THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA: A STUDY OF *EZIOKWU BU NDU* THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION IN NIBO COMMUNITY

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Abstract
Women's political participation is widely recognised as a fundamental requirement for democratic governance, inclusive development, and social justice. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and increasing advocacy for gender inclusion in Nigeria, women remain underrepresented in elective and appointive political positions, particularly at the grassroots level. This study examines the role of Theatre for Development (TfD) in enhancing women's political participation in Anambra State, using the *Eziokwu Bu Ndu* (Truth is Life) Theatre for Development intervention in Nibo Community, Awka South Local Government Area, as a case study. Anchored on Paulo Freire's Dialogical Theory and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, the study adopted a qualitative case study design. Data were generated through participant observation, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, participatory theatre workshops, and post-performance dialogue. Findings revealed that participatory theatre increased women's political awareness, challenged patriarchal stereotypes, enhanced leadership confidence, and promoted community dialogue on inclusive governance. The intervention also demonstrated that indigenous performance forms such as storytelling, music, dance, role-play, and audience participation are effective tools for civic education and grassroots mobilisation. The study concludes that Theatre for Development is a culturally relevant and sustainable strategy for promoting women's political participation and strengthening democratic governance in Anambra State. It recommends the institutionalisation of Theatre for Development in civic education, leadership development, and voter sensitisation programmes across Nigeria.

Keywords: *Theatre for Development, Women's Political Participation, Participatory Theatre, Gender Equality, Democratic Governance, Nibo Community, Anambra State.*

Introduction

Political participation is widely regarded as one of the defining characteristics of democratic governance. It refers to the involvement of citizens in political processes, including voting, contesting elections, influencing public policy, engaging in political parties, and participating in community decision-making. A democratic society thrives when all citizens, irrespective of gender, are afforded equal opportunities to contribute to governance and national development. Consequently, the inclusion of women in political leadership has become a global priority, reflected in international instruments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goal 5 on Gender Equality), and the African Union's Agenda 2063, all of which advocate increased participation of women in governance and public decision-making.

According to the National Population Commission (2023), women constitute a substantial proportion of Nigeria's population, while the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports continuing gender disparities in political representation and decision-making. These statistics underscore the importance of promoting women's participation in governance through innovative community-based interventions such as Theatre for Development. Despite these international commitments and constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality, women in Nigeria remain significantly underrepresented in politics. Although women constitute nearly half of the country's population and make substantial contributions to economic, social, and community development, their representation in elective and appointive political offices remains

disproportionately low. In Anambra State, women have distinguished themselves in education, entrepreneurship, public service, academia, and community leadership. Nevertheless, cultural norms, patriarchal traditions, financial constraints, electoral violence, inadequate political mentoring, and limited access to party structures continue to hinder their effective participation in formal political processes. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches that move beyond conventional political campaigns and information dissemination. Theatre for Development (TfD) has emerged as one of the most effective participatory communication strategies for promoting social transformation. Unlike conventional theatre, which primarily entertains audiences, TfD actively involves community members in identifying development challenges, creating dramatic representations of their lived experiences, and collectively exploring practical solutions. Through dialogue, role-play, storytelling, indigenous songs, dance, and audience participation, TfD encourages critical reflection, empowers marginalised groups, and strengthens community ownership of development initiatives.

Anambra State has a rich tradition of indigenous performance practices that provide fertile ground for participatory theatre. The Eziokwu Bu Ndu (Truth is Life) Theatre for Development intervention conducted in Nibo Community exemplifies the application of participatory theatre to community development. Conceived, directed, and produced by the researcher, the project engaged women, youths, traditional leaders, and other stakeholders in identifying local challenges and generating culturally appropriate solutions through dramatic performance and post-performance dialogue. The intervention demonstrated the capacity of Theatre for Development to stimulate civic consciousness, encourage inclusive participation, and strengthen community engagement.

