

# Evaluating Participatory Communication for Development Strategies: The Case of Amplio Chana and Community Development Alliance in The Wa East and West Districts

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<i>Abstract</i>	<i>Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)</i>
<p><i>This study evaluated the effectiveness of Communication for Development (C4D) strategies implemented by Amplio Ghana and the Community Development Alliance (CDA) in the Wa East and West Districts of Ghana's Upper West Region. Participatory and culturally sensitive approaches were used, including interviews and focus group discussions with NGO staff, Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) members, Agricultural Extension Officers, and other beneficiaries. The study revealed that Amplio Ghana's Talking Book and Champion Farmer Model and CDA's Circle of Support and Tug of War effectively promoted inclusivity, trust, and behavioral change. Stakeholders appreciated the participatory nature of these strategies, which enhanced engagement and ownership. However, linguistic diversity, cultural norms, and resource limitations constrained scalability. Recommendations include prioritizing local languages, leveraging trusted messengers, and strengthening monitoring frameworks. The study emphasized sustained engagement and cultural alignment as crucial for successful C4D strategies.</i></p>	<p><i>Vol. 17 Issue 2 (2024)</i> <i>ISSN(p) 1597-9385</i> <i>ISSN (e) 2814-1091</i> <i>Home page:</i> <a href="https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds">https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds</a></p> <p><b>ARTICLE INFO:</b> <b>Keyword</b> <i>Communication for Development (C4D), Participation, Behavior Change, Inclusivity, Cultural Alignment</i></p> <p><b>Received:</b> <i>4<sup>th</sup> November 2024</i> <b>Accepted:</b> <i>31<sup>st</sup> December 2024</i> <b>DOI:</b> <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v17i2.9">https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v17i2.9</a></p>

## 1. Introduction

Communication for Development (C4D) is increasingly recognized as an essential enabler for sustainable development; it helps address complex social and economic challenges, especially in developing regions. C4D can be defined as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth. Thereby making it possible for greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of human potential. (Quebral, 1971). Initially conceptualized as a top-down dissemination model whose primary focus was on the transfer of information, it has since evolved into a more participatory approach that emphasizes two-way communication (dialogic), stakeholder engagement, and community empowerment. (Mefalopulos, 2008). In today's world, C4D uses strategies that prioritize listening to and involving communities rather than simply disseminating messages to them. Development theorists inform this shift to participation like (Mefalopulos, 2008); who advocated for a dialogic communication model that allows communities to play active roles in decision-making and project implementation. The theoretical underpinnings of C4D emphasize that development communication should go beyond mere information dissemination to foster active stakeholder participation, empower communities, and facilitate mutual learning (Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes, 2008).

Historically, C4D has been a transformative tool in diverse areas, including health, agriculture, education, and social development. Through the use of communication strategies that resonate well with local communities, such as radio, community theatre, and mobile technology, C4D strategies aim to promote behavior change, disseminate critical information, and encourage active participation in development processes (Fink, 2018; Ganiu, 2014). For instance, African public health campaigns have successfully leveraged local media to address health issues, including HIV/AIDS prevention and maternal health awareness, by creating culturally relevant messages that resonated well with community values (Waisbord, 2015). Similarly, in Ghana, C4D has been instrumental in encouraging behaviors that improved agricultural productivity and promoted educational access, often through culturally resonant formats such as radio broadcasts and community dialogue sessions (Odoom, 2021).

Despite the proliferation of Communication for Development (C4D) initiatives across Africa, particularly within NGO-led projects, challenges remain in achieving sustainable, meaningful impact at the community level. Logistical and resource limitations inherent to many C4D projects exacerbate these challenges (Forkuor & Korah, 2023). Funding constraints often result in low-cost communication methods that may not reach all population segments, particularly in rural or marginalized areas (Fink et al., 2018). Additionally, infrastructural deficiencies, such as inadequate access to media and digital tools, hinder the consistent delivery of C4D messages across the region. NGOs often struggle to balance the demands for cost-effective solutions with the need for culturally responsive communication, which can compromise development interventions' reach, quality, and impact (Forkuor & Korah, 2023).

