COMMUNITY THEATRE AS A TOOL FOR BIRTH CONTROL IN
BEKWARRA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE-
NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined the problem of understanding Community Theatre as a tool for controlling outrageous birth rate in Bekwarra Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. In line with the study problem, Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory served as the frame. The study blended qualitative and quantitative methods of research for data collection and analysis. Because of the enormous population size of the people which was 105,497 according to Federal Republic of Nigeria’s official Gazette 25, a multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used to draw out a sample of 150 respondents for the study. Data generated were analyzed, using simple percentages and thematic analysis of emerging issues during the investigation. Findings reveal that community theatre is a better medium for sensitization to birth control because of its strong influence on personal and social development of the people through drama. This study therefore recommends that Bekwarra Healthcare Management teams should form community drama group and frequently develop interventions, using drama and workshop which are community theatre strategies that embody the capacity to make people understand the importance of using artificial contraceptive methods for births regulation.

Key Words: Community Theatre, Birth, Birth Control

Résumé
Cette étude a analysé le problème de la compréhension du théâtre communautaire en tant qu’outil de contrôle du taux élevé de naissance dans l’arrondissement Bekwarra de l’État Cross River, Nigéria. S’alignant à la problématique interrogée, l’étude penche sur le cadre théorique ‘Social Learning’ développé par Albert Bandura. Elle a combiné des méthodes qualitatives et quantitatives de recherche pour la collecte et l’analyse des données. En raison de l’énorme taille de la population, 105,497 personnes selon le Journal officiel 25 de la République Fédérale du Nigéria, une technique d’échantillonnage en groupe à plusieurs phases a été utilisée pour prélever un échantillon de 150 répondants à l’étude. Les données produites ont été analysées à l’aide de pourcentages et d’une analyse thématique des problèmes émergents au cours de l’enquête. Les résultats montrent
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que le théâtre communautaire est un bon moyen de sensibilisation au sujet du contrôle des naissances en raison de sa forte influence sur le développement personnel et social de la population. Cette étude recommande que les équipes de gestion des soins de santé à Bekwarra forment un groupe de théâtre communautaire et développent fréquemment des interventions utilisant le théâtre et les ateliers, qui sont des stratégies de théâtre communautaire qui incarnent la capacité de faire comprendre aux gens l'importance d'utiliser des méthodes de contraception artificielle pour le contrôle des naissances.

Mots clés: Théâtre communautaire, naissance, contrôle des naissances

Introduction
Uncontrolled birth resulting to having too many children is virtually a wide spread phenomenon in many parts of the world, especially in Africa and this has often contributed negatively to the nation’s social and economic development. The situation is not different in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Theatre can play an important role in addressing this. Theatre is increasingly becoming a predominant tool for sensitization and mobilization of local communities for positive development. “Theatre is a folk art which, like any such art, must originate in the community. It can best be developed and communicated to the audience by people who ‘speak the same language’ with the audience, people who must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel, and thus interpret phenomena, in roughly similar ways” (Ekpe 149). Community theatre specifically aims at creating opportunity for the people to own the process of research into their problem, creating new knowledge and interrogating old ones as well as sharing this knowledge with other members of the community. The focus here is about checking outrageous birth rate of individuals through drama as a research and communication tool.

