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Staging Eco-Justice: Applied Theatre, Social Equity, and Diversity in Contexts of Ecological Distress

Austin Chibueze Okeke, Cindy Anene Ezeugwu, Ikenna Emmanuel Onwuegbuna, Richard Ndu Umezinwa, Oyindamola Samuel Adesunloye, Uche Okey Ofoedu, Jonathan Chidi Ezeh, Nelson Torti Obasi, Ikechukwu Erojikwe, Kasarachi Collins Okpe, Cynthia Chinenyenwa Nwabueze

Correspondence: Cindy Anene Ezeugwu, cindy.ezeugwu@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Ecological distress is not merely an environmental emergency; it is a crisis of justice whose consequences are distributed unevenly across social, economic, and cultural divides. Communities occupying the margins of political and environmental decision-making often bear the heaviest burdens of environmental degradation while remaining largely absent from dominant policy and scientific narratives. This paper examines how Applied Theatre and Theatre for Development (TfD) create spaces through which ecological injustice can be articulated, interpreted, and collectively confronted. Rather than treating environmental crisis as an abstract scientific problem, these performance practices locate it within the everyday realities of affected communities and render its consequences visible through embodied experience. Drawing on African performance epistemologies, the discussion centres on the Itchi-Agu Theatre for Development project as a practice-based case study. Through storytelling, improvisation, song, and ritual performance, participants connected ecological change to declining agricultural yields, pressures on water resources, gendered labour practices, land-use conflicts, and questions of intergenerational responsibility. The performances generated not only opportunities for expression but also locally grounded forms of ecological knowledge and ethical reflection. By foregrounding participant agency and sustaining collective dialogue, theatre functioned as a medium through which diverse experiences of environmental distress could be negotiated and shared. Although performance alone cannot resolve the structural causes of ecological crisis, it remains indispensable to the cultivation of ecological consciousness, democratic participation, and collective action. The paper therefore reaffirms the significance of the humanities in advancing more equitable and socially responsive approaches to environmental justice.

Keywords: Applied Theatre, Theatre for Development, Ecological Justice, Environmental Humanities, African Performance Epistemologies

Introduction

Ecological distress has become one of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century. Yet its significance extends beyond environmental science and public policy. Ecological crisis is equally a crisis of justice, shaped by unequal histories, uneven distributions of power, and profoundly asymmetrical exposure to risk. Climate change, deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and extractive industrial practices are routinely quantified through global metrics such as carbon concentrations, emission targets, and temperature thresholds. While such measurements remain indispensable, they often conceal the human realities through which ecological damage is experienced (Ezeugwu et al. 162). Across much of the Global South, communities that contribute least to environmental degradation frequently endure its most devastating consequences. For them, ecological crisis is neither abstract nor anticipatory; it manifests in shrinking livelihoods, food insecurity, displacement, deteriorating health conditions, and the erosion of longstanding cultural relationships with land and place.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" provides a powerful framework for understanding this condition. Nixon identifies environmental degradation as a form of violence whose effects accumulate gradually and often escape immediate public recognition (2–3). Unlike spectacular catastrophes that command headlines and political attention, slow violence unfolds through contaminated waterways, depleted soils, toxic atmospheres, and prolonged climatic instability. Its incremental character renders it difficult to represent and therefore easy to ignore. The communities most affected by environmental decline frequently remain invisible within dominant environmental narratives, their experiences displaced by technical data and policy abstractions. The central challenge is therefore not merely the remediation of ecological damage but the struggle to render environmental suffering visible, intelligible, and ethically compelling.

The humanities occupy a critical position within this struggle. Scientific analysis may explain ecological processes, but it cannot by itself account for the ways environmental crises are lived, remembered, narrated, and contested. Theatre is particularly significant in this regard because it transforms environmental questions into embodied social experience. Through performance, dialogue, and collective storytelling, ecological harm becomes something that can be witnessed, felt, and interrogated within the realm of human relationships. Applied Theatre and Theatre for Development (TfD) extend this capacity by enabling communities to become authors of their own environmental narratives rather than objects of external interpretation.

Augusto Boal's conception of theatre as a "rehearsal for reality" offers a useful point of departure. For Boal, theatre acquires transformative power when spectators become active participants who collectively investigate the conditions shaping their lives (122). Within contexts of ecological distress, such participation creates opportunities for communities to examine environmental degradation not as an isolated technical problem but as a social and ethical condition rooted in everyday experience. Theatre thus becomes a mode of inquiry through which environmental realities are interpreted, debated, and reimagined.