These notwithstanding, organizations rely on standardized C4D strategies that do not align with the local cultural and linguistic landscape. Several studies have shown that a lack of culturally relevant communication can bring about misunderstanding, mistrust, and, ultimately, resistance from target communities (Abubakari, 2023). The misalignment between project objectives and the community's expectations highlights the critical need for an empirical evaluation of C4D effectiveness from the stakeholders' perspective. Understanding how stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of C4D strategies is essential for refining approaches

that fit in better with local realities, thus ensuring higher levels of community engagement and ownership.

This study, therefore, focuses its lens on stakeholder perspectives as a critical measure of C4D effectiveness in NGO-led projects in the Wa West and East Districts. Specifically, the study identifies the C4D strategies used by two selected NGOs. It examines stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of the various C4D strategies employed by these NGOs in developing and managing development projects. By examining stakeholder insights into the strengths and limitations of current C4D strategies, this study aims to inform future development communication practices, ultimately supporting the design of more context-sensitive, participatory, and impactful C4D interventions. The findings are expected to contribute to academic discourse on development communication and provide practical guidelines for NGOs working within culturally and resource-constrained environments, thereby enhancing the capacity of C4D to foster authentic, community-driven development.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations**

This study's theoretical foundation is grounded in Participatory Communication Theory, which advocates for inclusive processes that allow local voices to be integrated into development projects' planning and implementation phases. Participatory Communication Theory has shifted the focus from information dissemination, which is the focus of the theory of Development Communication, to engagement, emphasizing inclusivity and dialogue between development practitioners and communities (Mefalopulos, 2008). Advocated by theorists like Freire (1970), participatory communication promotes a model in which communities are not passive recipients but active co-creators in the communication process, reflecting local knowledge and fostering ownership. Freire's (1970) Concept of "dialogical communication" emphasizes the importance of mutual learning, arguing that sustainable change can only occur when communities are empowered to make decisions that impact their lives. This approach is crucial for development in culturally diverse, resource-constrained regions, where externally imposed models often fail to resonate with local needs and realities (Mubita et al., 2017).

C4D can play a critical role in bridging the gap between external development agendas and regional priorities by including stakeholders in these processes. In line with this theory, development practitioners argue that true empowerment emerges when stakeholders have a hand in shaping the interventions that affect their lives rather than being passive recipients of externally designed projects (Freire, 1970). C4D strategies that embrace participatory principles are more likely to achieve sustained impact, as they respect and incorporate local voices, address community-specific concerns, and promote empowerment. The importance of stakeholder perception lies in its ability to reveal gaps between NGO intentions and community expectations, which can often undermine project success if not adequately addressed (Servaes, 2008).

Abubakari (2023) Emphasizes that without local involvement in planning and implementing development initiatives, communication efforts are less likely to foster ownership or lead to sustainable outcomes (Abubakari, 2023). Studies have consistently shown that C4D projects prioritizing stakeholder engagement, feedback, and adaptation to local conditions are more successful in driving social change and building long-term community relationships (Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes, 2008). This study draws on this theory to examine how effectively these participatory ideals are operationalized in CSO-led C4D efforts in the Upper

West Region of Ghana, mainly through stakeholder perceptions, which provide insights into the extent of community ownership and engagement in development initiatives.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

#### **Research Design**

This study adopted a case study design to examine C4D effectiveness in the Upper West Region's Wa East and West Districts. The case study approach is ideal for exploring complex social phenomena, allowing for a nuanced understanding of stakeholder perspectives on C4D strategies (Yin, 2018).

#### **Sampling Strategy**

This study employs a purposive sampling method, a non-probability technique suitable for identifying individuals capable of providing the requisite information for in-depth analysis. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate as it allows for selecting participants with expert knowledge of the topic under study, ensuring relevance, diversity, and efficiency in data collection (Haute, 2021). Two NGOs, the Community Development Alliance (CDA) and Amplio Ghana, were purposively selected based on their extensive operational experience in the Upper West Region's Wa East and Wa West districts over the past 15 years. These organizations offer a diverse case of a local and an international NGO, offering a comparative perspective on the communication strategies employed in their development projects. The depth and coverage of their work make them ideal for assessing the effectiveness of C4D strategies applied to attain project outcomes. Project managers/coordinators were purposively selected for their critical roles in implementing development projects.

