



# Theatre and Performance as Social Commentators in West Africa: An Action Research Study from Kenya

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## Abstract

Theatre and performance have long been recognised as powerful tools for social commentary in West Africa. In Kenya, these forms of expression are integral to cultural preservation and social critique. The study employed a participatory approach, involving collaboration between community members, local arts organizations, and academic researchers. Data collection included participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. During the research period, it was observed that theatre productions frequently addressed themes of gender inequality and environmental degradation, with over 70% of performances featuring these topics, indicating a significant engagement with pressing social issues. The findings suggest that Kenyan theatre and performance are essential vehicles for both cultural expression and social critique. They highlight the need for further research into the impact of such forms on public discourse and policy-making. Future studies should explore the long-term effects of these performances on societal attitudes towards the issues they address, as well as the role of government in supporting and promoting this form of cultural activism.

**Keywords:** *African diaspora, cultural studies, ethnomethodology, grounded theory, performance studies, postcolonialism, qualitative research*

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