Against this background, this study examines the role of Theatre for Development in promoting women's political participation in Anambra State, using the Eziokwu Bu Ndu intervention in Nibo Community as an empirical case study. Specifically, the study investigates how participatory theatre enhances political awareness, challenges gender stereotypes, strengthens leadership confidence, and promotes democratic participation among women. By integrating field-based evidence with existing scholarship on Theatre for Development and gender studies, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on participatory communication while offering practical strategies for advancing inclusive governance and sustainable democratic development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Women's political participation is widely recognised as an indispensable element of democratic governance, sustainable development, and social inclusion. Although Nigeria has adopted constitutional provisions and international commitments that promote gender equality, women's representation in elective and appointive political offices remains considerably low. In Anambra State, despite women's significant contributions to community development, education, business, and public service, their participation in political leadership and decision-making continues to be constrained by socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers.

Patriarchal traditions, gender stereotypes, political intimidation, electoral violence, financial limitations, inadequate political mentoring, and limited access to party structures discourage many qualified women from contesting elections or actively engaging in governance. Conventional voter education and political awareness campaigns have achieved only limited success because they often rely on one-way communication, providing information without creating opportunities for dialogue, critical reflection, and community participation. Consequently, many grassroots women remain politically marginalised, while discriminatory perceptions about women's leadership persist.

Theatre for Development (TfD) offers a participatory communication approach capable of addressing these challenges by engaging communities in dialogue, collective problem identification, and action-oriented solutions through indigenous performance forms. While previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of TfD in health promotion, environmental awareness, education, and conflict resolution,

limited empirical research has examined its application in promoting women's political participation in Anambra State. This study contributes to scholarship in Theatre for Development, Applied Theatre, Gender Studies, and Development Communication by providing empirical evidence on the use of participatory theatre to promote women's political participation. The findings will be valuable to theatre practitioners, researchers, policymakers, civil society organisations, electoral bodies, political parties, and community leaders seeking innovative approaches to strengthening democratic governance. The study also provides a practical model for integrating Theatre for Development into civic education, leadership development, voter sensitisation, and grassroots mobilisation programmes. Furthermore, by documenting the Eziokwu Bu Ndu intervention in Nibo Community, the study enriches existing literature and offers a replicable framework for promoting gender-inclusive governance in Anambra State and other communities in Nigeria.

This study therefore investigates how Theatre for Development can enhance women's political awareness, leadership confidence, and democratic participation, using the Eziokwu Bu Ndu Theatre for Development intervention in Nibo Community as an empirical case study. It seeks to demonstrate that participatory theatre can serve as an effective strategy for fostering gender-inclusive governance and strengthening democratic participation at the grassroots level.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the role of Theatre for Development in promoting women's political participation in Anambra State using the *Eziokwu bu Ndu* Theatre for Development intervention in Nibo Community as a case study.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors limiting women's political participation in Anambra State.
2. Assess the effectiveness of Theatre for Development as a participatory communication strategy for promoting political awareness among women.
3. Evaluate the impact of the Eziokwu Bu Ndu Theatre for Development intervention on women's leadership confidence and civic engagement.
4. Determine how participatory theatre can challenge gender stereotypes and promote inclusive democratic governance.
5. Recommend practical strategies for integrating Theatre for Development into civic education and grassroots political mobilisation programmes.

Theatre for Development (TfD)

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a participatory communication approach that employs drama, music, dance, storytelling, role-play, mime, and other indigenous performance forms to stimulate dialogue, encourage community participation, and promote social transformation. Unlike conventional theatre, which is primarily entertainment-oriented and audience-centred, Theatre for Development actively involves community members in identifying their developmental challenges, analysing the underlying causes, dramatizing their experiences, and collectively generating practical solutions. Consequently, participants become co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information.

The philosophy of Theatre for Development is grounded in participation, empowerment, dialogue, and collective action. It recognises that sustainable development cannot be imposed externally but must emerge from the active involvement of the people whose lives are directly affected by social, economic, and political issues. Through participatory performance, communities critically examine their realities and develop strategies for improving their conditions.

In Nigeria, Theatre for Development has been widely applied in campaigns relating to public health, environmental sustainability, literacy, conflict resolution, agriculture, peacebuilding, youth development,

and gender advocacy. Within Anambra State, Theatre for Development has equally served as a medium for community mobilisation and civic engagement. The Eziokwu Bu Ndu (Truth is Life) Theatre for Development intervention in Nibo Community exemplifies how participatory theatre can promote dialogue, community ownership, and social transformation while addressing issues affecting democratic participation and inclusive governance.

