



## Theatre-for-Development and Economic Sustainability: Revitalizing Traditional Skills in Eka Nung Ikot Community

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### Abstract

*The notion of Theatre-for-Development (TfD) primarily focusses on mobilising, enlightening, educating, sensitizing, and informing individuals to foster necessary growth that enhances their well-being within a community, particularly in cultural contexts, which has become a significant concern in recent times. It is crucial to note that many traditional industrial practices that were employed by various African communities for local productions in order to support their economic survival are quickly and gradually being replaced by modern skills, techniques, procedures, and equipment due to advancements in technology, equipment, and techniques. The unexpected situation is that, despite the associated challenge of obtaining sophisticated equipment for the same reasons, many of these methods are foreign to the locals. The difficulty persists as local communities have diminished support for local production, with many fleeing to metropolitan regions due to the inability of local industries to sustain their livelihoods. Sadly, the negative progress is threatening to eradicate the natural skills, methods, and processes used in local manufacturing. In response to this issue, this paper highlights the value of Theatre-for-Development in an effort to revitalise traditional industrial processes and endangered African native talents for economic reliance and subsistence based on the experience of the Eka Nung Ikot Community. To intentionally address the economic problems that local and distant populations in Africa face, the study suggests using the Theatre-for-Development strategy.*

**Keywords:** African, Community, Traditional Skills, Economic Sustainability, Theatre-for-Development (TfD).

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### Introduction

Theatre-for-Development (TfD) programmes/projects are basically intervention platforms for the translation of TfD's theoretical

concept into developmental practices in the targeted communities. However, it is quite pertinent to note that these interventions need a total understanding of the appropriate and practical means or process that can be engaged properly coordinated, guided with the required and design techniques, concepts,

approaches and strategies in order to achieve the aims and goals as desired for expected development. According to Abel Idebe, “TfD is a communication intervention method that is primarily aimed at facilitating community and social development” (27). And in the view of Lucy Iseyen, “such practice can contribute to the sustenance of skill processes and patronage” (75). Relatively, Nnanake Ekeke describes TfD as “a term that describes a practical process in communicating the desired change message employing song, drama and dance as modes of sensitizing, educating and empowering communities to improve their status quo” (90).

Theatre-for-Development as an applied arts form offers a hand in fashioning out a technique that can be used to facilitate community development as well as to address socio-economic issues bothering communities - reaching out to the people in various communities (including rural/local communities), to sensitize, educate and inform the people in order to enable them take decisions and actions by themselves, that will in turn have positive effects on the general well-beings of the people for developmental purposes. It is on this note that Bassey Bassey considers arts as “a component of the social superstructure; a component of the ideology of a community which is a part of the intricate web of social perception” (91).

It therefore means that Theatre-for-Development draws people out into a common platform and thus enabling them to be sensitized in order to take critical decisions on issues bothering them. This seems to inform Iyorza and Iseyen’s assertion that “theatre goes beyond mere representation to add relevance to humanity; to explain to man the nature of himself” (40). Theatre-for-Development is a reflection of the communal situation in the aspect of social reality. It is a veritable tool for achieving social change in various ways. Speaking on the role of Theatre for Development, Ahmed Yerima asserts that it “has become thought-provoking to the extent that it can ask the audience to reflect on issue; social

and political which affect their lives” (6). Ekeke adds that “Theatre for Development has the necessary components to get the rural people involved in the process of finding solutions to their problems” (91). It therefore follows that Theatre-for-Development charts a course for overhauling of the society through change advocacy in various spheres. It can as well open man to social action and inspiring his aspiration to revolutionize the society to a positive standpoint through change in actions and behaviours

This paper contends that Theatre-for-Development has the potential to offer a sustainable alternative approach toward addressing issues confronting economies of African communities especially at the rural setting. To this end therefore, this paper examines the intervention project through Theatre-for-Development in an attempt to revive the endangered African unique local skills and traditional industrial processes for economic dependency and sustenance from the experience of Eka Nung Ikot Community – as facilitated under the supervision of the researcher.

