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**COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: AN ANALYSIS OF INTERACTIONS
BETWEEN LOCAL CHIEFS AND RESIDENTS IN NIMA AND THE IMPLICATIONS
FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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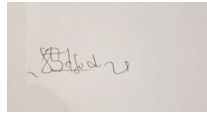
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DECLARATION BY STUDENT – DISSERTATION

I solemnly declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Master of Arts in Development Communication degree. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by any other person, nor any material which has been presented for the award of any other degree in this or any other university, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

I hereby certify that this dissertation has been prepared and submitted under my supervision in accordance with the supervision and formatting guidelines prescribed by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC).

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Abstract

Communication is widely acknowledged as an essential element of social change and community development, particularly in situations where traditional leadership structures remain dominant. This study investigates communication for social change by analysing interactions between local chiefs and people of Nima, a highly populated and culturally diverse urban district in Accra, Ghana. The study examines the impact of communication procedures between chiefs, residents, professionals, and other stakeholders on participation, trust, and development outcomes. The study employs an interpretivist qualitative approach, utilising a case study design and conducting in-depth interviews with fifteen purposefully selected participants, including traditional leaders, local government officials, professionals, religious leaders, youth activists, traders, and residents. The findings reveal additional difficulties such as trust deficiencies, ineffective feedback systems, political intervention, and insufficient openness. The study implies that Nima's development is limited due to a lack of professional engagement in planning and execution processes. The study suggests that, while conventional, all leadership remains necessary, enhancing participative, inclusive, and dialogical communication is crucial for achieving genuine social change and sustainable urban development in Nima.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, children, and grandchildren, whose invaluable and unwavering support has brought me this far. Your understanding and acceptance of the path I chose are deeply cherished and sincerely admired.

To Alhaji Mohammed Mukhtar Umaru Braimah, also known as Garkuwan Gabas, you were there when your support was most needed. I greatly value all that you did to help ensure that this journey reached a successful conclusion.

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Today, I stand at a higher level of knowledge than when I first enrolled in this programme, in affirmation of Allah's words: "taught man that which he knew not" (Qur'an 96:5).

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

International development organisations like UNESCO and UNICEF have identified communication as a critical instrument for advancing education, health, governance, and community resilience (Eventhén, 2024). In many areas of the world, participatory communication practices are being used to guarantee that marginalised populations are active decision-makers rather than passive users of information (Asimakopoulos et al., 2025). Paulo Freire's dialogical paradigm, for example, promotes communication procedures that enable communities to question, reflect, and act jointly to alter their social reality (Escobar et al., 2024). This transition from top-down information transmission to participatory engagement emphasises the expanding role of communication in promoting equitable and sustainable development across the world (Sebunya & Gichuki, 2024). In Africa, communication for social change is profoundly embedded in traditional governance structures and indigenous knowledge practices (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023). Before the development of contemporary state institutions, African communities depended significantly on chiefs, elders, and opinion leaders to encourage conversation, resolve problems, and organise collective action (Ijomah-Reynolds, 2024).

Traditional communication channels such as storytelling, community forums, town criers, and festivals were used to shape public opinion and mobilise community members (Ineji, 2024). Despite the growth of contemporary governance, traditional leaders continue to play important roles in development, frequently collaborating with governments and civil society groups to raise resources and promote community engagement (Gerencser et al., 2025). However, many African nations are presently facing a conflict between traditional leadership systems and contemporary

democratic government, particularly in metropolitan areas (Bhanye, 2023). The problem is to reconcile conventional authority with participatory communication tactics that reflect current realities, such as the impact of youth, technology, and globalisation (Hossain, 2024). Communication is widely acknowledged as a major engine of societal change and progress (Mahoney & Tang, 2024). The term "development communication" was first used in the Philippines in the 1970s by Professor Nora Quebral to describe the processes of conveying and sharing new information about rural surroundings (Flor, 2024).