In many African contexts, ecological distress cannot be separated from histories of colonial extraction, uneven development, and continuing environmental injustice. Oil pollution, deforestation, land dispossession, and climate vulnerability are inseparable from structures of power that routinely marginalise local knowledge and community perspectives. Applied Theatre and TfD respond to these realities by drawing upon indigenous languages, cultural practices, and performance traditions to create spaces of collective reflection. Rather than imposing externally generated solutions, they privilege local experience as a source of ecological understanding and social action.

This study situates Theatre for Development as a vital humanities-based intervention within contemporary ecological discourse. By foregrounding marginalised voices, facilitating collective dialogue, and transforming environmental damage into shared ethical narratives, TfD challenges the abstraction that characterises much environmental debate. It insists that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a human concern requiring not only technological and policy responses but also cultural, ethical, and imaginative engagement.

The Nigerian experience offers a compelling illustration of these dynamics. Community-based Tfd initiatives have increasingly engaged local environmental challenges by placing affected populations at the centre of inquiry and performance. The Itchi-Agu Theatre for Development project exemplifies this approach. Through participatory performance conducted in local languages, community members examined questions of land use, environmental degradation, and livelihood insecurity. The resulting performances revealed how ecological decline reshapes social relationships, economic practices, and communal futures. By rendering slow violence visible and collectively discussable, the project demonstrates theatre's capacity to function as both a mode of environmental knowledge and a catalyst for ethical engagement.

Conceptual Framework: Ecological Distress, Slow Violence, and Environmental Justice

Ecological distress signifies far more than the deterioration of natural systems. It names a condition in which environmental degradation intersects with historical inequality, political exclusion, and uneven vulnerability. Environmental harm rarely affects populations in uniform ways. Instead, it follows established patterns of power, exposing some communities to disproportionate risk while insulating others from its consequences. Climate change, pollution, resource extraction, and land degradation therefore raise fundamental questions about whose environments are sacrificed, whose interests are protected, and whose lives are considered expendable within prevailing political and economic arrangements.

Nixon's formulation of "slow violence" illuminates the structural nature of this unequal burden. Environmental destruction often unfolds incrementally, accumulating over years or decades before its full consequences become visible (2–3). Contaminated water systems, exhausted agricultural lands, toxic air, and prolonged climatic disruption rarely possess the dramatic immediacy associated with conventional understandings of violence. Yet their effects are no less devastating. Slow violence persists because it is embedded within political and economic structures that normalise environmental sacrifice in the pursuit of profit and development. Ecological distress consequently emerges not as an accidental by-product of modernity but as a manifestation of deeper patterns of dispossession and exclusion.

Environmental justice scholarship expands this analysis by locating ecological harm within broader struggles for recognition and participation. David Schlosberg argues that justice cannot be reduced to the equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits; it also requires meaningful recognition of affected communities and genuine opportunities for democratic participation in decision-making processes (14). Environmental injustice occurs whenever communities are denied the power to shape environmental futures that directly affect their lives. Across many rural African contexts, ecological vulnerability is intensified by fragile agricultural systems, extractive industries, and limited institutional accountability. Environmental degradation becomes inseparable from political marginalisation.

The experiences documented through the Itchi-Agu project resonate strongly with what Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier describe as the "environmentalism of the

poor"—a form of environmental engagement rooted in struggles for livelihood and survival rather than abstract conservation agendas (12–13). Soil degradation, deforestation, and water scarcity emerged in Itchi-Agu not simply as environmental conditions but as lived social realities with far-reaching implications for food security, youth migration, women's labour burdens, and communal cohesion. Ecological distress thus appears as both an environmental and a social justice concern, demanding interpretive frameworks capable of addressing its ethical and human dimensions.

Theatre, Social Justice, and Diversity in Ecological Contexts

Theatre possesses a unique capacity to translate structural realities into human experience. Where scientific reports and policy frameworks frequently operate through abstraction, theatre works through presence, embodiment, and encounter. It places human lives at the centre of ecological discourse and reveals how environmental injustice is experienced within everyday social worlds. Baz Kershaw's characterisation of performance as a "site of struggle" captures this transformative potential: performance is never merely representational but a space in which meanings are contested, identities negotiated, and social relationships reconfigured (16). Applied to ecological questions, theatre exposes the lived contradictions of environmental injustice and creates opportunities for communities to challenge dominant narratives that render their experiences invisible.