## **Implication and Strategy of Theatre-for-Development Practice**

The primary strategy Theatre-for-Development involves the engagement of the community people through dramatic performance from an improvised play to dramatically present their problems and challenges and proffering solution in critical ways. Theatre-for-Development has the potential of addressing problems affecting the people and the community in the social, cultural, behavioural, political, economic religious and other aspects as corroborated by Komolafe and Apena that:

Theatre-for-Development (TfD) is a unique and powerful approach that utilizes the arts, particularly theatrical performances, as a medium for social change and community engagement. Unlike conventional theatre, which often focuses on

entertainment and artistic expression, Theatre-for-Development aims to address and resolve specific social, political, and economic issues within communities (64).

Because of traditional skills, techniques and processes in local production (which were natural) and facing extinction in various local communities in Africa, the call for Theatre-for-Development becomes expedient for economic sensitization in the revival of traditional industrial skills and processes that are gradually being phased out in the contemporary world – to the detriment of local productions and rural economy.

In Theatre-for-Development strategy, the recognized forms of presentation are acting, dances, songs and other theatrical improvisations. Ekeke and Ekeke recognize that these forms have “the power to change the viewer's perspective. And the capacity to persuade and have an impact” (111). Performances share “etymological foundation because they have to do with the process of doing something that is essentially useful” (Ekeke and Ekeke 35).

It should be added that Theatre-for-Development is a public-oriented theatre with the major aim of sensitizing the target people who have common cultural base and background. Akinbulu is of the argument that:

The key issue ... for the development initiative to succeed, it must position the people and communication at the centre. Communication is central to the lives of the people and their communities, to the issues and conflicts that affect their lives. It is pivotal to good governance because the success of the interface between the leader and the led ultimately rests on a good communication process (46).

It is important to note that Theatre-for-Development engages theatrical performance with the community people which is often participatory and exploratory – in attempt to achieve the targeted goal of helping the people to be mobilized and have development mentality.

**Participation:** Theatre-for-Development involves participation for its intervention that employs song, drama and dance and other dramatic actions to sensitize, educate and inform the people at community level for development. The implementation as the name connotes, refers to a process whereby theatre is used to research, analyse and solve critical issues in the community, empowering indigenous people to enhance or make change towards positive behaviours, knowledge and attitudes regarding vital social issues challenging their lives. According to Oga Steve Abah:

It is about the ability to understand the situation, the politics and cultural dynamics, the layers of meanings and the nature of relationship that exist in the community. Sometimes the ontological is important in so far as development is not simply a satisfaction of the physical needs. The psychological, the spiritual, the religious and the social must all be embedded in the process ... the amateurs must read meanings, must notice trends and sense dangers and conflicts (2004 ix).

It is from the above standpoint that Theatre-for-Development becomes a tasking and painstaking exercise that requires commitment, dedication, devotion, resilience, doggedness, open-mindedness, firmness and good observation in order to achieve the desired goal for the target community.

- **Targeting the Community and Interrogating the People:** In Theatre-for-Development practice, the best option before selecting a target community should be an in-depth study of the rural community and its people. Questions that are pertinent should be

asked and answers scrutinized in order to be equipped with facts that are necessary for effective and result-oriented community theatre performance. The Theatre-for-Development strategy involves interrogating the people in the target community to find out their challenges in order to enable the improvisation of a dramatic piece where their problems are woven into an improvised play and the solutions dramatically proffered.

- **Model:** Theatre-for-Development project has to make a choice from either the traditional or modern theatre models, or a cocktail of both. The choice of traditional model should not solely be a reaction to the level of literacy in the community, but also the availability of traditional forms in that community. Hence the cocktail of two models - traditional and modern - could be employed in an integrative performance. In this blended model, many approaches are adopted using drama, storytelling, folk, song, or possibly dance, were adopted to help pass the revival message effectively in Eka Nung Ikot community. Just as emphasised by Bassey and Wekpe, "storytelling is a veritable narrative in most cultures. Its practitioners reply on the local culture to underscore and verbalise their craft. The material for their stories is sourced from their communities" (21).
- **Improvisation:** Script in contemporary theatre and performance is important but in Theatre for Development, the major technique used in the place of script is improvisations. As earlier stated, the language of the performance should be that of the people of the community. The sample performance does not utilize a written script. As an improvisational affair, as earlier stated, it makes provision for the expression of the aesthetic endowment of the rural people involved.