#### **Data Collection Methods**

##### **In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted with one Project Manager in each selected NGO. Also, in-depth interviews were conducted in each of the selected communities with one Unit Committee member, one Assembly member, and a chief within each sampled community. The in-depth interview guide was designed to standardize data collection while allowing flexibility to probe for deeper insights as necessary. This approach ensures participant engagement and captures detailed, personalized responses. According to (Madill, 2021), in-depth interviews are particularly effective in qualitative research for eliciting comprehensive and contextually rich data. The interviews provided tailored, context-specific information that aligns with the study's focus on participatory and context-sensitive C4D practices.

##### **Focus Group Discussions**

In addition to in-depth interviews, the study employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather diverse perspectives from people who have directly benefitted from NGO interventions. FGDs facilitate interaction among participants, generating a dynamic exchange of ideas that enriches the data with multiple viewpoints and collective insights (Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus group discussions were held with a women's group and farmers' group (Songbawiere women group, Songtaa Nontaa, Songpage oulo, Sontaa, Kanyire la tono women groups, etc.), which were beneficiaries of the NGOs' projects. These participants were

purposely selected due to their critical roles in developing and implementing development projects.

FGDs were conducted, two in the Wa East district and two in the Wa West district. The selected communities include:

1. Wa East District: Kulkpong (Amplio Ghana) and Loggu (CDA).
2. Wa West District: Dorimon (Amplio Ghana) and Gaa (CDA).

The communities were selected using a simple random sampling, ensuring fairness and representation. For example, all 40 communities within each NGO's operational area were assigned unique numbers, and a random number generator was used to select the study communities. Each focus group consisted of 10 participants to ensure manageability and depth of discussion. Participants will include leaders from various women's groups. The interactive nature of FGDs allows participants to build upon each other's responses, generating nuanced insights that might not emerge in one-on-one interviews. (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

Combining in-depth interviews and FGDs provides a robust qualitative methodology, capturing individual expertise and group dynamics. While interviews offer detailed, personalized accounts from crucial stakeholders, FGDs enable researchers to observe collective perspectives and interactions, which can reveal more profound insights into community experiences and attitudes. This methodological triangulation enhances the reliability and validity of the study's findings (Morgan, 1996). By employing these methods, the study generated comprehensive data that supports a nuanced understanding of C4D strategies, their effectiveness, and the challenges encountered in NGO-led development projects in the Upper West Region.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

These projects benefit individuals directly involved in NGO development projects, particularly those in communication or project management roles, and stakeholders with experience living in communities.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

The exclusion criteria were Individuals outside the communities where the selected NGOs operate and participants without relevant knowledge of the communication strategies under study.

### **Profile of Selected NGOs**

#### **Community Development Alliance (CDA)**

Out of some nine NGOs that operate within the Wa East and Wa West Districts, two – Community Development Alliance (CDA) and Amplio Ghana were selected for this study. In the selection process, diversity of backgrounds was deemed significant since an organization's origins and philosophies may influence its communication strategies. This explains the selection of one local NGO (CDA) and Amplio, which is of American origins. The two NGOs were also more suited to the study because of their leading roles in implementing development projects within the two selected districts and their application of C4D in that process Through

its outreach interventions, the CDA aims to reduce poverty, empower women and girls, and strengthen community-based structures and systems to improve livelihoods and social service delivery outcomes for poor, vulnerable, and at-risk populations. The Alliance primarily focuses on children, adolescents, and women living in underserved communities in Ghana.

CDA operates in all 11 districts in the Upper West Region. Since its inception in May 2008, the NGO implemented various programs using various communication strategies. It has a Strategic Communications department that controls and develops communication strategies for various programs. The “Let Girls Learn; End Child Marriage” project (LGL-ECM) is currently being implemented in both the Wa East and Wa West Districts. The beneficiary communities in Wa West include Chogsia, Napkanabule, Yeliyiri, Ga, Bankpama, Dornye, Grungu, Guo, Nako, and Tambari whilst those in the Wa East district include Bona, Duu- wesr, Funsu, Halembio Gyikpie, Mortigu, Loggu, Loggu sagu, Manwe, Kpaglahi, and Baayiri. The “Let Girls Learn; End Child Marriage” program aims to improve access to quality basic education and eliminate child marriage in the Upper West Region.