Development communication is 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 that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfilment of the human potential (Cardey et al., 2024). Development communication is an attempt to inform, raise awareness, educate, and enlighten people so that they can improve their lives in every way (Kankam & Attuh, 2024). It includes participatory action for learning and power sharing in three areas: social, economic, and political, all within specific cultural contexts. At every level (social, economic, and political), information flow and communication are critical (Garnham, 2020). Development is unlikely to occur without a sufficient two-way flow of information and communication between the peripheral and the centre, including knowledge sharing, market information, and political engagement (Zhang & Liao, 2022).

Communication may facilitate participative and shared decision-making between people and communities, as well as governments and citizens. Alternatively, communication media contribute to development through informative and instructional efforts, as well as participatory forms of group media that affect attitudes and views (Galatsopoulou et al., 2022). The concept of development communication is founded on the notion that telephones, radio, television, the

Internet, and other mass media can enhance the lives of disadvantaged individuals in developing nations (Yar'Adua & Aondover, 2021). In African countries, communication frequently transcends contemporary media systems and is strongly ingrained in traditional power structures (Gibrilu, 2023). Chiefs and local leaders have long been crucial communicators, mediators, and cultural guardians, helping to mobilise communities for collective action and growth (Dlamini, 2025). The notion of communication for social change promotes discussion, involvement, and empowerment, shifting away from one-way information transmission and towards inclusive methods that allow communities to take ownership of their own development (Igbashangev, 2025). Traditional leadership continues to play an important role in social organisation and community development in Ghana (Kubi & Korang, 2024). Ghana's 1992 Constitution acknowledges the importance of chieftaincy, although decentralisation policies urge chiefs to assist governmental efforts in community development (Boateng & Bawole, 2021). In reality, chiefs mediate disagreements, facilitate land access, and advocate for infrastructure and social reforms (Bashiru, 2020). Communication between chiefs and community people is therefore essential for good government and development (Carius & Job, 2021). However, the Ghanaian setting poses special obstacles. Rapid urbanisation, political polarisation, economic disparities, and generational gaps have all exacerbated the communication environment (Zhou & Liu, 2025). This complexity may be seen in Accra's urban areas, like Nima.

Nima is noted for its cultural richness, economic activity, and extensive informal networks, but it also confronts significant developmental issues such as poor sanitation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited employment possibilities. Chiefs in Nima maintain power and influence, but their ability to promote development is primarily dependent on how well they communicate and connect with citizens (Bukari et al., 2023). This study analyses how local chiefs in Nima interact and

collaborate with people and development stakeholders to identify, prioritise, and implement community development projects in an urban Ghanaian setting. It examines the chiefs' communication methods, channels, and participation techniques and evaluates their compatibility with development communication and communication-for-social-change concepts.

The study is crucial because there is little empirical understanding of how traditional leadership communication works in complicated metropolitan environments where political intervention, generational divisions, and technological development frequently undermine participatory involvement. Nima's dense population, cultural variety, and ongoing development issues make it an important case study for analysing the role of traditional communication mechanisms in inclusive development. The study looks at communication practices, participation, and power relations employing in-depth interviews and theme analysis, following a qualitative, interpretative methodology influenced by Freire's dialogical paradigm. Its aim is to identify communication gaps and create context-specific solutions to promote equitable and sustainable development in Nima.

1.1.1 Nima: A Brief Overview

Nima is a vibrant and historically significant neighbourhood in the northeastern part of Ghana's capital (Bandauko, Asare & Arku, 2025). It is in the Ayawaso East Municipal Assembly and is an important part of Greater Accra's urban landscape (Abdulai, 2024). Nima is located around five kilometres from Accra's core business area and covers roughly 1.59 square kilometres of the larger 3.7-square-kilometre Ayawaso East Municipal area (Blechner, Leight & Polifka 2021). The community's population has grown significantly, rising from 29,797 in 1960 to over 69,000 by 2000, with a population density of around 437 people per hectare (Apeku, 2021). Its origins may

be traced back to the Odoi Kwao family, who donated Malam Amadu Futa with land (Ziblim, 2022). Over time, the neighbourhood has grown into a significant business hub. The Nima Market is open every day and sells cereals, vegetables, spices, animals, and traditional remedies, representing the community's economic vigour.