- **Cast:** Although Theatre-for-Development calls for the use the community people in the cast, it should be under the directorship of a professional hand, facilitator or researcher. Usually facilitators of Theatre-for-Development project of this nature are often professionals. For example, in a Theatre-for-Development Course Project in 2024 (under the researcher's supervision), embarked upon in Eka Nung Ikot, in Oruk Anam Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The researcher, (after preliminary stages) only served in an advisory capacity in selecting the local cast that performed to sensitize the people of the community on how to revive their traditional industries and skills.
- **Rehearsals:** In a Theatre-for-Development project, the rehearsals for production should not be over-stretched for days and months compared to conventional theatre. Ideally, few days of rehearsals, run consecutively, are appropriate. It is expedient to also consider their level of literacy and domestic engagements to avoid absconding and disappointment. In Eka Nung Ikot, knowing quite well that the participants were mere volunteers with no remuneration reward, and that they were committed to several pressing rural engagements. The duration on daily basis was between two or three hours depending on the length of the performance and the acting capacity and adaptability of the local cast. During the rehearsals process, dialogues, gestures and lyrics were carefully analysed to ensure that offensive, libelous, obscene and items that can arouse the sensibilities of the local audience and member were expunged.
- **Performance Proper:** The date of performance in Eka Nung Ikot was agreed upon by the host community in advance. This agreement enabled the community to arrange their engagements in preparation for the

actual performance date. The clan head and members of his cabinet mandated the town-crier to announce the performance and the date to the people. The information was also proclaimed in churches and other places of meeting within the community. It is pertinent to suggest here that the choice of the performance venue is another major decision for these facilitators. The use of village square or any open-air arena is preferable because it is the traditional setting of the people as in the case of Eka Nung Ikot community. The researcher in his project in Eka Nung Ikot used the village square which the people are so used to.

- **Follow-up and Feedback:** The final performance in Theatre-for-Development practice is not the end of the project, but the beginning of a new phase that requires follow-up and regular monitoring in order to evaluate the impact of the project. In Eka Nung Ikot, this was done by assessing the impact created by the performance through the feedback Information received from the host community. It is pertinent to note that the evaluation and monitoring was done through interrogation and interaction from selected people in the community after a reasonable people for dependable feedback. This process also entailed the observation of the situation, individual's reactions and contacts which would further necessitate the re-enforcement of the process of following up and monitoring of the momentum of revival of the traditional industries and skills for economic sustainability as in the case of Eka Nung Ikot community. Theatre-for-Development to be effective, it must be creatively applied within the confines of the conventional strategy and stages as enshrined in its practice.

Above lineup of activities supports Bassey and Ekeke's position that "creative works have often Knowledgeable Research (KR) 2026, vol.5, Issue.01

been used to x-ray the African cultural values to which underscore the uniqueness of African culture and the need to preserve and promote them" (116).

### **Contextualization of Theatre-for-Development and Rural Mobilization**

Theatre-for-Development entails the use of performance to explore the problems associated with a community. From this statement it could be said that Theatre-for-Development by implication means theatre of the people by the people and/or the people. Theatre is a communal communicative activity, and an influential informant. It intensifies the experience of the participant and is capable of advancing the frontiers of the public audience beyond the familiar surroundings. Jide Timothy - Asiode in Akinwale (73) describes it as "one of the most powerful media of mass communication".

The incorporation of performance in Theatre-for-Development tradition has been producing tremendous results in various rural communities in the last few decades across different developmental, political, social, religious, health and educational projects. The Theatre for Development, which has played a role in mobilization process, can be employed in a planned and sustained process of sensitization of the public to adopt the message of sustainable development – making the environment safe for the public and future generations. In the area of sensitization, Theatre-for-Development may give pleasure, but the spirit of the performance derived from the informative, educational and didactic nature of its themes is very important. It enlightens the rural people, challenges and equips them with new developments, with a view of drawing out responses through re-orientation of attitudes, mobilization and implementation of policies. Hence Theatre-for-Development uses performance to enforce rural sensitization.

From the function earlier stated, Theatre-for-Development educates and informs the public

through traditional performance. Equally, it informs the people of the rural community of their plights and disadvantages being faced. These, however, create a mood and mobilize them to clamour for and achieve, change through community effort. Theatre-for-Development also entertains the public. Duruaku, asserts that "Art is a peep into the soul" (21). Therefore, in relaying the message of sensitizing the rural people, they should also enjoy the content of the performance. The styles and approaches of performance should be pleasurable to sink-in the ideology.