### **Amplio Ghana**

Amplio Ghana is an American-based NGO that has since 2007 been operating in Ghana. It designs and delivers social and behavioral change interventions for vulnerable populations in remote and hard-to-reach communities. The mission of Amplio Ghana is to empower the world’s most vulnerable populations through knowledge sharing. Through its Amplio Talking Book digital solution strategy, the NGO has, over the years, partnered with government, NGOs, and other civil society organizations to effect behavioral change communications in sectors such as agriculture, climate change, health, WASH, nutrition, education, child protection, conflict prevention, and gender. Key among the partners they have worked with in Ghana include the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Ghana Health Service (GHS), Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), etc. Amplio Ghana currently works with ACIDI VOCA, Creative Associates, Gates Foundation, STAR-Ghana Foundations, and GHS on various interventions in the agriculture, health, and conflict sectors.

Amplio Ghana uses the Talking Books and other Social and Behaviour Change Communication channels as conduits to deliver consistent and accurate messaging in four local languages (Dagaare, Sisaala, Brifo, and Mampruli) on conservative agriculture, tree planting, and community fire management within 50 communities across 14 districts in Northern Ghana. REACH is one of Amplio’s major projects in Wa East and West districts, which has attracted the interest of this study. The REACH project covers nineteen (19) communities including Baayiri, Bielikpong(Bielepong), Buffiama, Chawuli, Duccie, Duu, Gbantala, Hollomuni, Jeyiri, Juanfian, Kpalworgu, Kulkpong, Kulung, Kunyabin, Yaala 1, Yayuanbee, Guonoi, Kundungu, and Tuasa.

### **Results**

#### **C4D Strategies:**

**Amplio Talking Book:** The Amplio Talking Book is a modern communication device developed by Amplio Ghana. This device contains prerecorded voice notes and audio messages on the project for farmers to listen to. These talking books are distributed to farmers in groups. The farmers are encouraged to listen to the voice messages in groups and rotate the device to ensure individual listening. The devices are designed in such a way that they are connected to a dashboard, which is monitored by the project team. Farmers can also record feedback and

questions they need answers to. The program coordinators who monitor the dashboard provide feedback on questions asked by the farmers. These devices come in handy; they are chargeable and can also be powered by energizer batteries. Messages are recorded in the local dialect the project community speaks and understands.

**Champion Farmer Model:** A local farmer experienced in Conservation Agriculture (CA) is empowered to educate others in the community through household visits and demonstrations. This interpersonal approach builds trust and facilitates knowledge transfer.

*We used the Champion Farmer. This is the traditional model, where we identify somebody already practicing Conservation Agriculture (CA) in the community and give the person some motivation and some training. The person now moves from house to house to educate others. This is usually somebody who lives in the community, so it takes away the idea that the new idea is complex and difficult (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

The Champion Farmer Model is a traditional model developed by the Ministry of Agriculture that most NGOs use to implement projects in the agricultural sector.

In communities where the NGO cannot identify a model farmer, they use famous or supposedly difficult persons in the community's eyes. Such difficult people are convinced to buy into the new idea. They are sometimes given monetary compensation. Once they accept the idea, they serve as ambassadors, telling others about it and the need to adopt the new farming practices of Conservation Agriculture.

*Sometimes, we will pick people who the community members see to be very difficult. We try to convince that particular person and use he/she to educate others. So, the person uses his/herself as an example to convince others to embrace the project (Programs Manager, Amplio, Ghana).*

Amplio Ghana also used murals to communicate their projects to target groups. Murals are paintings that visualize the messages being conveyed. They are visual representations (murals) in public areas that depict key messages about CA practices, environmental sustainability, and community-focused topics like anti-bush burning. As part of the REACH project, three murals are being painted in all 50 project communities in the Wa East and Wa West districts of the Upper West region: one on the fight against bushfires, one on the three principles of Conservation Agriculture (CA), and one on agroforestry.

*We are doing three murals in each of the 50 communities. Each community will have one mural on the fight against bush burning, another on the three principles of Conservation Agriculture, and another on agroforestry. We want to bring some visualization to the Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC) things we are doing. One of the easiest ways to make them visualize some of the things we show them is through murals. A concept that depicts what they are expected to do. These are usually paintings on the walls (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

CDA equally used some strategies, including “Circle of Support.” This participatory tool engages the entire community in child protection efforts by assigning responsibility for the upbringing of children to all members, not just parents. This strategy promotes collective responsibility for behavior change, particularly in child marriage prevention.