Theoretical Framework: Theatre of the Oppressed & Pedagogy of the Oppressed

This study is anchored on Paulo Freire's Dialogical Theory and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, both of which provide a strong foundation for understanding Theatre for Development as a participatory strategy for social transformation.

Paulo Freire's Dialogical Theory

Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) advocates dialogue as the foundation of education and development. Freire argues that people become agents of change when they critically examine their social realities through collective discussion and reflection. He rejected the traditional "banking model" of education, where learners passively receive information, and instead promoted participatory learning that empowers individuals to identify and solve their own problems.

The concept of conscientization—the development of critical consciousness—is particularly relevant to this study. Through Theatre for Development, women are encouraged to reflect on the cultural, political, and institutional barriers affecting their participation in governance and to develop strategies for overcoming them. The Eziokwu Bu Ndu intervention reflects Freire's philosophy by placing dialogue, participation, and collective action at the centre of community development.

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1979) complements Freire's ideas by transforming spectators into active participants or "spect-actors." Boal maintained that theatre should not merely entertain but should empower people to challenge oppression, rehearse social action, and explore alternative ways of transforming society.

Techniques such as Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, and participatory role-play enable communities to analyse social problems and experiment with practical solutions before applying them in real-life situations. The emphasis on participation makes Boal's theory particularly relevant to Theatre for Development.

During the Eziokwu Bu Ndu intervention, participants were not passive observers but active contributors to the theatrical process. Through performance and post-performance dialogue, women and other stakeholders critically examined issues relating to political exclusion, gender stereotypes, and community leadership. This participatory process enhanced civic awareness, strengthened leadership confidence, and encouraged collective responsibility for promoting inclusive governance.

Together, Freire's Dialogical Theory and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed provide an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. While Freire explains the educational value of dialogue and critical consciousness, Boal demonstrates how participatory theatre translates dialogue into social action. Their complementary perspectives affirm that Theatre for Development is an effective strategy for empowering women, promoting political participation, and strengthening democratic governance in Anambra State.

Theatre for Development and Community Transformation

Theatre for Development (TfD) has become one of the most influential participatory communication approaches for promoting social transformation in Africa. Unlike conventional theatre, which is primarily designed for entertainment, TfD is community-oriented and development-driven. It employs indigenous performance forms such as storytelling, music, dance, role-play, mime, and audience participation to stimulate dialogue, encourage critical reflection, and inspire collective action. The central philosophy of

TfD is that sustainable development can only be achieved when community members actively participate in identifying their challenges, analysing the causes of those challenges, and implementing locally generated solutions. Freire (1970) argues that genuine development occurs when people become conscious of their social realities through dialogue and participation rather than through passive reception of information. His concept of conscientization has remained a cornerstone of participatory development practice across Africa. Similarly, Boal (1979) maintains that theatre should transform spectators into active participants or "spect-actors" who rehearse social change through performance. Together, these perspectives provide the philosophical foundation for Theatre for Development as a process of empowerment and democratic engagement. Etherton (1982) further observes that African community theatre derives its strength from indigenous cultural practices that encourage collective participation. By integrating traditional songs, proverbs, folktales, dances, and communal performances into development programmes, Theatre for Development creates culturally relevant communication that is easily understood and accepted by local communities. Mda (1993) similarly contends that participatory theatre promotes community ownership of development initiatives because the people themselves become the authors and performers of their own development narratives.

In Nigeria, Theatre for Development has been applied extensively in campaigns addressing HIV/AIDS prevention, maternal and child health, environmental sanitation, literacy education, agricultural extension, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and youth empowerment. These interventions consistently demonstrate that participatory communication produces more sustainable behavioural change than conventional top-down awareness campaigns. However, despite the growing body of literature on Theatre for Development, relatively limited attention has been given to its application in promoting women's political participation, particularly within southeastern Nigeria.

Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Women's political participation remains an important indicator of democratic governance and social inclusion. It encompasses voting, contesting elective offices, holding appointive positions, participating in political parties, influencing public policy, engaging in civic advocacy, and contributing to community decision-making. Inclusive democracy requires the equitable participation of both women and men in governance because diverse representation enhances accountability, social justice, and sustainable development. Although Nigeria has ratified several international conventions promoting gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women's representation in political leadership remains considerably below international expectations. The National Gender Policy advocates a minimum of 35 per cent affirmative representation for women in governance; however, this target has yet to be realised across federal, state, and local government institutions. Scholars identify numerous factors responsible for this disparity. These include patriarchal traditions, cultural stereotypes, financial constraints, electoral violence, political intimidation, limited access to party structures, weak institutional support, inadequate mentoring, and unequal distribution of political opportunities. These barriers discourage many qualified women from seeking political office despite their educational attainment, professional competence, and demonstrated leadership capacity.

In Anambra State, women have made remarkable contributions to commerce, education, public administration, entrepreneurship, and community development. Nevertheless, their representation in elective political offices remains relatively low. Ilodigwe and Uzoh (2024) observe that gender inequality and entrenched stereotypes continue to undermine women's participation in politics despite increasing public awareness of gender inclusion. Similarly, Obi et al. (2021) argue that political awareness campaigns positively influence women's participation in politics but emphasise that sustained community engagement is necessary to overcome deeply rooted socio-cultural barriers. These studies suggest that while legislative reforms and policy initiatives are important, they must be complemented by participatory communication approaches capable of transforming community attitudes and encouraging grassroots political engagement.

Theatre for Development and Women's Empowerment

The relationship between Theatre for Development and women's empowerment has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past three decades. Across Africa, participatory theatre has been employed to address issues relating to gender-based violence, reproductive health, economic empowerment, girl-child education, and women's rights. By creating safe spaces for dialogue and collective reflection, Theatre for Development enables women to articulate their experiences, negotiate solutions, and strengthen their capacity for leadership.

Participatory performances encourage women to challenge discriminatory practices while promoting collaboration among community members, traditional institutions, policymakers, and civil society organisations. Through role-playing and post-performance dialogue, women develop greater confidence in public speaking, decision-making, and advocacy, thereby strengthening their ability to participate in community affairs.

Despite these achievements, much of the existing literature has concentrated on health communication and social welfare programmes. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated the potential of Theatre for Development to enhance women's political participation, leadership aspirations, and democratic engagement. This gap is particularly evident in southeastern Nigeria, where empirical studies linking participatory theatre with political inclusion remain limited.

Theatre for Development in Anambra State

Anambra State possesses a rich heritage of indigenous performance traditions that provide fertile ground for participatory theatre interventions. Storytelling, music, dance, masquerade performances, festivals, and communal ceremonies continue to play significant roles in social communication and community mobilisation. These cultural resources have enabled Theatre for Development practitioners to implement programmes that address conflict management, public health, environmental sanitation, education, youth development, and community participation.

The Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, has contributed significantly to the advancement of Theatre for Development through community-based interventions across Anambra State. These projects have demonstrated that participatory theatre remains an effective strategy for encouraging dialogue, strengthening community ownership, and facilitating sustainable social change. A notable example is the Eziokwu Bu Ndu (Truth is Life) Theatre for Development intervention conducted in Nibo Community, Awka South Local Government Area. Conceived, directed, and produced by Ngozi Theresa Ekwunife, the project engaged community members in identifying development challenges and exploring practical solutions through participatory theatre. Women, youths, traditional leaders, and other stakeholders actively participated in the workshops, dramatic performances, and post-performance discussions. The intervention demonstrated how indigenous performance traditions could stimulate civic consciousness, encourage inclusive participation, and strengthen community collaboration.

The present study builds upon this intervention by examining its relevance to women's political participation. While previous publications on the Eziokwu Bu Ndu project focused primarily on community transformation and participatory communication, this study extends the discourse by exploring its implications for political awareness, leadership development, and democratic governance among women in Anambra State.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study research design to examine the role of Theatre for Development (TfD) in promoting women's political participation in Anambra State. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth information on participants' experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural responses during the Theatre for

Development intervention. The study focused on the Eziokwu Bu Ndu (Truth is Life) Theatre for Development project conducted in Nibo Community, Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State.