## **Economic Sustenance through Theatre for Development**

Sustainable Development here means the kind of development without interference hindrance or dependency on external forces. Theatre-for-Development helps the rural people by provoking their consciousness on how to try to solve their immediate problems, provide for themselves and maintain their environment without waiting continually for the government. This call for rural sensitization is basically a call for the adoption of sustainable development. Performance admonishes the people in the rural community to think about the present situation and state of things; in addition to making provision for the future and ensuring continuity of the community and people inhabiting the community.

As an ideology, sustainable development is "normative embracing social ecological and economic dimensions of conservation and change" (Hediger in Akinwale, 72). Theatre-for-Development has the efficacy of advocating a sustainable development in a community when there is a response to stimuli by the adoption of a new approach based on the profound nature of information made possible through performance. It is pertinent to recognize the fact that Theatre-for-Development is equated with and alternatively called "Community Theatre" - a term describing a group of

methodologies that employ performance (song, drama, and dance) as a mode of sensitizing the public to engender rural community development. Theatre-for-Development employs theatrical expressions at the grassroots level in order to research and analyse peculiar issues, situations and problems in an effort to create critical awareness and potential for action to solve those problems in the society as applicable in Eka Nung Ikot community.

Theatre for Development, mobilizes the rural people to the reality of the fact that they are actually responsible for any untoward circumstances faced in the society, and inspires them to take sufficient steps based on informed decision to change their status quo for better. It creates awareness through learning, watching, listening, setting agenda, putting ideas into the minds of the public and ensuring that information are properly given to provoke them into positive action. It stirs them to depend most importantly on what they can afford to offer their communities without depending on the government for development and places the destiny of the people in their hands - prompting them to chart a positive course for themselves and the society. Theatre-for-Development can be regarded as a weapon capable of curbing the economic, social and political malady of the society through the process of sensitization, consideration and liberation through massive mobilization.

Theatre-for-Development helps in registering the protest of the community people to attract the attention of the government. In effect, the employment of creative of imagination, acted by the people of the target community, stimulates the potentials and sustains communal participation in the development process. By engaging the rural people's imagination and harnessing their creativity in a process that deviates from description of realities to analysis of situations and possibility for change, Theatre-for-Development serves as a medium for exploring situation and rehearsing for change. It helps the public to alter activities which threaten

their sustainable livelihood and considers their impact on their environment. Through Theatre for Development, people in the target community (as in the case of Eka Nung Ikot) helped able to identify their challenges, articulate their problems and presented solutions to these problems through participation in the research, analysis, drama-performance and evaluation.

### **Analysis of TfD Experience in Eka Nung Ikot Community**

Eka Nung Ikot is the clan headquarters of Nung Ikot Clan and a community in Oruk Anam Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Eka Nung Ikot Community is predominantly a Christian community with comparatively very few pagans holding on tenaciously to established traditional customs and rites. With a population of about 4000 (four thousand), the people of Eka Nung Ikot community shares one common language (Annang) as a means of communication. The major occupations of the people of Eka Nung Ikot Community are: farming, trading and fishing. The village modes of transportation are bicycles and motorcycle because the networks of the roads are in a deplorable state especially during rainy season. The men cultivate the land, harvest palm fruits, dredge gravel and sand, engage in pottery and also tap palm wine. The women are engaged in milling of palm oil as well as cassava processing. Both men and the women are engaged in trading of fish, fruits and other edibles. There is no single health facility in the village except some counter-drugs selling, no schools except in the neighbouring villages. The village has a clan head with his cabinet (other village heads and Family Heads) who together form the governing council, headed by the Village (clan) Head. The women in the village are well coordinated under one umbrella as a union. The village has a market square where farm products are bought and exchanged for services. The people of Eka Nung Ikot Community are hard-working people and very hospitable. The youths are also engaging in the

available occupations in the village. It is a peaceful village.