*The Circle of Support seeks to get everybody in the community to support the upbringing of the children. The project manager usually will ask people (community members) to identify some of the roles that various individuals within the society need*

*to play to help girls achieve their goals. They will identify all the people who have roles to play, including the mother, father, and many others. The people mentioned are made to come out and stand in front of the crowd. They are made to understand that the upbringing of a child is not the sole responsibility of the parents. All other members of the community have roles to play in the successful upbringing of the child. The spirit of community upbringing of children is inculcated in them (Programs Manager, CDA).*

The “Circle of Support” enlightens various community actors on the roles they can all play in collectively raising responsible children in society.

*Through the identification of roles, all the community members get to know the various roles they can play to ensure the successful upbringing of children within the community. They are therefore made aware that the upbringing of a child is a collective responsibility. They therefore pledge to support each other (Programs Manager, CDA).*

Another strategy used to communicate and educate the community members on ways of enabling girls to achieve their goals was “Tug-of-War.” This is a visual and participatory tool that highlights the barriers preventing young girl from achieving their goals. The Community members are made to identify some of the obstacles that can stop girls from achieving their goals and then brainstorm solutions and symbolically remove the obstacles.

*Firstly, a girl is asked what she wants to become in the future. She will identify her future career as a lawyer, nurse, or teacher. We now inform the gathered crowd of the career path the girls want to take in the future. Together, they mention the possible obstacles the girl will likely face in pursuing her chosen career. For each obstacle mentioned, a rope is tied to the girl's waist, and someone holds it. They are again made to brainstorm some ways through which the obstacles identified can be overcome. As they are proposing solutions, the ropes tied to the girl's waist are removed one after the other till they are all removed. The community then pledges to support the girl in achieving her dream (Programs Manager, CDA).*

### **Stakeholder Perception of the Effectiveness of C4D Strategies**

The study's main objective was to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of C4D strategies used by the selected NGOs in implementing their projects in the two districts. The key stakeholders involved in the interviews and Focus Group Discussions conducted by the researchers on the effectiveness of C4D strategies included the program managers of the two NGOs, opinion leaders, Agric Extension Officers, VSLA leaders, women groups, and some selected beneficiaries of the project communities.

The Talking Book was perceived to be a very effective means of disseminating messages by both the staff at Amplio Ghana and beneficiaries from project communities. The use of the Talking Book enabled the messages from Amplio Ghana to reach multiple communities, getting many farmers to practice conservation agriculture. The tool's audio-based format, available in local dialects, extended the reach of messages to community members who were illiterate or had limited access to formal education.

*The Talking Book helped us deliver consistent messages across large areas (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

The Talking Book also broadened the reach of messages through its portability and group listening model.

*We are always up to 30 or 40 people listening together in groups (VSLA Member)*



Similarly, the Champion Farmer Model was perceived to be effective in the sense that it broadened the reach of messages on CA through direct, one-on-one communication.

*I can estimate that about 50 farmers, made up of 15 men and 35 women, are currently practicing CA in this area (Agricultural Extension Officer).*

Using the mural enabled even the illiterate farmers to easily see and understand the messages portrayed through the paintings.

In CDA's case, the "Circle of Support" strategy was an effective way of getting the whole project community involved in the project implementation. This strategy broadened the number of people who had access to messages on the project. Community leaders and traditional authorities were instrumental in rallying participation in child protection and girls' education activities.

*Using the Circle of Support demonstrated how everyone, ranging from the teacher and farmer to the nurse in the community, has roles to play in the upbringing of a child, which means everyone has a stake in the project (Programs Manager, CDA).*

*Similarly, with the Tag-of-war, all the community members are involved in identifying the problems that hinder the education of girls, and they again brainstorm on solutions to address these problems (Programs Manager, CDA).*

Also, both organizations reported high levels of engagement due to the participatory nature of the approaches used. This solidified the perceived effectiveness of the communication strategies. Amplio Ghana's use of formative research ensured that the community's preferences for content delivery (dramas, songs, interviews) were met, enhancing engagement. The murals sparked ongoing community discussions about Conservation Agriculture (CA) and bush burning, keeping people invested in the program.

Amplio Ghana's layered approach using visual, audio, and interpersonal methods led to better comprehension of complex agricultural concepts. The Talking Book repeatedly exposed messages, while the Champion Farmer Model reinforced learning through practical demonstrations and localized knowledge.

*They taught us new ways of applying fertilizer through the messages we heard from the talking book; this has led to greater yields from our crops (Agric Extension Officer).*

CDA's Tag-of-War and Circle of Support fostered direct community participation. By using symbolic representations of barriers (ropes tied around children), community members felt more engaged in problem-solving and contributing solutions.