Despite its vitality, Nima suffers from the normal issues of quickly urbanising areas, such as insufficient infrastructure and housing (Dotsey, Dzikpe & Amoah, 2025). Redevelopment projects, such as the Accra Inner-City Redevelopment Project, seek to enhance living conditions, provide homes, and attract visitors (Owusu et al., 2023). Local chiefs play an important role in community leadership by facilitating development efforts and advocating for citizens' concerns (Salifu & Abdul-Karim, 2024). Their relationships with the community are critical for encouraging social change and boosting growth.

1.2 Problem Statement

Development Communication is an integrated discipline which examines and advocates social change through the conscious, participatory implementation of communication research, theory, and technological resources in development initiatives (Servaes, 2022). Nordberg, Mariussen, and Virkkala (2020) define development as a widely participative process of social change in a society that aspires to achieve both social and material betterment. Communication for development is a social activity that tries to build common ground among all participants in a development project, creating the framework for coordinated action (Gupta et al., 2024). The strategic use of communication methods, activities, and media gives people powerful tools for experiencing and influencing change (Woodcock & Johnson, 2021). An increased exchange of ideas among various segments of society can result in more engagement in a common cause (Hügel & Davies, 2020). This is a fundamental requirement for appropriate and sustainable growth. Effective

communication is widely recognised as a cornerstone of community development, yet many grassroots communities in Ghana continue to have gaps in how traditional leaders and members engage (Odoom et al., 2021).

In Nima, chiefs play an important role in rallying locals, settling conflicts, and lobbying for communal concerns (Sasu & Owusu-Agyeman, 2024). Despite their impact, the neighbourhood continues to suffer development issues, such as poor sanitation, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to basic social services. This raises questions about the effectiveness of chief-resident communication in driving real social change. Mazibuko (2021) is of the view that while chiefs have historically served as their people's voices and mediators of local problems, changes in social structures, generational dynamics, and the effect of contemporary government and digital communication platforms have transformed how citizens interact with leaders. Akaateba, Ahmed & Inkoom (2021) also share the view that some inhabitants, particularly young, may regard chiefs as symbolic rather than functional, restricting their participation in development discussions.

According to Entsie et al. (2025), distrust, political meddling, or inadequate feedback systems stifle communication, excluding many community members from decision-making processes that impact them directly. This dynamic creates a schism between local officials and inhabitants, which may hinder collective action and development efforts (Saif, Keane & Staddon, 2022). There is a significant body of literature on development communication and the theoretical foundations of social change, including the role of communication in participatory development, media engagement, and collective action (Servaes, 2022; Gupta et al., 2024; Woodcock & Johnson, 2021; Hügel & Davies, 2020). Similarly, various studies have looked at the role of traditional leaders in Ghanaian communities, specifically their effect on conflict resolution, community mobilisation,

and local government (Sasu & Owusu-Agyeman, 2024; Mazibuko, 2021; Akaateba, Ahmed, & Inkoom, 2021).

While there is a growing body of work on chiefs' leadership and development communication, there is little empirical research on the actual interactions and communication processes between chiefs and residents at the grassroots level, particularly in urban, diverse, and rapidly changing neighbourhoods like Nima. Most studies examine chiefs' duties in broad strokes or focus on historical, political, or symbolic aspects without considering how communication strategies, feedback mechanisms, and participatory practices influence resident participation and concrete social change. Furthermore, research on contemporary issues in chief-resident communication, such as the influence of demographic transitions, digital media, distrust, and political involvement on local development initiatives, appears to be limited. Young citizens' opinions of chiefs as symbolic or functional leaders, as well as the actual hurdles to inclusive community engagement, have not received appropriate attention.