### **Analytical Stages of TfD Project in *Eka Nung Ikot* Community**

The emerging approach to the use of Theatre-for-Development as a developmental tool provides some basis for the designing of a communication model through which the development message and the theatre medium relate to the ideas of people and their experiences in specific social contexts. Within this approach the idea is now well established that community people can be changed to adapt to what can bring development to them and the community. It means that the Theatre-for-Development makes the people not to be passive recipient of messages but more actively involved in the developmental process. The process of involving a broad section of the community in exploring issues relating to their common interest and sharing experience through dramatic action, on efforts to survive and be developed within a natural and social landscape to provide a developmental impact.

In Eka Nung Ikot Community, the Theatre-for-Development practical project was well coordinated under the facilitation of the researcher with the following analytical stages:

**1. Entry and First Visit:** The entry into a village in Theatre-for-Development practical is borne out of careful consideration of the target audience-community for the message of development. Eka Nung Ikot Community, being a remote village with little or no government presence was chosen for the research project because of its potentials for development if equipped with the right developmental message. To this end the researcher, along and his team decided to use Eka Nung Ikot Community. The first visit by the researcher was to the Village Head, Okuku Pius Eka, at his palace where introduction was made and a robust conversation to what the intended research was all

about. It was quite an interesting session as the Clan head took time to take the researcher around the community and explaining things of interests. The initial entry into the Eka Nung Ikot Community was basically for rapport building.

**2. Meeting with the People:** After the first stage, the next stage in the process was for the researcher, based on the instruction by the Clan Head, to meet with the identified stakeholders and personalities that were well respected by the people in the community. This became important in order to gain access and acceptance to carry out the Theatre-for-Development project. The stakeholders and personalities in Eka Nung Ikot Community include the Chiefs and Family Heads (Village Council).



**The Researcher in a session with Stakeholders of Eka Nung Ikot Community** Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

This meeting was an influential strategy to identify with because it served the researcher an opportunity to make the intention of the Theatre-for-Development project known to these respected personalities and the community authority before moving on to carry out the project with the village people. At this point, the researcher and his facilitators were led by the Clan Head, who

mobilized the community members and facilitated several meetings with them as the project demanded.

### 3. Interactive session with members of Eka Nung Ikot Community

A special day was fixed for the community stakeholders and the community people to meet with the project team in order to have a face-to-face discussion concerning the project to be carried out. In attendance were the Clan Head, family heads, women, men as well as the youth. The meeting was held at the village square.



**Interactive session with members of Eka Nung Ikot Community** Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

The researcher with his team discussed the project objectives with the villagers (focus group), stressing that 'self-help' action is all they need as an alternative to their problems and challenges while waiting for the government. The people asked pertinent questions and answers were provided convincingly. This session helped in mobilizing the villagers and cohered the social capital at the village level that would help in the project.

**4. Participation:** Through participation the people engaged actively in identifying, evaluating and exchanging views on how to contribute to the development of their village. According to Bappa and Steve, "the practice of Theatre-for-Development indicates a strong belief in the creative capacity of

every individual and attempts at restoring the use of that power to the larger majority of the society" (18). To get the people to be fully involved in the process, the researcher also engaged the use of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) to help in the Theatre-for-Development implementation in Eka Nung Ikot Community. According to Abah "Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is an assemblage of tools and techniques which re-conceptualize the traditional... and makes them more participatory... in which community members are involved..." (124). However, the researcher used the participatory approach to facilitate a process of collective analysis and learning. This was necessary as a strategy in the project as it offered the opportunity to go beyond more consultation and promote active participation of the community people.

**5. Understanding the Situation:** Investigation in Eka Nung Ikot Community led to the discovery of their peculiar condition of living there. In the community the access roads were in a deplorable state because of gully erosion. Also, there was no single health facility in the community as well as school. Services in education and health were obtained from the neighbouring villages. As a result, the level of death in Eka Nung Ikot Community has been a major challenge. According to the Clan Head, "patients died on the process on getting to the next village for attention" (Interview session). Also, the level of illiteracy has become too high as that many youths cannot gain access to school to be educated.



**The Researcher with volunteers on environmental tour of Eka Nung Ikot Community Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024**

Concentrations of the people of Eka Nung Ikot Community were majorly focused on their deteriorating economic culture that has affected the people making it difficult for them to raise money and feed themselves. This community in terms of socials has been detached from basic infrastructure and needed facilities.