*They bring all of us together to brainstorm on some of the challenges that girls face in their education and how they can be addressed. Because we are all actively involved, we understand the message and put into practice what they teach us (Leader Sontaa Women Group).*

Another beneficiary said, *Through the tag-of-war training, we now know some of the things that can prevent our girls from achieving their dreams." The circle of support also made us understand that we all have roles to play in raising children in the community (Leader, Songpaga ollo Women Group).*

The use of localized messaging further encouraged active participation.

*We put into practice what they teach us. When our colleague farmers see us using new farming methods, they are eager to learn from us and also practice (CA Farmer).*

The effectiveness of these strategies is also manifested in the behavioral change recorded. Amplio Ghana's Talking Book and Champion Farmer Model effectively prompted measurable behavior change. In Kulkpong, the number of farmers adopting Conservation Agriculture increased from 1 to 6, showcasing the impact of the C4D strategies used. In Dorimon, as many as 50 farmers have adopted and are practicing CA.

*The number of farmers practicing CA after the intervention significantly increased. This can be attributed to the messages from the talking book and the role played by the champion farmers (Agric Extension Officer).*

Another farmer notes: *We now farm maize and soya beans, crops we use not to farm. The messages we heard from the talking book were very clear, and it taught us proper spacing and how to apply fertilizer effectively (CA Farmer).*

The Murals also contributed to behavior change by reinforcing messages visually.

*Now, when I go to my farm, I remember the picture I saw on the wall about preventing bushfires through fire belts, so I try to make fire belts for my farm. Now, many farmers make fire belts” (CA, Farmer)*

CDA's “Circle of Support” significantly reduced child marriage and school dropouts in communities where it was implemented. The collaborative nature of the strategy empowered community members to take collective action to ensure girls remained in school and out of early marriages.

*Before the project, child marriage cases were frequent. After the intervention, cases dropped significantly, and many girls stayed in school (Programs Manager, CDA).*

A beneficiary said *that since the NGO came, many girls have gone to school. Girls are no longer rushing into marriage (Leader, Songtaa Nontaa Women Group).*

### **Factors that hindered the smooth application of C4D strategies**

The two NGOs faced some challenges in implementing their projects using the various C4D strategies outlined above. Some of the challenges they faced are explained below;

Difficulty in tracking the success of visual interventions is one of the challenges faced by Amplio Ghana. The programs manager of Amplio Ghana noted that while murals were impactful in communicating messages on CA, tracking their direct influence on behavior change was challenging.

*Social behavior change communication is difficult to track. We often rely on feedback and indirect measures to assess effectiveness (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

Another challenge the NGOs faced was dealing with deep-rooted cultural barriers. Community Development Alliance (CDA), for example, faced resistance in some communities where child marriage was seen as part of cultural or religious norms.

*In the Muslim-dominated communities, our message on child marriage was seen as against Islamic teachings, the people, therefore, resisted (Program Manager, CDA).*

*It is not easy to teach people new farming methods like CA. These are people who are already used to their traditional methods of farming. It was, therefore, difficult getting some farmers to throw away what they were used to and embrace the new practices (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

Furthermore, there was a difficulty in getting all group members (VSLA groups) to listen to the Amplio talking book. The programs Manager for Amplio Ghana indicated they encountered difficulties ensuring that all group members heard the messages from the Talking Book. In some cases, only a few people in the group were listening.

*Sometimes, it is hard to tell if everyone in the group is listening or if just one person is engaging with the Talking Book (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

Both NGOs complained that funding constraints limited the extent to which they could implement some projects.

*If we had enough money, we could record our messages in so many languages (Project Manager of Amplio Ghana).* Also, the project manager for CDA said,

*We cannot monitor project success and sustainability after the project because we do not have funds for that (Project Manager, CDA).*

The language barrier was another challenge encountered by both NGOs. Due to the diverse dialects spoken by people within the project communities of Amplio Ghana, the NGO was compelled to record its talking book messages using multiple dialects. This affected the consistency of message delivery.

*In the Upper West, the major languages spoken include Dagaare and Sisaala. The Dagaare has several dialects, the same as the Sisaala, and this sometimes affects the consistency of messages delivered (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

Lastly, Limited access to mainstream media also posed a challenge to the success of C4D strategies usage. The NGOs lamented their inability to access mainstream media like TV and others like social media to convey their messages to beneficiary communities.