Thus, the research gap is defined by a dearth of focused, empirical studies that investigate the efficacy, obstacles, and possibilities in communication between local chiefs and Nima inhabitants, especially how these interactions promote social change and long-term community development. Addressing this gap will yield meaningful insights into increasing participatory communication and collaborative action at the community level and expose the implications for development.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To examine how local chiefs in Nima communicate and engage with professionals and residents in identifying and prioritizing development projects.

- ii. To explore how the interaction between the chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima can be characterized
- iii. To investigate the implications of the nature of communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders, including professionals and development stakeholders of Nima.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. How do local chiefs in Nima communicate and engage with residents and professionals in identifying and prioritising development projects?
- ii. How can the interactions between local chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima be characterised in terms of participation, inclusivity, and effectiveness?
- iii. What is the implications of the nature of communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders, including professionals and development actors, in promoting community development in Nima?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study investigates interactions between local chiefs and residents of Nima to promote development in Nima, Accra. Thus, the data is sourced from Nima and do not cover all slums in urban neighborhoods in Ghana. The findings and conclusions of the study should be understood as such, although the findings may give helpful lessons for other urban communities facing similar developmental issues.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study's fundamental significance stems from its addition to academic knowledge in development communication and traditional government. Empirically, the study presents new, context-specific information on how Nima chiefs interact and communicate with residence and

development stakeholders to shape development activities inside an urban informal settlement. The study fills a significant vacuum in the literature, which has primarily concentrated on either rural traditional leadership or formal state-led development, therefore broadening academic understanding of chief-stakeholder communication dynamics in urban African settings. Theoretically, the study adds to the global literature on development communication by critically examining the applicability of participatory and communication-for-social-change frameworks particularly Freire's dialogical model in a setting marked by political complexity, generational shifts, and digital transformation.

The study challenges accepted assumptions that participatory communication is necessarily inclusive by depicting how power dynamics and urban realities influence communication results. Furthermore, the study adds a unique Ghanaian perspective to worldwide discussions about development communication by situating chieftaincy within Ghana's constitutional, decentralised, and urban government frameworks. This contextualisation strengthens comparative studies by introducing a practice-based viewpoint that is under-represented in hegemonic development communication theory. Further, the findings provide policymakers, development practitioners, and traditional leaders with practical recommendations for increasing communication, trust, and collaboration in community development. Socially, the study promotes inclusive participation and collaborative action, which leads to more sustainable development outcomes in Nima.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

This research is divided into five chapters, each covering a different facet of the study and providing a full evaluation of communication for social change in Nima. The first chapter describes the study's background, problem description, research purpose, objectives, questions, scope, and importance. It lays the groundwork for understanding the role of communication in fostering

growth. Chapter Two examines important literature and theoretical frameworks, including scholarship on communication for social change, traditional leadership, and participatory development, while also identifying gaps that the study fills. Chapter three describes the study technique, including design, population, sampling, data collection, analysis methodologies, and ethical issues. The fourth chapter presents and analyses the findings, assessing data from chiefs, locals, and professionals to identify communication hurdles, major topics, and chiefs' roles in participatory discourse. The study concludes with Chapter Five, which summarises findings, discusses ramifications, makes suggestions, and suggests topics for further research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter explores literature related to the topic of this research and theories that guide the analysis. It investigates scholarly works on communication for development, participatory communication, and the changing role of traditional leadership in urban settings such as Nima. The theoretical framework is based on Communication for Social Change Theory, Participatory Development Theory, and Social Capital Theory, and provides lenses for examining relationships, power dynamics, and communication patterns between chiefs and stakeholders. By integrating theoretical and empirical insights, the review highlights gaps in the literature, particularly in everyday communication processes in urban communities, laying the groundwork for the study's methodological.