**6. Script Improvisation:** In understanding the situation of the village and the people, considering the technical implication in the Theatre-for-Development process, the next task for the researcher was to improvise a play for the participants. In Eka Nung Ikot Community, the improvised script had all the identified problems woven into the dramatic piece.

**7. Selecting Cast and Crew:** Selecting the cast and crew for the actions in the improvised script was really an experience as the villagers were almost all interested in being part of the cast and crew to be recorded.



**Cross-section of cast and crew of the TfD performance in Eka Nung Ikot Community Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024**

However, the researcher made sure that all participants with a zealous interest were given roles to play in the performance. The cast and crew have

only the villager under the supervision and direction of the researcher.

**8. Rehearsal:** At the stage, the researcher in agreement with the people of Eka Nung Ikot Community scheduled 2 particular days of the week (Friday and Saturday) from 4:30 pm for the rehearsals. The decision for this day and time for rehearsals was a decision reached considering the farming season where everybody is engaged in planting activities. The decision of fixing Friday was reached in collaboration with the community people based on the fact that from 5pm on Fridays, people in the village are not allowed to go to their farms as traditionally observed. During this period, the researcher also made sure that the rehearsal duration was short for the people. The rehearsal session was all fun as the participants acted themselves out with their peculiar situation. The rehearsal was done at the village square as the participants perfect the skills for their roles with optimism to deliver perfectly in the performance day, where the whole villagers were expected to come out to watch their community theatre production.

**9. Performance Proper:** The date of the real performance was agreed with the community people and Eka Nung Ikot Community Council to take place on Sunday by 3pm.

The reasons of this agreement was to ensure that people attend the performance in good numbers and without excuses of going for work or engaged in farming since Sunday is a special day for rest in Eka Nung Ikot Community. One of the scenes dramatized a family to be surviving through local palm milling industry. All the scenes in the performance showcased how palm fruits are cultivated, processed and milled. It was dramatically presented to awaken the people on the traditional skills and techniques in the palm industry and mobilize them for economic sustenance and development.



**Dramatic Scene with indigenes of *Eka Nung Ikot* Community on traditional skills and processes in Palm harvesting and production** Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024.



**Performance scene in *Eka Nung Ikot* Community**  
Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

**10. Session for Questions and Answers:** The last but not the least stage is the Feedback process. This stage after the performance, is called the “Follow-up and Evaluation” was carried out with the entire villagers after the performance production. It was also interactive session for the researcher and the participants where questions were asked and answers given based on the dramatic presentation that captured issues challenging the Eka Nung Ikot Community to be mobilized for development. This session was facilitated with the help of the project volunteer-facilitators. It went to support Bassey's assertion that “indigenous wisdom has played a key

role in solving local issues and continues to do so" (111).



**Researcher with TfD project Volunteer-Facilitators in Eka Nung Ikot Community**

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

### **Mobilization and Developmental Effects of Community Theatre in Eka Nung Ikot**

In assessing the tool of Theatre-for-Development for community mobilization and cultural development can only be analysed as a "Follow-up and Evaluation" of the entire project.



**Dramatic scene showcasing traditional pottery skills and process** Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

The researcher was privileged to lead his group in 2024 Theatre-for-Development project at Eka Nung Ikot Community as shown in the research picture but fulfilled the last stage in the process to follow-up, get Knowledgeable Research (KR) 2026, vol.5, Issue.01

the feedback responses and evaluate the effect of the community theatre project in the areas of rural mobilization and cultural development. A follow-up visit showed that the people were revived in their cultural practices on seeing the beauty of their cultural practices as re-enacted in different scenes of the performance in Theatre for Development. Also, it was discovered that the villagers taking a cue from the researcher and his team's effort in manual construction of the deplorable roads, that were really worked on to be passable. It was also observed that the people were optimistic of getting some of their forgotten unique cultural practices back. It should be observed from the researcher's perspective that life standard has been enhanced in Eka Nung Ikot Community as the people and their consciousness have been awakened, mobilized to develop their culture and enhance rural coexistence without depending on the government. It should be observed from experiment and observation from the researcher's follow-up exercise, that Theatre-for-Development is no doubt an available veritable tool for rural mobilization and cultural development from the experience of Theatre-for-Development engagement in Eka Nung Ikot Community.