Applied Theatre and Theatre for Development intensify this democratic potential by privileging participation over spectacle. Boal's notion of the spect-actor dissolves conventional distinctions between performer and audience, transforming theatre into a collaborative process of inquiry and intervention (122). Within environmentally vulnerable communities, such participation enables individuals to connect ecological challenges to broader questions of labour, land ownership, gender relations, resource access, and intergenerational responsibility. Theatre thereby becomes a means of reclaiming agency within contexts where environmental decisions are often imposed from above.

Diversity, within this framework, extends beyond demographic representation. It refers to the coexistence of multiple forms of knowledge and experience shaped by age, gender, occupation, memory, and social location. Petra Kupperts emphasises that community-based performance derives its value from the creation of spaces where diverse experiences can encounter one another without being reduced to a single perspective (12–14). Such performance practices privilege dialogue, collaboration, and collective creativity, enabling participants to negotiate differences while recognising shared concerns. This understanding of diversity aligns closely with Theatre for Development's commitment to inclusive participation and communal meaning-making.

African performance traditions offer particularly fertile ground for such plurality because they privilege collective creativity, oral transmission, ritual practice, and communal participation. As Biodun Jeyifo observes, African theatre derives much of its vitality from its rootedness in the social struggles and aspirations of the communities that produce it (45). Its ethical orientation is therefore inherently inclusive and dialogic.

These principles were evident throughout the Itchi-Agu project. Women reflected on the intensification of agricultural labour amid environmental decline. Younger participants voiced anxieties about migration, economic uncertainty, and the future of community life. Elders contributed ecological memories that connected present conditions to longer histories of environmental change. The resulting performances did not seek consensus through simplification. Instead, they accommodated multiple perspectives and allowed different experiences of ecological distress to coexist within a shared performative space.

Embodied Ecological Knowledge

Environmental humanities scholars have increasingly recognised that ecological crises are never merely scientific phenomena. They are also cultural, ethical, and narrative problems shaped by the stories societies tell about nature, responsibility, and human belonging. Ursula K. Heise argues that ecological knowledge acquires social significance only when communicated through narratives and cultural forms capable of engaging people emotionally and imaginatively (21). Theresa J. May adds that environmental consciousness is shaped not only by scientific information but also by the cultural narratives through which societies imagine their relationships with the natural world (4–6). For May, performance occupies a particularly significant position within ecological discourse because it transforms environmental concerns into shared public encounters where reflection, responsibility, and dialogue become possible.

Within this interdisciplinary framework, applied theatre offers a distinctive mode of ecological engagement through its emphasis on embodied and participatory ways of knowing. Unlike written texts or visual representations that often position audiences as observers, theatre works through presence, action, and interaction. Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" provides a useful lens: human bodies are inseparable from the material environments they inhabit, and environmental processes continually move through bodies in ways that shape health, labour, vulnerability, and experience (2–4). Ecological degradation is therefore never external to human existence; it is experienced physically, socially, and emotionally. Applied theatre makes these entanglements visible by transforming environmental conditions into performative experiences through which participants can recognise the intimate connections between ecological systems and human lives.

This understanding resonates with Dwight Conquergood's conception of performance as both a moral and an epistemological practice. Conquergood rejects rigid distinctions between knowledge and action, arguing instead that performance generates situated forms of understanding grounded in participation, ethical responsibility, and mutual exchange (146). Applied theatre does not simply communicate ecological information to communities; it creates opportunities for communities to produce ecological understanding through their own experiences, memories, and interpretations. The Itchi-Agu project exemplifies this: rather than relying on technical language or external expertise, it drew upon participants' experiences of declining agricultural yields, polluted water sources, and shifting seasonal patterns, allowing ecological knowledge to circulate through shared emotion, storytelling, and collective reflection.

African Performance Epistemologies and Ecological Knowledge

African performance traditions constitute far more than artistic or recreational practices. They function as epistemological systems through which communities preserve, interpret, and transmit social, historical, and ecological knowledge. Embedded within ritual, oral narration, music, dance, and communal performance are sophisticated frameworks for understanding relationships between human beings, the natural environment, and the spiritual worlds that sustain communal life. Ecological knowledge within these traditions is not organised primarily through abstraction or scientific categorisation. Rather, it emerges through lived experience, collective memory, and sustained engagement with local environments across generations.