2.2 Empirical Review (related literature)

Brierley and Ofori (2024) performed an experimental research to investigate how traditional leaders affect public decision-making, notably through endorsements during election cycles. The study findings showed that leaders maintain tremendous power and legitimacy, and that their

communication has a big impact on voter attitudes and behaviours. This research emphasises the continuous significance of traditional leadership communication in Ghanaian culture, as well as how chiefs' speeches may unite or divide communities. This finding is critical for understanding the political elements of chief-resident communication in Nima, where political intervention and credibility concerns have been recognised as hurdles to successful development communication. Similarly, Kos, Lensink, and Meuwissen (2023) investigated how social capital impacts community conduct, using agricultural innovation uptake in Ghana as an example. His quantitative investigation revealed that trust, network links, and community cohesiveness all play important roles in influencing whether people accept new ideas and participate in collaborative endeavours. The study discovered that weak connecting social capital, namely fear of authority or bad connections with leaders, affects community readiness to participate in new ventures. This conclusion is directly related to the issues observed in Nima, where mistrust between chiefs and villagers stifles development initiatives and communication frequently fails to bridge the gap between leadership and stakeholders.

Tufts (2024) provided a critical analysis of Communication for Social Change (CFSC) strategies in a variety of worldwide situations. His assessment indicated that, while the CFSC encourages discourse, participation, and empowerment, actual implementation frequently falls short owing to structural disparities, tokenistic involvement, and institutional impediments. This study offers a crucial cautionary viewpoint for analysing communication processes in Nima, advising researchers to distinguish between true participatory communication and participation that occurs just in form but not in practice. Further studies from the Nima community help to expand the understanding of these dynamics. Bandaiko, Asare, and Arku (2025) performed a mixed-methods study on place attachment and social networks in Nima and Old Fadama. Their findings found

that, while inhabitants have strong social links and cultural connections to their community, they are also dissatisfied with limited institutional accountability and slow response from traditional and municipal authorities. These findings illustrate the complicated interplay between cultural attachment and unhappiness with leadership, implying that communication strategies may impact citizens' perceptions of their leaders' efficacy.

Additional studies in the Ghanaian setting demonstrate the changing responsibilities of chiefs in contemporary government. In a qualitative study of leadership vacuums in Ghanaian communities, Sasu and Owusu-Agyeman (2024) discovered that when chiefs are absent, inactive, or delegitimised, informal leaders, such as youth organisations and market women, take on leadership and communication responsibilities. This suggests that communication routes in communities are flexible and adaptable, especially as faith in conventional authority dwindles. The study draws key parallels with Nima, where youth organisations and other informal players wield power alongside chiefs.

Collectively, these empirical studies reveal numerous essential patterns. First, trust and social capital have a huge impact on whether locals engage in development initiatives and accept leaders' ideas. Second, conventional leaders' communication continues to influence public perceptions, but its success is dependent on legitimacy and openness. Third, participatory communication is frequently limited by institutional and political barriers that must be overcome before true social change can occur. Fourth, urban communities like Nima are moulded by hybrid systems of leadership and communication that include both formal and informal players. Despite the insights provided by these studies, none directly investigates the daily communication processes between chiefs, people, and professional stakeholders in a varied and heavily populated metropolitan area such as Nima. This gap highlights the importance of the current study, which attempts to

investigate these interactions in depth and assess their impact on participatory development and social change.

2.2.1 Gaps in Literature

Although research on traditional leadership, social capital, and participatory development communication in Ghana has increased, there are still gaps in comprehending these processes in densely populated urban areas like Nima. Brierley and Ofori (2024) found that chiefs maintain significant authority, with their communication influencing public attitudes and voter behaviour. According to Kos, Lensink, and Meuwissen (2023), social capital—trust, network links, and community cohesion—plays an important role in creating community involvement and efforts. Tufte (2024) emphasises that, while Communication for Social Change (CFSC) promotes dialogue and empowerment, structural and institutional barriers frequently limit its effectiveness. Empirical studies conducted inside Nima, such as Bandaiko, Asare, and Arku (2025), demonstrate strong social links and cultural attachment, as well as discontent with traditional and city authorities' lack of responsibility and response.