Statement of the Problem
This study examined the problem of understanding Community Theatre as a tool for controlling outrageous birth rate in Bekwarra Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. Observably, the problem of uncontrolled birth is occasioned by the pride and prestige among many Bekwarra men to have plenty children that become difficult for them to take care of. Before now, Bekwarra Primary Healthcare Providers carried out sensitization on the implications of having many children through conventional communication approaches such as posters, leaflet, bill board, radio and TV and provider-client communication. In spite of these efforts, the birth rate in Bekwarra Local Government Area is on the increase due to cultural beliefs of the people. It is in the light of this problem that this study considered the application of a participatory process of research, learning and
communication by involving the healthcare providers and the community in a community theatre process on the subject matter. Community theatre in this study therefore presents an alternative communication approach to birth control.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Community theatre refers to theatrical performance developed to address a particular problem in a particular community. "It instigates change in perceptions and initiates action towards the surmounting of whatever difficulty individuals are facing" (Okam, 30). This form of theatre performance is usually made by the community members themselves and for the community, targeted primarily to address an identified problem hindering the development of the said community. It may further be referred to as a performance that is made entirely by a community with no outside help, or in collaboration between non-professional community members and professional theatre facilitators, or to performance made entirely by theatre professionals that is addressed to a particular community (Simon and Delyse). No matter this diversity of meaning, community theatre is generally understood and used to describe theatre that in some way addresses the needs of the community in which it is developed or performed. That is, it “strives to create alternative realities for its target audience” (Chinyowa 3). Going by Chinyowa’s position, community theatre has the potential to create an immediate and lasting impact in the life of Bekwarra people by making them realize the implications of giving birth to plenty children. Since this form of theatre requests for an audience that has the heart to accept change, it is believed that its dramatic activity specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies (Nicholson Helen 2), would reshape the thinking, perception of Bekwarra people. “Community theatre occurs everywhere around us in the world in different forms, yielding a broad range of performance styles whose emphases are often predicated on local and/or personal stories (rather than pre-written scripts) that are first processed through improvisation and then collectively shaped into theatre under the guidance either of outside professional artists or of local amateur artists residing among groups of people that, for lack of a better term, could perhaps best be called ‘peripheral’” (Erven 17). It is a form of Theatre for Development known for its ability to "target people who have been marginalized in development and also involves them efficiently in a process that emphasizes dialogue, conscientization, empowerment and action," (Okam, 231). So it is apparent that community theatre in this study would give residents of different communities ample opportunity to come together and share information, encourage community dialogue so as to enable them change their erroneous way of thinking. The dramatization of a problem has noticeably, drawn people's attention and made them focus on that problem in a way that challenged their perception of their circumstances. This encourages them to take a fresh look at
the situation and exude assiduous efforts for new solutions. Therefore, community theatre here is used as a two-way communication process which includes serving as a catalyst for involving Bekwarra people in discussion and action on their problems rather than merely waiting for external solutions.

Theoretical Framework
The study made use of Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. Social Learning or Social Cognitive Theory according to Bandura is a theory that explains how people can learn behaviours of other people through observation. The Theory posits that people learn how to behave by observing the actions of others; observing apparent consequences of those actions; checking those consequences for their own lives; and rehearsing and trying out those actions themselves (C-Modules: Module 0, Session 4, 11). It can easily be said that Social Learning Theory is predicated on observational learning process among people. These people from whom such characters are emulated or learned are automatically recognized as models. For instance, a young Bekwarra man or woman who admires and appreciates his or her parent’s tradition of giving birth to plenty children may want to be like them. In this case, his parent whose character he admires and appreciates becomes his model to the extent that he wants to be like them. Social Learning Theory asserts that human behaviours are learned observationally through modeling i.e. individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behaviour if it results in outcomes they value (Bandura 22). Bandura further makes us understand that desired behaviour could be planted in characters whose actions will serve as a model for other people who are in turn influenced through attention, retention and motivation. This theory establishes an interlocking joint with the problem of this research, making it a better theory for the study in the sense that it helped the researcher to explain the nature of many Bekwarra Youths to learn behaviours by watching the behaviour of not only their promiscuous parents, but other people around them, and eventually, imitate them and continue to feel motivated to repeat the behaviour.

Over the years, the inappropriateness in the control of birth by the parents of these youths has only succeeded in escalating the rate of illiterate and illegitimate children in the community, making it possible for one to ask if the youths (young men) themselves can embrace this behaviour of giving birth to many children and still not follow the same line of abandoning these children to cater for themselves. The essence of this question is exemplified in the "Bobo Doll” experiment(s) which Bandura included an adult who was tasked to act aggressively towards a Bobo Doll while the children observed him. Later, Bandura let the children play inside a room with the Bobo Doll. He affirmed that these children imitated the aggressive behaviour toward the doll, which they had
observed earlier (Sincero 2). Even though a Northwestern psychologist Donald Campbell (94) describes the acquisition of behaviour as optional and suggests some ways that we learn to choose one option over another, this researcher has used the theory in line with Bandura’s, specifically to show that the relationship between Bekwarra youths and their parents is influential and admirable.