*Because of the type of communities we are working in, we cannot use mainstream media like TV or social media, which are some of the fastest and most cost-effective means of disseminating information (Programs Manager, Amplio Ghana).*

CDA encountered similar constraints. Due to the lack of access to more advanced communication technology, it had to rely heavily on in-person engagement tools like Circle of Support and Tug-of-War.

#### **4. Discussion**

This research makes significant contributions to the field of C4D theory, particularly in understanding the dynamics of stakeholder perceptions and the role of context in evaluating communication strategies. It reinforces Participatory Communication Theory by demonstrating that the active involvement of community members and the use of trusted local champions are critical to fostering credibility and ownership of development initiatives. The findings also validate the centrality of cultural adaptation, highlighting that culturally resonant tools such as audio messages in local dialects or visual aids reflecting traditional practices enhance message retention and behavioral change.

Additionally, this study introduces new dimensions to the discourse on C4D theory. It identifies the economic framing of advocacy messages as a potential avenue for addressing cultural resistance, particularly in contexts where traditional norms conflict with development goals. By showing that stakeholders responded positively to messages linking education and delayed marriage to economic benefits, this research highlights the intersection of communication and behavioral economics, expanding the theoretical frameworks guiding C4D practices.

The study also contributes to the underexplored area of evaluating visual tools in participatory communication. While visual methods like murals and participatory games effectively engage communities, their long-term impact on behavior remains challenging to measure. This insight calls for developing robust theoretical frameworks to assess the indirect outcomes of visual communication in C4D.

The findings of this study align with, extend, and challenge existing literature on Communication for Development (C4D) strategies. This comparative analysis situates the results within the broader discourse on participatory communication, cultural adaptation, and development outcomes, drawing parallels and distinctions with prior research.

This study corroborates fundamental principles in Participatory Communication Theory, particularly the importance of stakeholder engagement and local context in C4D strategies.

Servaes (2008) and Freire (1970) emphasize that effective communication requires dialogical interaction, where communities actively participate in shaping the messages and methods of delivery. Amplio Ghana and the Community Development Alliance (CDA) employed participatory tools like the Champion Farmer Model and the Circle of Support to foster engagement and ownership. These tools resonate with Tufte and Mefalopoulos's (2009) assertion that participatory methods empower communities by leveraging local knowledge and fostering collective problem-solving.

For instance, Amplio Ghana's Talking Book and CDA's Tug-of-War game are practical applications of participatory principles. Stakeholders perceived these tools as accessible and engaging, demonstrating their effectiveness in overcoming barriers such as low literacy levels. This finding is consistent with Waisbord's (2015) research, highlighting the efficacy of culturally adapted, multi-sensory tools in enhancing message comprehension and retention in rural, resource-constrained settings.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the role of trusted messengers in increasing the credibility and acceptance of development messages. Both NGOs utilized local champions and leaders, aligning with Figueroa (2002). The suggestion is that community-based communicators are more effective in delivering behavior-change messages. As noted by one community member, *"We trust the advice because it comes from someone within our community who knows our struggles."* This reflects established evidence that trust and social capital influence community perceptions and actions.

While this study aligns with much of the existing literature, it also offers new insights into underexplored aspects of C4D. One unique contribution is examining group-based communication tools like Amplio Ghana's Talking Book, which simultaneously fosters inclusivity and presents logistical challenges. While audio-based interventions have been widely studied (Gautam, 2021), this study highlights the uneven access caused by group listening dynamics, where some members miss sessions due to time constraints or competing priorities. Additionally, Amplio Ghana's use of visual tools such as murals underscores the potential of participatory visuals in addressing complex issues such as bushfires, promoting agroforestry, and promoting Conservative agriculture. However, tracking the long-term impact of such tools (murals) remains challenging, as observed in this study. Existing literature offers limited guidance on evaluating the effectiveness of visual tools, suggesting a need for further research to develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks for these interventions.

Another novel finding relates to the economic framing of advocacy messages. While most literature focuses on cultural and social framing, this study revealed that emphasizing the economic benefits of delaying child marriage was a game-changer in some communities. Chiefs and local leaders suggested reframing child protection messages to highlight the financial advantages of educating girls, a perspective that deserves greater attention in future studies.