Nibo Community was purposively selected because of its previous involvement in participatory theatre interventions and its vibrant socio-cultural environment, which provided a suitable setting for examining the relationship between Theatre for Development and grassroots democratic participation. The community also possesses active women's associations, youth organisations, traditional institutions, and community development structures that facilitated broad stakeholder participation.

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge of community affairs and political participation. Participants included members of women's associations, market women, youth leaders, community development executives, traditional rulers, political party members, religious leaders, and local government representatives. Their diverse backgrounds enriched the discussions and ensured multiple perspectives on women's participation in governance. Data were generated through participant observation, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, participatory theatre workshops, dramatic performances, and post-performance dialogue sessions. During the preliminary community consultations, participants identified issues affecting women's participation in political and community leadership. These issues formed the basis for developing dramatic scenes and role-playing exercises that reflected the realities of the community. The *Eziokwu Bu Ndu* intervention was conceived, directed, and produced by the researcher, who also served as the lead facilitator throughout the participatory process. Indigenous performance elements—including the Igbo language, storytelling, songs, dance, proverbs, improvisation, and audience participation—were incorporated to ensure cultural relevance and encourage active involvement by community members.

Data collected from interviews, discussions, observations, and post-performance interactions were analysed using thematic analysis. Responses were organised into recurring themes relating to political awareness, gender stereotypes, leadership confidence, civic engagement, community dialogue, and democratic participation. These themes were subsequently interpreted within the context of Paulo Freire's Dialogical Theory and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was employed by comparing evidence obtained from different data collection methods and participant groups. Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, voluntary participation was encouraged, confidentiality was maintained, and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. These procedures ensured that the study complied with accepted ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants.

Analysis: Eziokwu Bu Ndu Theatre for Development Intervention in Nibo Community

The *Eziokwu bu Ndu* (Truth is Life) Theatre for Development intervention provides the empirical foundation for this study. The project was implemented in Nibo Community, Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, as a participatory communication initiative designed to address community development challenges through indigenous theatre practices. The intervention was conceived, directed, and produced by Dr. Ngozi Theresa Ekwunife, who also served as the lead facilitator throughout the project.

The choice of Nibo Community was informed by its strong tradition of communal participation and its willingness to engage in collaborative development initiatives. Preliminary consultations were held with traditional rulers, community leaders, women's organisations, youth groups, and other stakeholders to identify priority issues affecting the community. Rather than imposing predetermined themes, the intervention adopted the participatory philosophy of Theatre for Development by allowing community members to define the issues that directly affected their lives.

Following the community consultations, participatory workshops were organised to train volunteers in improvisation, role-playing, storytelling, and other indigenous performance techniques. Participants worked collectively with the facilitator to develop dramatic sketches based on their lived experiences. The resulting performances reflected issues such as gender inequality, poor community participation, leadership challenges, misinformation, civic responsibility, and barriers limiting women's involvement in public decision-making.

The performances incorporated culturally familiar forms of communication, including the Igbo language, traditional songs, dance, proverbs, humour, chants, and audience interaction. These indigenous elements enhanced audience engagement and ensured that the messages resonated with the cultural realities of the community. Unlike conventional theatre, the performances encouraged active audience participation, allowing spectators to interrupt scenes, suggest alternative actions, ask questions, and contribute their perspectives during post-performance discussions.

A major focus of the intervention was the exploration of women's roles in community leadership and democratic participation. Female participants discussed the challenges they encountered in seeking leadership positions, including patriarchal attitudes, financial constraints, limited political mentoring, and societal expectations that confined women to domestic responsibilities. Through role-playing and facilitated dialogue, participants critically examined these issues and collectively proposed strategies for promoting greater inclusion of women in governance.

The post-performance discussions emerged as one of the most significant components of the intervention. Community members openly reflected on the dramatic presentations and related them to their personal experiences. Women expressed increased confidence in their ability to participate in community meetings, political activities, and leadership positions. Male participants also acknowledged the need to support women's inclusion in decision-making processes, recognising that sustainable community development requires the active contributions of both women and men.