Methodology: Communication Design, Channels of Communication/ Message Style and Delivery

This study was basically a survey research. It employed Community Theatre Strategy using both qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis methods. The qualitative method helped the researcher to examine the participant’s experiences in detail especially during the workshop session. They include observation, interview and drama, while the quantitative data gathering tool was head count to ascertain the numeric figures of the respondents. The Drama presentation, questions and answer session and head count were incorporated into community workshop which took place at Ugboro Community Old Junction otherwise known as Mini Market. The drama with the title ‘Plenty Children, Extra Load’ was developed by the affected audience with the help of the researcher as the facilitator and presented before a seating audience who happened to be other members of that same community. After the drama presentation, there was room for discussion, questions and answer to elicit responses from the target audience/participants. These responses were majorly on their understanding of the use of community theatre as a tool for sensitizing them to proper birth control.

However, as part of methodology, it was pertinent to identify the communication networks or channels within the community through which the target audiences could be reached. So the design for communicating with the audience approached the following dimensions:

1. Channels of Communication:
   a) Community Theatre (drama) was used when delivering the core message on the problem of giving birth to plenty children in the study area
   b) Primary Healthcare Providers and the sampled respondents were contacted (on interpersonal bases) through visitation to Bekwarra general hospital and their various homes
   c) With the help of the community town criers, other community members were assembled for community workshop and drama presentation through mega phone.

2. Message Style and Delivery:
The message style was participatory, believing that participatory learning as knowledge sharing process would inculcate new attitude on the affected
audiences. However, in order to ensure effective message delivery, communication applied:

I. The use of simple and correct English, local language (Bekwarra) and pidgin English in verbal communications where necessary;

II. The use of home-grown health experts as part of the research team who anchored the workshop in the area of sensitizing the target audiences to proper birth control through the use of modern family planning methods.

3. Message on the control of Birth Rate:

   The messages on proper management of birth rate were predicated on:

   I. The use of modern family planning methods, aimed at limiting childbearing or the number of children. Much emphasis was placed on the benefits of birth spacing as well as advice to couples on the different contraceptive methods available for spacing pregnancies. They were also referred to the appropriate health facilities in order to meet their unmet demands);

   II. Married Women and their Husbands currently practising modern family planning or birth control were encouraged to continue, while those not using modern family planning methods as well as those who had not developed interest or desire to space were sensitized;

   III. The youths who happened to be the target audience of this study were seriously discouraged from embracing the habit of giving birth to plenty children when they get married. The researcher did this by highlighting the economic implications of having too many children.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study embraced youths, male and females of marriageable age (15-34), including adults of Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The total numeric figure therein is 105,497, out of which 52914 are males and 52583 females (Federal Republic of Nigeria official Gazette 25). This research adopted a multi-stage cluster sampling technique to draw out a sample size of 150 respondents from the population of the study for the study. As earlier indicated above, Bekwarra LGA consists of more than 25 villages, structured into 10 political wards. At the first stage, these 10 political wards were divided into 2 clusters according to their geographical locations. Ugboro Ward, Ukpah, Ibiaragidi, Afrike I, and Afrike II Ward represented cluster (I), while Nyanya, Aboochiche, Beten, Otukpuru, and Gakim Ward represented cluster (II). At the second stage, the arrangement was done according to the villages for each cluster. I.e. in each unit of the clusters, 3 Villages were chosen through simple random sampling for the intervention exercise. From cluster (I) - Ugboro Village, Ukpah Village, and Ibiaragidi Village; while from cluster (II) Gakim Village, Nyanya Village, and Aboochiche Village. However, 3 villages from a cluster x 2 clusters
= 6 villages. Twenty (20) youths from each of the villages were selected for Community Theatre Performance. The third stage of this sampling exercise involved the selection of three (3) healthcare providers from one (1) clinic from each of the six (6) villages for community workshop on the use of modern family planning methods. This was still done by simple random sampling since the technique does not consider any reasonable factor in the selection of these respondents other than the fact that these Health Workers are indigenes of Bekwarra and also resident there.

