem-tree analysis, pairwise ranking, and matrix scoring, can substantially strengthen Community Theatre by ensuring that dramatic narratives are grounded in systematically generated community evidence. Importantly, the Aye Gbede experience extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that PAR and PLA should not be regarded as independent methodologies operating alongside Community Theatre. Rather, they can be integrated into a unified participatory development process in which research, communication, performance, planning, and implementation mutually reinforce one another. This methodological integration represents one of the principal innovations underpinning the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework.

The findings also reaffirm the continuing relevance of Community Theatre as a culturally grounded form of participatory communication. Throughout the workshop, indigenous songs, storytelling, dance, oral traditions, satire, mime, and dramatic improvisation enabled participants to communicate complex development concerns in culturally meaningful forms. These observations support the arguments of Mlama (1991) and Mda (1993), who emphasised that African performance traditions provide effective vehicles for community dialogue and social transformation. Contemporary communication scholarship similarly recognises participatory communication as a process through which communities negotiate shared meanings, strengthen social relationships, and coordinate collective action (Servaes, 2020). However, the Aye Gbede findings also suggest that communication should not terminate with dialogue alone. Public performance successfully validated community research findings, stimulated broad participation,

and generated consensus regarding development priorities. Yet its greatest contribution lay in preparing participants for organised Action Planning and implementation. In this respect, the workshop extends Participatory Communication Theory by demonstrating that communication should culminate in collaborative planning rather than awareness creation alone. Community Theatre therefore becomes an implementation-oriented communication process through which dialogue generates practical development action.

Perhaps the most important finding emerging from the Aye Gbede workshop concerns the role of Community Action Planning (CAP). Existing Theatre for Development literature has devoted considerable attention to community participation, awareness creation, empowerment, and behavioural change. Comparatively little emphasis has been placed on structured implementation planning immediately following theatrical performance. Consequently, many Theatre for Development projects conclude after public dialogue without providing practical mechanisms for coordinated community action. The Aye Gbede workshop addressed this limitation by introducing Community Action Planning as a compulsory stage immediately after public performance. Participants collectively prepared Action Plans specifying implementation activities, stakeholder responsibilities, timelines, available resources, monitoring indicators, and expected outcomes. This finding strongly supports recent participatory development scholarship. Mabetha et al. (2023) demonstrate that Action Planning strengthens implementation because communities and institutions jointly define responsibilities. Similarly, Wood (2025) argues that organised collective action depends upon clearly defined leadership, institutional collaboration, democratic participation, and shared responsibility. Thus, the present study extends these perspectives by positioning Community Action Planning as the methodological bridge between participatory communication and sustainable development. Without Action Planning, Community Theatre risks remaining primarily an awareness-raising activity. With Action Planning, however, theatre becomes an operational framework for community development.

The findings of the Aye Gbede workshop are broadly consistent with contemporary developments in Applied Theatre and participatory development while simultaneously extending existing scholarship. For example, Gallagher et al. (2021) argue that community-engaged theatre creates democratic spaces for collaborative inquiry. Jiang and Alizadeh (2023) likewise demonstrate that participatory theatre strengthens community relationships through shared reflection and dialogue. These studies affirm the communicative and educational value of Community Theatre. Similarly, Mabetha et al. (2023) and Lopez Piggott et al. (2025) demonstrate that Participatory Action Research contributes to community ownership, collaborative governance, and sustainable implementation by involving communities directly in research, planning, and monitoring. The Aye Gbede experience supports these findings but advances them in two important respects. First, it demonstrates that Community Theatre can systematically integrate PAR, PLA, Community Theatre, and Community Action Planning within a single participatory methodology rather than employing them independently. Second, it shows that public performance should function as the transition between participatory diagnosis and organised

implementation. This represents a significant methodological departure from much of the existing Theatre for Development literature, where performance is frequently treated as the endpoint of participation. Consequently, the Aye Gbede findings provide empirical support for reconceptualising Community Theatre as an implementation-oriented participatory development methodology capable of strengthening collaborative governance, institutional partnerships, and sustainable community development.