Jeyifo's observation that African theatre remains deeply rooted in material social realities is particularly instructive in this regard (45). Performance arises from concrete experiences of labour, subsistence, conflict, survival, and social responsibility. Ecological understanding consequently appears not as a detached body of information but as a network of obligations and relationships linking communities to land, water, seasons, and non-human life. Agricultural rituals, harvest celebrations, initiation ceremonies, and communal storytelling practices have historically functioned as repositories of environmental knowledge, preserving practical understandings of cultivation, resource management, and ecological stewardship.

The Itchi-Agu project revealed the continuing vitality of these knowledge systems. Proverbs, songs, folktales, and oral narratives emerged as important vehicles for recalling environmental histories and articulating contemporary ecological concerns. Elders contributed memories of seasonal cycles, land-use practices, and environmental transformations observed over decades; younger participants reinterpreted these histories through songs, dramatic improvisations, and collective performance. The resulting dialogue bridged generational perspectives, enabling inherited ecological wisdom to engage directly with contemporary challenges such as soil depletion, deforestation, and declining agricultural productivity.

Such practices challenge dominant environmental paradigms that privilege scientific expertise while relegating local knowledge to a secondary position. The ecological understandings embedded within performance traditions are neither anecdotal nor supplementary; they constitute legitimate forms of environmental knowledge grounded in long-term observation, cultural memory, and communal experience. Applied theatre therefore serves not merely as a medium for communicating environmental concerns but as a site in which ecological knowledge is actively generated, negotiated, and renewed. Performance becomes an epistemological practice through which communities interpret environmental change and imagine more sustainable futures.

Theatre for Development: Methodology and Ethical Practice

Participatory and Dialogic Methodology

Theatre for Development is founded upon principles of participation, dialogue, and shared authorship that position communities as active producers of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. Rejecting top-down models of development that treat communities as objects of intervention, TfD creates collective processes through which local experiences, cultural knowledge, and communal interpretation become central to social understanding. Paulo Freire's critique of the "banking model" of education provides a foundational framework: education becomes oppressive when knowledge is deposited into supposedly passive learners rather than generated through dialogue, critical reflection, and mutual exchange (66–67). TfD extends this pedagogical philosophy into performance practice by creating theatrical spaces where participants collectively examine and reinterpret their social conditions. Within ecological contexts, environmental problems cease to appear as purely technical failures requiring expert correction and instead become lived realities open to communal analysis and ethical interrogation.

Boal's concept of the spect-actor further radicalises this participatory ethos by dismantling the conventional distinction between performer and audience. For Boal, theatre functions as a "rehearsal for reality," enabling participants to experiment with responses to social injustice through embodied action rather than passive observation (122). Applied to ecological concerns, this framework allows communities to investigate the causes and consequences of environmental degradation while collectively imagining alternative possibilities.

The Itchi-Agu Project in Practice

The Itchi-Agu Theatre for Development project was conducted in Itchi-Agu, Igboeze South Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria—one of seventeen local government areas in the state grappling with significant environmental degradation. The area is predominantly agrarian, with most households depending on subsistence farming for livelihood. Over recent decades, community members have observed declining soil fertility, deforestation from fuelwood collection and small-scale commercial logging, increasing difficulty accessing potable water, and noticeable shifts in rainfall patterns that have disrupted planting and harvest cycles.

The project involved approximately forty-five participants drawn from across the community: farmers (both men and women), youth, elders, and local leaders. Participation was voluntary and organised through existing community networks—village meetings, women's groups, and youth associations—rather than through external recruitment. Sessions ran over eight weeks, with weekly workshops lasting three to four hours each, conducted primarily in Igbo (the local language) with occasional code-switching to English when conceptual terms required it. Sessions were facilitated by a team of five researchers experienced in TfD methodology, working collaboratively with two community liaison persons selected by the village leadership.

The workshops followed a consistent structure. Each session began with songs and warm-up exercises drawn from local performance traditions, followed by storytelling or guided discussion around a specific environmental theme (soil, water, trees, farming, seasonal change). Participants then worked in small groups to develop short improvisations based on their own experiences. These were performed for the larger group and followed by

facilitated dialogue in which performers and audience—the distinction deliberately blurred—reflected on what the scenes revealed. In Boalian terms, participants moved freely between the roles of spect-actor and actor, sometimes watching, sometimes intervening to propose alternative actions or outcomes.