Data Presentation and Analysis
This section presents and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data elicited from the respondents in the course of the survey. 150 respondents were involved in this study. Respondents were males and females. Male respondents were 119 (79.3%); while female respondents were 31 (20.7%). There was variation in the ages of respondents with 68 (45.3%) failing between ages 15-25 years; 52 respondents which formed (34.6%) were between ages 26-34; while 16 respondents (10.6%) were between 35-45 years. Others in the age brackets of 46-56 years were 7, accounting for 4.6%; 57-67 years were 5 (3.3%) while those from 68 years and above were 2 (1.3%). In terms of marital status, the survey shows that 121 (80.7%) respondents were single as at the time of this investigation; 16 (10.6%) respondents were married; 4 (2.6%) respondents were divorced; while 9 respondents representing (6%) of the sampled population were widowed. In the aspect of respondents’ level of education, 65 (43.3%) of them had first school leaving certificate; 62 (41.3%) had SSCE; while only 18 (12%) had first degree and 5 (3.3%) had higher educational qualifications. The researcher asked to know the occupation of the respondents, and from the information made available, farmers were 60 which constitute 40% of the sample population; while Students of Tertiary Institutions were 12, accounting for just 8% of the sample size for the study, Secondary School Students were 24 (16%) respondents, Public/Civil Servants recorded 16 (10.7%) respondents, and those engaged in other forms of livelihood not categorically stated were 38 which constitute 25.3% of the sample population of this study. As regards the respondents’ religious background, the table shows that 124 (82.7%) were Christians, those practicing Islamic religion were 2 (1.3%), while the pagans were 24, representing 16% of the entire number of respondents.

Future Direction: Respondents Responses on the understanding and importance of community theatre as veritable tool for sensitization to birth control
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| S/N | ITEMS | A | % | SA | % | D | % | SD | % |
|-----|-------|---|---|----|---|---|---|----|---|
| 1   | The drama you just watched not enjoyable | 11 | 7.3 | 22 | 28.7 | 43 | 28.7 | 74 | 49.3 |
| 2   | The message of the drama is not understandable | 17 | 11.3 | 13 | 8.7 | 51 | 34 | 69 | 46 |
| 3   | The message of the drama I just watched is that giving birth to plenty children when one doesn’t have the resources to take care of them is bad | 46 | 30.7 | 51 | 34 | 17 | 11.3 | 36 | 24 |
| 4   | The drama we just watched can make some youths who are planning to give birth to plenty children when they get married change their minds | 73 | 48.7 | 38 | 18.7 | 22 | 14.7 | 17 | 11.3 |
| 5   | Drama if used often to sensitize Bekwarra youths to | 77 | 51.3 | 60 | 40 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 4 |
the general implications of having a large family size can help to reduce the practice of giving birth to plenty children

|                                      |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
|                                      |   |   |   |

**Source:** Survey Data obtained from field work on the 19th of March, 2016

The table above presents respondents’ responses on their understanding of community theatre as viable tool for sensitization to birth regulation. Here, some assertions were made and subjected to the respondents’ view. Item one in the table asserts that the dramatic performance presented to the people was not enjoyable. While assessing this assertion, 74 (49.3%) of the total 150 sampled respondents strongly disagreed, 43 (28.7%) disagreed, 22 (14.7%) strongly agreed, while 11 respondents, representing 7.3% of the sampled population agreed. Comparing the responses, the value of this rating predominantly confirmed that the people enjoyed the drama which they developed, rehearsed and acted out in the presence of other community members. No wonder Ozdemir and Cakmak (15) say that “drama provides individuals with an opportunity to get encouraged, to have new experiences, to be at peace with themselves and with the others, and to be tolerant towards others since every member of the group has the opportunity to participate in the process...” In item two of the table, there is an assertion that the message of the drama was not understandable. It is difficult for the same set of people who developed, presented and confirmed that they enjoyed the drama to say that the message of the drama was not understandable. So we have 69 respondents representing 46% of the sampled size of this study strongly disagreeing to the assertion, while only 13 (8.7%) strongly agreed. This implies that drama promotes easy and better understanding of information. In item four of the table, survey data reveals that drama has the capacity to make people effect necessary adjustments in their life styles or practice. Such adjustment like one considering giving birth to plenty children as a burden, is developmental to a developing society like Nigeria. So it is pertinent to consider the frequent use of this community theatre tool in the study area to keep reminding them of the general implications of having a large family size as confirmed by their response to the last assertion in the table. This is in line with what the theory of this study—Urie Bronfenbrenner says in his Socio-Ecological Model for change that since human behaviour is amplified by different factors that may act in isolation or in
combination, people need information that is timely, accessible and relevant to keep them motivated and act in a way that would ensure positive development in the society (C-Modules: Module 0, Session 4, 12).