The collective interpretation of these findings reveals an important analytical insight. The principal limitation confronting many Community Theatre interventions is not inadequate participation but inadequate methodological continuity. Communities frequently participate enthusiastically during research, rehearsals, performances, and post-performance discussions, yet the participatory process often concludes before implementation structures are established. The Aye Gbede workshop demonstrates that this discontinuity can be overcome through the systematic integration of Participatory Action Research, Participatory Learning and Action, Community Theatre, Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation readiness, and participatory monitoring. This integrated process provides the empirical basis for the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework, which reconceptualises Community Theatre as a continuous cycle of participatory development rather than a performance-centred communication strategy. Accordingly, the findings contribute to a growing body of scholarship advocating more implementation-oriented approaches to participatory development while simultaneously extending Theatre for Development theory through the introduction of a comprehensive framework linking community research, communication, planning, implementation, monitoring, and sustainability.

Implications for the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework

The findings of the Aye Gbede Community Theatre Workshop have important implications for Theatre for Development (TfD), Applied Theatre, Development Communication, and Community Development scholarship. Collectively, they demonstrate that sustainable participatory development requires a theoretical shift from performance-centred participation to implementation-oriented participation. The integration of Critical Pedagogy, Theatre of the Oppressed, Participatory Communication Theory, and Empowerment Theory reveals that participation should not terminate with dialogue or critical consciousness. Freire (1970) conceived praxis as the inseparable relationship between reflection and action, while Boal (1979) viewed theatre as a rehearsal for social transformation. The Aye Gbede experience extends these theoretical traditions by demonstrating that action should be institutionalised through Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, implementation, participatory monitoring, and community ownership. Similarly, Participatory Communication Theory argues that development communication should promote dialogue, negotiation, and collaborative decision-making rather than one-way information dissemination (Servaes, 2020; Melkote, 2021). The findings suggest that dialogue achieves its fullest developmental value only when it culminates in organised

implementation. Thus, communication should be understood not merely as a process of meaning-making but also as a mechanism for coordinating collective action. Empowerment Theory is likewise extended by the findings. Traditional interpretations often emphasise awareness, confidence, and participation in decision-making. The Aye Gbede workshop demonstrates that empowerment also includes the capacity of communities to organise themselves, mobilise stakeholders, prepare Action Plans, monitor implementation, and sustain development initiatives independently. Empowerment therefore becomes both a developmental process and a measurable outcome.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study lies in its methodological implications. Existing Theatre for Development practice frequently follows a sequence comprising community entry, research, rehearsals, public performance, discussion, evaluation, and facilitator exit. While this sequence has proved effective for awareness creation, it often lacks a structured transition to implementation. The Aye Gbede workshop demonstrates that a more comprehensive methodology is both feasible and desirable. By integrating Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Theatre (CT), and Community Action Planning (CAP), the workshop created a continuous participatory process in which each methodological stage reinforced the next. Within this expanded methodology: Participatory Action Research generated collaborative knowledge; Participatory Learning and Action strengthened community diagnosis and prioritization; Community Theatre transformed research findings into culturally meaningful public dialogue; Community Action Planning converted dialogue into implementation strategies; Stakeholder mobilisation facilitated institutional collaboration; Participatory monitoring created opportunities for learning, accountability, and adaptation; Community ownership enhanced long-term sustainability. This integrated methodology represents a significant advancement beyond conventional Theatre for Development practice because it deliberately addresses the implementation gap frequently identified in participatory development programmes.