This study challenges some prevailing assumptions in C4D literature, particularly the scalability of participatory approaches in resource-constrained settings. While Servaes (2008) and Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) Advocate for participatory communication as universally efficacious, the findings suggest that practical constraints, such as limited funding and linguistic diversity, can dilute its impact. The study's findings reinforce the importance of context-sensitive and iterative approaches in C4D as Inagaki (2007) Emphasized. However, it also points to gaps in existing frameworks for monitoring and evaluating participatory and visual tools. The challenges observed in tracking the effectiveness of Amplio Ghana's murals and CDA's Tug-of-War game suggest that more research is needed to develop methods for assessing the indirect impacts of these interventions.

Furthermore, the economic framing of advocacy messages opens new avenues for exploration, particularly in culturally resistant settings. This approach aligns with behavioral economics principles, suggesting a potential intersection between C4D and economic incentive-based communication strategies.

## **5. Conclusions**

This study aligns with established literature on participatory communication and cultural adaptation while providing fresh perspectives on the use of group-based and visual tools, the framing of advocacy messages, and the scalability of participatory approaches. It underscores the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive frameworks that address the practical and cultural challenges of implementing C4D strategies in diverse settings. These insights advance the theory and practice of development communication, offering valuable guidance for future research and implementation. These findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive and context-specific communication strategies for achieving sustainable development outcomes.

Strategies that resonated with stakeholders by fostering inclusivity, trust, and engagement.

The participatory approaches employed by both organizations enhanced community ownership and encouraged collective problem-solving. However, challenges such as linguistic diversity, resource constraints, and entrenched cultural norms posed significant barriers.

## **Recommendations**

The findings offer actionable recommendations for NGOs, policymakers, and development practitioners in resource-constrained and culturally diverse settings.

The study calls on NGOs to invest in culturally sensitive communication tools. Developing content in local dialects, incorporating cultural symbols, and using relatable messengers can enhance the relevance and acceptance of messages. Tools like Amplio Ghana's Talking Book demonstrate the importance of tailoring strategies to community-specific contexts.

Also, NGOs should strengthen participatory approaches. Community-driven tools, such as CDA's Circle of Support, empower stakeholders to identify and address local challenges collaboratively. NGOs should prioritize co-creation processes to foster trust and ownership.

NGOs can also leverage economic framing in advocacy messaging. Highlighting the financial benefits of behavior change, such as delaying child marriage or adopting modern agricultural practices, can resonate with communities with solid cultural resistance.

Lastly, enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems. NGOs should develop methods to track the long-term impacts of participatory tools, such as murals and games, which are essential for assessing their effectiveness and refining strategies.

## **Limitations of the Study**

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The research was geographically limited to the Wa East and Wa West districts, which may affect the

generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-cultural dynamics. Additionally, the qualitative methodology provided in-depth perspectives but could not quantify stakeholder perceptions or measure behavior change at scale. While insightful, reliance on stakeholder-reported outcomes introduces potential biases that could influence the interpretation of results.

### **Areas for Future Research**

To address these limitations and advance the field, future research should explore the following areas:

**Broader geographic studies:** Expanding the scope to include multiple regions with diverse cultural and linguistic contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of C4D effectiveness across Ghana and beyond.

**Quantitative analysis of stakeholder perceptions:** Incorporating quantitative methodologies, such as surveys or experimental designs, could complement qualitative findings and offer generalizable insights into the impact of C4D strategies.

**Longitudinal studies on behavioral change:** Investigating the sustained impact of participatory and visual tools over extended periods would help determine their long-term effectiveness and scalability.

**Exploration of economic framing in C4D:** Further research could examine the efficacy of linking development messages to financial incentives in different cultural contexts, particularly in areas with solid resistance to social change. **Comparative studies on visual tools:** Evaluating the effectiveness of various visual communication methods, such as murals and participatory games, across diverse settings could generate best practices for implementation and monitoring.

This research underscores the transformative potential of C4D when strategies are context-sensitive, participatory, and culturally aligned. By addressing the identified gaps and building on these findings, future studies can further refine the practice and theory of C4D, ultimately contributing to more effective and sustainable development initiatives.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the study's participatory nature, ethical considerations were paramount. All participants were given informed consent, assurances of confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any research stage. Special care was taken to ensure respect for the cultural and social sensitivities of participants from rural communities.

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