**Performance scene showcasing the traditional craft skills in making palm-roofing sheets** Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024

The traditional industries that are unique to the people of Eka Nung Ikot (facing extinction) were carefully researched by the traditional stakeholders

who volunteered to replicate them during the project performance in order to help revive these skill and techniques for economic sustenance and independence. These traditional included but not limited to arts and crafts making, delicacies, palm milling, palm wine tapping, gravel/sand excavation, pottery, farming, food processing, etc.



**Traditional process of preparing unique delicacies of Eka Nung Ikot Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024**



**Dramatization of traditional skills and techniques in Cassava products and Processing Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024**

The men, women, boys, girls and even children showcased their performance that demonstrated their traditional industrial skills and processes involved and for them to be mobilized to guarantee their development.

**A cast member demonstrating traditional skills for palm wine tapping in *Eka Nung Ikot* Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024**

Because of traditional skills, techniques and processes in local production (which were natural) and facing extinction in various local communities in Africa, the call for Theatre-for-Development becomes expedient for economic sensitization in the revival of traditional industrial skills and processes that are gradually being phased out in the contemporary world – to the detriment of local productions and rural economy.

## Conclusion

The engagement of Theatre-for-Development as an instrument for rural mobilization and cultural development in the context of this study as implied Theatre-for-Development as a basic tool readily available in rural communities to sensitizes the rural people to the reality of the fact that they are actually responsible for any outward circumstances faced in their communities, and are inspired to take significant steps based on informed decision to change their status quo in order to bring and attract economic development and sustenance. Engaging Theatre-for-Development from the example in Eka Nung Ikot Community created the revival awareness of the traditional skills peculiar to their naturally and uniquely endowed industries through dramatic learning, watching, listening, thinking and putting ideas into the minds of the people for the need to revisit these endangered traditional industrial skills and ensuring that information are properly given

through the performance to provoke them into positive actions of engagement for economic sustenance and development.

Theatre-for-Development stirs the rural community members to depend most importantly on what they can afford to offer their communities without depending on the government for development. It places destiny of the community in the hands of the people in terms of promoting their economic value and well-being, thereby prompting them to chart positive course for themselves to be mobilized and develop their community. The engagement of Theatre-for-Development also helps in registering the protest of the community people in order to attract the attention of the government. It also stimulates the potentials and sustains communal participation in economic sustenance and development progress. The practical engagement of Theatre-for-Development as experimented by the researcher, in Eka Nung Ikot Community, proved all the aforementioned benefits and servicing as a medium for exploring situations and rehearsing for economic survival. Observation from the practical project emphasized the utility of Theatre-for-Development (TfD) in an attempt to revive the endangered African unique local skills and traditional industrial processes for economic dependency and sustenance. The experience from Eka Nung Ikot, further supports the fact that rural mobilization for economic development is possible through Theatre-for-Development process if it is well coordinated and engaged with desired purposes.

Additionally, Theatre-for-Development as applied in Eka Nung Ikot Community has proven to be of immense benefits to the community. It has established the plausibility and possibility of using its peculiar strategies as a theatre that promotes communal economic values and mobilizing the rural community people to dramatically realize challenges of danger facing traditional industries and the need to revive these unique developmental ideas backed with actions for sustainable economic development.

As presented in this paper, the importance of engaging Theatre-for-Development in rural mobilization to revive the endangered African unique local skills and traditional industrial processes for economic dependency and sustenance, is not in doubt but rather should be encouraged and promoted in the rural community development process. Since Theatre-for-Development from the example in Eka Nung Ikot Community has proven to be a potent and credible tool for these aforementioned reasons, it is imperative for its engagement at every community level for these and other purposes. It is believed that the analytical presentation of Theatre-for-Development practice, as shown in this paper, should encourage economic development planners and practitioners, government as well as rural communities to consider the engagement of Theatre-for-Development to sensitize, mobilize and educate the people in Nigerian rural communities for the essence of diverse spheres of development. Theatre-based organisations and professionals should avail themselves to utilize Theatre-for-Development to further strengthen the traditional developmental and mobilization processes at the rural levels for more productive results. The study also recommends that government at all levels should finance the engagement of Theatre-for-Development in developing communities by partnering with Theatre-for-Development practitioners and professionals in the rural intervention process to educate the community people for the purpose of reviving their productive traditional industrial skills and techniques for economic sustenance and development.

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