The findings also have important implications for practitioners working in Theatre for Development, Applied Theatre, Development Communication, and community engagement. First, Community Theatre should no longer be organised as an isolated awareness campaign. Instead, facilitators should design interventions that integrate participatory research, dialogue, Action Planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation from the outset. Second, Community Action Planning should become a standard component of Theatre for Development methodology. Every workshop should culminate in practical Action Plans that clearly identify development objectives, implementation activities, stakeholder responsibilities, timelines, available resources, monitoring indicators, and expected outcomes. Third, participatory monitoring should be institutionalised. Communities should establish implementation committees capable of reviewing progress, documenting lessons, strengthening accountability, and adapting Action Plans to changing circumstances. Such an approach ensures that Community Theatre contributes to continuous community learning rather than one-off interventions. Fourth, universities and training

institutions should revise Theatre Arts and Development Communication curricula to incorporate implementation-oriented Community Theatre methodologies. Students should be trained not only in facilitation and performance but also in participatory research, Community Action Planning, stakeholder engagement, project implementation, and participatory evaluation.

One of the principal conceptual contributions of this study is the identification and validation of the Dead-End Phenomenon. The findings indicate that many Community Theatre interventions successfully achieve participation, awareness creation, dialogue, and community mobilisation. However, the participatory process frequently terminates before organised implementation begins. Consequently, communities often possess strong consensus regarding development priorities but lack structured mechanisms for translating that consensus into coordinated action. The Aye Gbede workshop provides empirical evidence that this discontinuity is not inevitable. By incorporating Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, participatory monitoring, and implementation readiness into the workshop structure, the project successfully extended participation beyond theatrical performance. The Dead-End Phenomenon should therefore be understood not as a criticism of Community Theatre itself but as an explanation of a methodological limitation within many conventional Theatre for Development models. Recognising this limitation creates opportunities for methodological innovation and theoretical advancement.

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework. Each stage of the framework was operationalised during the Aye Gbede workshop: Community Entry established legitimacy and stakeholder suppor; Confidence Building promoted trust and inclusive participation, Participatory Action Research generated collaborative knowledge; Participatory Learning and Action facilitated community diagnosis; Community Analysis and Prioritisation identified development priorities; Community Theatre Creation transformed research findings into dramatic narratives; Public Performance validated community knowledge and broadened participation; Participatory Dialogue generated consensus regarding development priorities; Community Action Planning translated dialogue into implementation strategies; Stakeholder Mobilisation strengthened institutional partnerships; Participatory Monitoring established accountability and continuous learning; Community Ownership enhanced sustainability. The successful integration of these stages demonstrates that Community Theatre can function simultaneously as a research methodology, a participatory communication strategy, a planning mechanism, an implementation framework, and a tool for collaborative governance. The framework therefore extends Theatre for Development beyond awareness creation by positioning performance as the beginning of organised community action rather than its conclusion.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Community Theatre can move beyond its conventional emphasis on awareness creation and post-performance dialogue to become a sustainable

framework for participatory development. Drawing upon empirical evidence from the Aye Gbede Thirteen-Day Community Theatre Workshop conducted in January 2016, the study has demonstrated that the integration of Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Theatre (CT), and Community Action Planning (CAP) significantly broadens the developmental scope and effectiveness of Theatre for Development (TfD). The study has shown that while conventional Community Theatre has made substantial contributions to community mobilisation, critical consciousness, public education, behavioural change, and participatory communication, many interventions terminate after theatrical performance and post-performance dialogue. This methodological discontinuity, conceptualised in this paper as the Dead-End Phenomenon, limits the long-term developmental impact of otherwise successful participatory theatre projects. Awareness without structured implementation often results in communities possessing a shared understanding of their problems but lacking organised mechanisms for translating that understanding into sustainable collective action. The Aye Gbede workshop provides compelling evidence that this limitation can be overcome through the deliberate integration of participatory research, collaborative learning, cultural performance, Community Action Planning, stakeholder mobilisation, participatory monitoring, and community ownership within a single methodological framework. The workshop demonstrated that theatre can function simultaneously as a research methodology, a participatory communication process, a community planning mechanism, a platform for democratic dialogue, and an implementation-oriented development strategy.