The performances themselves took shape organically rather than from predetermined scripts. One recurring scene depicted a family disputing over diminishing farmland: the eldest son wanting to sell his portion for quick cash, the father resisting, the mother pointing out that without the land there would be nothing for the daughters who traditionally did not inherit. Another scene showed women walking progressively longer distances to fetch water, then cutting to a meeting where male community members dismissed the problem as "women's work." Youth participants developed a satirical piece about a young man who migrates to the city believing he will find prosperity, only to end up hawking goods on congested streets—a direct commentary on how ecological decline pushes young people out of agriculture and toward precarious urban labour.

Songs composed during the project became particularly powerful vehicles for ecological commentary. One song, performed in call-and-response style, asked: "*Ala anyi na-ata? Ònye ga-azu umu anyi?*" ("Our land is failing; who will feed our children?"). Another linked deforestation to spiritual and cultural loss: "*Osisi ndi nna nna anyi kuru, oku na-ere ha; ife anyi na-efe, o na-efefela*" ("The trees our forefathers planted are burning; what we worship is flying away"). These songs circulated beyond the workshop sessions, sung by participants in their daily activities—an indication that the performative engagement extended beyond the formal project timeline.

Post-performance dialogues consistently connected environmental challenges to broader social concerns. Women described how soil degradation forced them to travel further, work longer hours, and allocate more household resources to food purchases. Young men linked environmental decline to diminished marriage prospects—without productive land, they lacked the economic standing expected for starting a family. Elders contributed historical perspective: one recalled that as a child, the stream near the village ran year-round and was deep enough to swim in; now it flows only during heavy rains and dries within weeks. Another remembered when the community's communal forest provided timber, medicine, and fruit; today, only stumps and scrub remain. These testimonies were not merely recorded but performed, dramatised, and reflected upon collectively, transforming personal memory into shared ecological knowledge.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics occupies a central position within applied theatre because its practice unfolds within the realities of everyday social life rather than the protective distance of fictional representation. As Helen Nicholson observes, applied drama cannot claim ethical neutrality because it inevitably engages questions of power, responsibility, and social accountability (15). These concerns acquire particular urgency within contexts of ecological distress, where environmental degradation intersects with poverty, political marginalisation, and historical injustice.

The Itchi-Agu project addressed these concerns through collaborative creation and dialogic facilitation. Facilitators functioned not as experts transmitting knowledge but as collaborators fostering conversation, reflection, and collective inquiry. Instead of imposing predetermined narratives or prescribing solutions to environmental problems, the project created conditions under which participants could articulate ecological experiences through their own cultural forms and interpretive frameworks. This approach echoes Freire's insistence that meaningful social transformation begins when people acquire the capacity to name and interpret their own realities rather than having those realities defined by external authorities (88).

James Thompson cautions against evaluating applied theatre exclusively according to measurable social effects, arguing that its value frequently resides in the affective, relational, and ethical experiences it generates (7–9). This insight is particularly relevant in ecological contexts, where meaningful change often begins with shifts in perception, awareness, and communal understanding rather than immediate policy intervention. The Itchi-Agu project did not seek to prescribe solutions or direct participants toward predetermined conclusions. Instead, it created conditions for collective reflection and imaginative engagement through which ecological concerns could be recognised as shared responsibilities.

Equally significant was the project's refusal to position theatre as a solution to the environmental crisis. Such claims risk overstating the capacities of performance while obscuring the structural and political dimensions of ecological injustice. Instead, theatre operated as a catalyst for recognition, dialogue, and ethical engagement. Its value resided not in delivering immediate outcomes but in creating opportunities for communities to confront difficult questions concerning environmental responsibility, vulnerability, and collective futures. By resisting closure and privileging process over prescription, the project affirmed an ethics of engagement grounded in listening, participation, and shared reflection.

At the same time, the project confronted genuine tensions. Not all community members participated equally; men's voices tended to dominate mixed-gender discussions in early sessions, requiring facilitators to develop separate women-only workshops before reintegrating perspectives. Some participants expressed frustration that the performances led to no immediate action—no government officials attended, no policy changes followed. This disappointment is itself instructive: it reveals both the power of performance to generate expectation and the structural gap between cultural expression and institutional response. Applied theatre practitioners must reckon honestly with this gap rather than claiming transformative impact where none exists.