Synopsis of Community Theatre Performance at the Study Area during a Workshop

The title of the performance is “Plenty Children, Extra Load”. This was suggested by the Respondents during the workshop. The performance centers on exposing some disadvantages of giving birth to plenty children and discouraging the practice, vis-a-vis the benefits of maintaining a small family size. There are two main characters, namely James Ushie and Godwin Odey. They are cousins. Both of them have been married for eighteen years and are not really financially comfortable. In the drama, the exposition explains that while James Ushie is married to three wives with fifteen children, Godwin Odey is married to one wife with three children. Odey and his wife are busy planning and working out their family size, while Ushie and his wives are rather giving birth to more children without a plan. Conflict comes when Ushie and Odey engage themselves in a tussle for family land. During this process, Ushie tells Odey that he (Ushie) is rich, powerful and has more responsibility because of his fifteen children, so deserves to own the only remaining family land but Odey refuses. Ushie abuses Odey, calling him a lazy man for having just three children. Odey in reaction, tells Ushie that wealth or riches is not calculated based on the number of children one has, but the ability of a man to make his children productive and useful to the society. Odey references his well-trained children and calls Ushie a fool for giving birth to plenty children that are not well-trained and are busy in the street, causing more problems in the community. While Odey’s three children are all doing well in school with one of them already in the University, none of Ushie’s fifteen children has gone beyond secondary school. In the rising action, Odey reports the land dispute to the chief of the Community who immediately sends his messenger with utere (staff of authority) to summon Ushie to give his own side of the case, but when the messenger gets to Ushie’s compound, his (Ushie) son (Ichuan) seizes the Utete and beats him (messenger) up. During the unfolding action, the Chief of the community becomes very angry and haven considered this atrocity committed by Ushie’s children, calls his cabinet members for emergency meeting. We see however, that in the course of delivering judgment on the land dispute between Ushie and Odey, a woman rushes in with her pregnant daughter and claims that one of Ushie’s sons (Onah) who is also present in the court is responsible for the pregnancy. This allegation further compounds Ushie’s problem. Onah makes effort to deny the allegation but when he discovers it is impossible to do so, he runs out of the community (local) court.
leads us to the end where the Chief became angrier and delivers judgment in favour of Odey by denying Ushie ownership of the remaining family land.

**Presentation and Analysis of some Scenes from Community Theatre Performance during the Workshop**

Since participatory communication strategy offers a very specific perspective on how to articulate social processes and decision-making processes in any change programme (Tufte and Mefalopulos 5), this section presents and briefly explains some scenes from the community theatre performance to show the level of involvement of the research respondents.

**PLATE 1**
*Lead characters (Ushie (left) and Odey (right)) of the drama*

*Source: Survey Data obtained from field work on the 19th of March, 2016.*

The scene in plate 1 above reveals the two main characters of the drama-James Ushie (left), and Godwin Odey (right). They are challenging each other over the only remaining family land. Ushie warns Odey seriously not to step his legs into the land, saying that he (Ushie) wants to own the land because he is saddled with more responsibility considering his plenty children he has to feed.

**PLATE 2**
Lead characters and their families

Source: Survey Data obtained from field work on the 19th of March, 2016.