A major contribution of this paper is therefore the development of the Beyond Dead End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework. Unlike conventional Theatre for Development models that often conclude with public performance, the BDECT Framework conceptualises Community Theatre as a continuous participatory development cycle comprising: Community Entry → Confidence Building → Participatory Action Research → Participatory Learning and Action → Community Analysis and Prioritisation → Community Theatre Creation → Public Performance → Participatory Dialogue → Community Action Planning → Stakeholder Mobilisation → Implementation → Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation → Community Ownership → Sustainable Community Development. This framework represents an important theoretical and methodological advancement in Theatre for Development scholarship. It integrates the principles of Critical Pedagogy, Theatre of the Oppressed, Participatory Communication Theory, and Empowerment Theory into a coherent implementation-oriented model capable of strengthening participatory governance and sustainable grassroots development. The study further contributes to the literature by introducing the Dead-End Phenomenon as a new conceptual lens for analysing why many Community Theatre interventions fail to progress beyond awareness creation despite generating strong community participation and consensus. By identifying this methodological gap, the paper provides a basis for redesigning future Theatre for Development interventions to incorporate implementation planning, institutional collaboration, and community ownership as integral components rather than optional post-project activities.

Beyond its contribution to Theatre for Development, the BDECT Framework has wider relevance for Applied Theatre, Development Communication, Participatory Governance, Community Development, Communication for Social and Behaviour Change (CSBC), and the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those relating to poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, sustainable communities, partnerships, and inclusive institutions. It provides researchers, practitioners, governments, universities, and development agencies with a practical participatory model capable of strengthening community resilience and sustainable local development. Ultimately, this study argues that the future relevance of Community Theatre lies not merely in producing performances that inspire discussion but in facilitating participatory processes that generate organised community action, institutional partnerships, and sustainable social transformation. Community Theatre achieves its fullest developmental potential only when the curtain does not fall at the end of the performance, but rises again in the form of collective implementation, participatory monitoring, and enduring community ownership.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Theatre for Development practitioners should redesign Community Theatre methodologies to incorporate Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Action Planning (CAP), stakeholder mobilisation, participatory monitoring, and sustainability planning as compulsory components of every intervention. Public performance should be regarded as the beginning of implementation rather than the conclusion of participation.
2. Departments of Theatre Arts, Performing Arts, Development Communication, and related disciplines should revise their curricula to include practical training in participatory research, Community Action Planning, stakeholder engagement, participatory monitoring, and community-based project implementation. Field-based Community Theatre workshops should deliberately produce measurable community development outcomes alongside academic learning.
3. Researchers should undertake comparative empirical studies to test and refine the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework across different cultural, geographical, and developmental contexts, including public health communication, climate change adaptation, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, agricultural extension, gender empowerment, youth development, and environmental sustainability.
4. Federal, State, and Local Government authorities should recognise Community Theatre as a strategic participatory development methodology rather than merely an entertainment or awareness-creation activity. Government-sponsored community development

programmes should integrate Community Theatre with structured Action Planning, implementation frameworks, and participatory monitoring systems.

5. Community Development Associations (CDAs), traditional institutions, youth organisations, women's groups, and faith-based organisations should institutionalise Community Action Planning Committees capable of coordinating implementation, mobilising local resources, strengthening partnerships with government agencies, and monitoring community development initiatives.
6. International development organisations, civil society organisations, and donor agencies should adopt implementation-oriented participatory theatre models such as the BDECT Framework when designing community-based interventions. Funding should extend beyond awareness campaigns to include implementation support, community monitoring, and long-term capacity development.
7. Every Community Theatre intervention should include a structured participatory monitoring and evaluation framework that enables communities to assess implementation progress, document lessons learned, revise Action Plans, and strengthen institutional accountability. Success should be measured not only by audience participation but also by the extent of implementation and sustainability achieved.
8. Future scholars should further investigate the Dead-End Phenomenon identified in this study and explore its applicability across other participatory development methodologies. Additional theoretical work may refine, expand, or adapt the Beyond Dead-End Community Theatre (BDECT) Framework for diverse sectors of community development and participatory governance.

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