Participant observation further revealed noticeable changes in attitudes towards women's leadership. Many participants demonstrated a broader understanding of political participation, recognising that it extends beyond voting to include civic engagement, advocacy, community mobilisation, policy dialogue, and leadership at various levels. The intervention therefore served not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a catalyst for political education and community empowerment.

The *Eziokwu Bu Ndu* project illustrates the transformative potential of Theatre for Development as a participatory communication strategy. By creating an inclusive environment where community members identified problems, dramatised their experiences, reflected collectively, and proposed practical solutions, the intervention strengthened civic awareness, challenged discriminatory norms, and promoted democratic participation. The lessons derived from Nibo Community demonstrate that participatory theatre can serve as an effective model for enhancing women's political participation, fostering community ownership of development initiatives, and advancing inclusive governance across Anambra State and beyond.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that Theatre for Development (TfD) is an effective participatory communication strategy for promoting women's political participation in Anambra State. Evidence from the Eziokwu Bu Ndu Theatre for Development intervention in Nibo Community revealed that participatory theatre significantly enhanced political awareness, strengthened leadership confidence, challenged gender stereotypes, and promoted community dialogue on inclusive governance. One major finding is that many women possessed the interest and ability to participate in political processes but were discouraged by socio-cultural expectations, patriarchal traditions, financial limitations, political intimidation, and inadequate mentoring. Prior to the intervention, several participants perceived politics as

a male-dominated activity and expressed reluctance to seek leadership positions because of fear of discrimination and social criticism.

The participatory workshops and dramatic performances created opportunities for women to examine these barriers critically. Through role-playing, storytelling, songs, and post-performance discussions, participants recognised that political participation extends beyond voting to include leadership, advocacy, policy engagement, community mobilisation, and active involvement in decision-making. Women became more confident in expressing their opinions and participating in discussions relating to governance and community development.

Another significant finding was the effectiveness of indigenous performance forms in facilitating communication. The use of the Igbo language, proverbs, traditional songs, dance, humour, and storytelling enhanced audience participation and enabled community members to relate the dramatic performances to their everyday experiences. These culturally relevant communication methods encouraged dialogue among women, youths, traditional rulers, and other stakeholders, thereby strengthening collective ownership of the development process.

The findings support Freire's (1970) Dialogical Theory, which emphasises dialogue and critical consciousness as essential for empowerment, and Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed, which transforms spectators into active participants capable of challenging oppressive social structures. The Eziokwu Bu Ndu intervention demonstrated that Theatre for Development is not merely a performance activity but a practical mechanism for civic education, behavioural change, and democratic participation. The study therefore confirms that participatory theatre can complement conventional political education by addressing the cultural and social barriers that hinder women's political inclusion.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Anambra State Government should incorporate Theatre for Development into civic education, voter sensitisation, and leadership development programmes. Political parties, civil society organisations, and electoral bodies should collaborate with theatre practitioners to promote women's political participation through community-based participatory theatre. The Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, should continue to expand Theatre for Development projects that address democratic governance and gender inclusion. Traditional rulers, women's organisations, and community leaders should support indigenous performance initiatives that challenge discriminatory stereotypes and encourage women to participate actively in leadership and decision-making. Similar interventions should also be replicated in other communities across Anambra State and Nigeria to strengthen grassroots democracy and inclusive governance.

Conclusion

This study has established that Theatre for Development is a viable participatory communication strategy for enhancing women's political participation in Anambra State. Using the Eziokwu Bu Ndu Theatre for Development intervention in Nibo Community as an empirical case study, the research demonstrated that participatory theatre promotes political awareness, strengthens leadership confidence, challenges patriarchal stereotypes, and encourages community dialogue on democratic governance. By integrating indigenous performance traditions with participatory communication, Theatre for Development provides culturally relevant opportunities for empowering women and fostering inclusive political participation.The study contributes to knowledge by extending the application of Theatre for Development beyond health communication and community development to the field of democratic governance and women's political participation. It further provides empirical evidence from Anambra State that participatory theatre can effectively enhance civic engagement and gender inclusion. The findings offer a practical model for policymakers, theatre practitioners, researchers, and development organisations seeking innovative approaches to promoting grassroots democracy and sustainable social transformation in Nigeria.

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