In plate 2 above, Odey (right) who chooses to maintain a small family size (one wife and three children), tells Ushie (who has three wives with fifteen children) that having many wives and plenty children is not a yardstick for demanding to own all the family lands and properties. Odey tells Ushie ‘look at your large family, your children cannot even recognize themselves because they are too many and busy causing problems in the community’.

After the drama presentation, there was group discussion where most of the participants revealed that Ushie’s case in this action highlights apparent predicament of many Bekwarra men with large family size whose major interest is just to give birth to numerous children that are left to decide their own fate.
PLATE 3
Interactive/Sensitization Session

Source: Survey Data obtained from field work on the 19th of March, 2016.
Plate 3 above is an evidence of an interactive session between the team of researchers and the respondents. Here, the respondents were asked to state their understanding of the performance they just presented, while the research team also used the session to sensitise the people to the importance of planning their family size so that they could only give birth to the number of children that would be easy for them to take care of. As part of effort towards ensuring the actualization of this objective of limiting family size, parents, couples who were yet to have children, as well as the youths were educated on the various family planning methods of regulating births which include the use of Condom, Withdrawal method, Exclusive Breastfeeding, Occasional abstinence when the woman is in her fertile period and the use of modern contraceptive pills like taking drugs that can prevent a woman from giving birth for a certain period of time. Some respondents while projecting their responses in the course of the interactive session described the use of pills as unnatural means of births regulation with countless disadvantages. However, as seen in the down part of the plate 3, one of the respondents who claimed to have four wives with nineteen children got angry after watching the drama presentation, saying that the community theatre presentation was targeted at breaking their homes. He pointed out that his intention was not to have nineteen children but it was provoked by circumstances ranging from his first and second wife’s inability to bear male children among other reasons which he did not mention. He however, said that even though he did not have the financial strength to cater for all his children’s educational needs among others, they were living happily and that the Governments should be held responsible for this obvious child neglect in not only Bekwarra Community, but in the Nigerian society in general.

**Community Action Plan “CAP”**

The essence of this section is to reveal what the affected community intends to do after the intervention programme. Community Action Plan if successfully implemented would support the healthy development of Bekwarra Local Government, young children and families in the community in all ramifications. These action plans include:

I. To facilitate the reduction of unnecessary, outrageous birth rate in the community through the instrumentality of youths and religious leaders who can raise fund from their congregations to organize and sponsor frequent intervention workshops in the community;

II. To form more drama groups in villages where there are none and harmonize them with the existing ones for effective message delivery and communication of the plights of the community in general;
III. To organize special workshop for men in marital relationship and communicate the importance of contraceptive use for birth regulation through drama;

IV. Women from polygamous homes promised to discourage their children from embracing the practice of marrying multiple women because of the difficulties associated with polygamy which gives rise to having plenty children that becomes difficult for the parents to take care of;

V. Healthcare providers plan to work in collaboration with the community drama group leaders for effective communication and service delivery.

**Conclusion:**
The reason for birth control play like any good play is to entertain, raise awareness and influence attitude change in a manner that should elicit the anticipated response from the target audience. In order to achieve this, the play should be realistic enough to reflect the existing circumstances or birth issues raised. This requires total dialectical and creative inclusiveness of both the researcher and the affected audience.

Community theatre offered the researcher these opportunities because of its flexibility. It offered the voiceless and powerless target audience the opportunity to express themselves and act in a manner that contributed meaningfully to the betterment of the entire Bekwarra community. This is evidence in the plats shown above. Today, the people believe that their coming together and involvement as a community to explore a process of communication will describe the legacy they will leave to their children; believing however that it will be a blueprint for the kind of community they want these children to learn and grow in. “We are lucky to have this chance to improve our lives and build a healthy community. Our hope is that haven participated actively in the entire communication process, if we are able to implement all that we have planned to do, the problem of outrageous birth rate among other problems confronting us will be seriously reduced and our community would be a better place”, said most participants at the end of the intervention programme. I therefore, recommend that community theatre should not only be streamlined into the activities of health practitioners in Bekwarra, but also the activities of health practitioners in other communities in Nigeria and even beyond.
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