From Performance to Ecological Civic Imagination

The Itchi-Agu project underscores the capacity of applied theatre to mediate between ecological awareness and ethical responsibility. While performance cannot replace environmental policy, legal reform, or institutional intervention, it performs a vital cultural function by reshaping how ecological problems are perceived and understood. Applied theatre intervenes at the level of consciousness and social imagination, transforming environmental degradation from a distant abstraction into an immediate

matter of human concern. As Nicholson suggests, its significance lies less in delivering solutions than in cultivating forms of attentiveness through which individuals reconsider their relationships to the social worlds they inhabit (33).

Within the Itchi-Agu project, ecological distress was reconstructed as a shared communal condition rather than an individual misfortune or an unavoidable natural occurrence. Performance enabled participants to recognise their interconnected positions within ecological systems—as farmers dependent upon fertile land, as elders entrusted with environmental memory, and as younger generations who will inherit the consequences of present decisions. This collective perspective disrupted narratives of inevitability and resignation, opening space for reflection on responsibility, care, and mutual dependence.

Such reflections resonate with Donna Haraway's call for forms of ecological thinking grounded in relationality and shared responsibility. Haraway argues that contemporary ecological challenges require communities to recognise their interconnectedness with both human and non-human worlds rather than imagining themselves as isolated actors (30–31). The collaborative processes developed in Itchi-Agu encouraged precisely this relational awareness, foregrounding ecological futures as matters of collective stewardship rather than individual survival.

The project also illustrates the practical relevance of Schlosberg's recognition-participation model of environmental justice. Environmental justice requires more than equitable distributions of risk and opportunity; it demands visibility, recognition, and meaningful participation in shaping environmental futures (14). Theatre facilitated recognition by rendering ecological suffering visible through embodied storytelling, while participation emerged through collaborative creation and sustained dialogue. Rather than representing community voices from a distance, the performance process enabled those voices to emerge on their own terms, restoring legitimacy to local ecological knowledge and experience.

The project's contribution may be described as fostering *ecological civic imagination*—the collective ability to envision alternative relationships to land, labour, community, and environmental responsibility. Through open-ended dialogue rather than definitive resolution, theatre sustained ecological consciousness beyond the immediate performance event. Participants reported continued conversations outside workshop settings; the songs composed during the project were heard at community gatherings and religious events months afterward. Some farmers began discussing communal strategies for soil conservation and tree planting, drawing directly on insights generated through the performances. These small shifts do not constitute structural transformation, but they represent the kind of cultural precondition without which structural change rarely takes hold.

Applied theatre therefore functions less as a culmination of social action than as a preparatory space in which the ethical foundations of social action can emerge. By positioning communities as reflective agents capable of interpreting and responding to environmental change, performance contributes to the longer, more complex work of cultivating responsibility, recognition, and shared ecological futures.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Humanities in Ecological Distress

This discussion has situated applied theatre and Theatre for Development as indispensable humanities-based responses to contemporary ecological crisis. Against environmental discourses that privilege technical expertise, quantitative measurement, and policy intervention, theatre restores attention to the human dimensions of ecological distress – its histories, inequalities, ethical dilemmas, and lived consequences. Theatre for Development is flexible enough to engage any issue regardless of its domestic context (Erojikwe et al. 47), and its application to environmental questions demonstrates the reach of humanities methodologies beyond their conventional domains. Climate change, driven by increased human activity and industrial growth, significantly harms human health and the environment (Ezeugwu et al. 170); responding to it adequately requires not only scientific and policy tools but also the cultural and ethical resources that the humanities provide.

The evidence from the Itchi-Agu project demonstrates that applied theatre functions simultaneously as a mode of knowledge production, a practice of ethical engagement, and a platform for democratic participation. By translating environmental degradation into embodied experience and collective reflection, theatre renders visible the forms of slow violence that frequently escape public attention. It recognises diversity not as a matter of representation alone but as a plurality of ecological experiences shaped by memory, labour, social location, and vulnerability. In doing so, it reclaims environmental questions as matters of culture, ethics, and social imagination alongside science and policy.

Applied theatre cannot resolve ecological crisis, nor can it substitute for the structural transformations required to address environmental injustice. Its significance lies elsewhere. It creates the conditions under which communities can recognise ecological harm, interpret its meanings, and deliberate collectively about possible futures. At a moment when ecological debates are increasingly dominated by technical and managerial solutions, theatre reminds us that environmental futures will ultimately be shaped not only by what societies know, but also by what they value, remember, imagine, and choose to become.

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