Sasu and Owusu-Agyeman (2024) demonstrate that informal leaders, such as youth organisations and market women, take up leadership when chiefs are unavailable. These findings suggest that trust, legitimacy, and participatory communication are essential for effective development, and that urban communities frequently employ hybrid leadership systems that include formal and informal players. However, previous scholarship focuses mostly on rural or election situations, creating a void in our knowledge of ordinary contact between chiefs, people, and professionals in cities. To address this gap, the current project aims to investigate these connections to inform participatory development and social change in Ghana's cities.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Communication for Social Change Theory

Jan Servaes' Communication for Social Change (CFSC) Theory provides a fundamental framework for understanding how communication may create meaningful and long-term community development (Akoh & Oluwasola, 2025). The theory arose as a critique of early development communication models, notably those based on the modernisation paradigm of the 1950s and 1970s, which saw development as the transfer of Western knowledge and technology to "underdeveloped" civilisations (Okajare, 2025). These approaches prioritised top-down communication, expecting that supplying the "right" information would inevitably result in social and behavioural change (Perlaviciute, 2025). Scholars, including Paulo Freire, Nora Quebral, and Servaes, criticised this strategy for ignoring local realities, stifling community voices, and failing to promote meaningful involvement or empowerment (Backhaus, 2021). CFSC integrates participatory and dialogical methods for development, highlighting communication as a collaborative, dynamic process (Dutta, 2025).

It sees communities as active agents in their own development, with communication, trust-building, reflection, and feedback essential for accomplishing attitudinal, behavioural, and social reform (Ma, Maziya & Francis, 2025). Development is defined not just as economic or technical advancement, but also as a participatory and culturally ingrained process requiring community ownership, inclusion, and communal decision-making (Banda, 2025). The theory is extremely pertinent to the current study, which looks at communication between chiefs and inhabitants in Nima, an ethnically diverse and socially active urban neighbourhood in Accra. CFSC may determine if interactions are participatory and empowering or hierarchical and top-down, and whether community dialogues encourage collective prioritisation and project ownership. It further

provides a framework for investigating issues such as political intervention, generational differences, and waning trust in traditional authority.

Therefore, CFSC identifies communication as a key driver of social change, giving conceptual tools for evaluating how chief-resident interactions promote trust, participation, cohesiveness, and long-term growth. The idea supports the study's goal of understanding the role of discourse, involvement, and collective engagement in creating development outcomes in urban traditional leadership environments.

2.3.2 Participatory Development Theory

Participatory Development Theory originated in the 1970s as a response to the limits of early top-down development models, notably those based on modernisation theory (Conable & Olsson, 2024). Modernisation theorists hold the view that transferring information, technology, and policies from governments or outside experts to passive masses would result in development (Mutalemwa, 2021). In reality, such methods silenced local voices, neglected cultural circumstances, and imposed externally planned solutions that frequently failed to fulfil grassroots communities' needs (Siddiqui, 2025). These assumptions were challenged by influential scholars such as Paulo Freire and Nora Quebral, who advocated for dialogical and participatory techniques, saying that progress and emancipation need active involvement, reflection, and knowledge co-creation (Phillips, 2024). Participatory Development Theory focuses on two-way communication, mutual learning, empowerment, and shared ownership of development processes (Gregory & Yudarwati, 2024).

It places communities as critical partners in diagnosing issues, setting priorities, mobilising resources, and implementing solutions (Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing, 2022). Participation is both a

practical technique for enhancing project outcomes and a democratic concept that promotes social cohesiveness and increases the legitimacy of initiatives (Sebunya & Gichuki, 2024). The theory is especially pertinent to this research, which looks at how local chiefs in Nima work with citizens and professionals to identify, prioritise, and implement development initiatives. Nima's socially heterogeneous metropolitan setting, which includes traditional leadership, informal networks, and professional stakeholders, requires a framework that captures dialogical participation, power-sharing, and collaborative decision-making. Participatory Development Theory gives a perspective through which to evaluate whether leaders establish inclusive environments, include disadvantaged groups, promote transparency, and encourage collaborative decision making. It also provides a lens to assess whether communication promotes trust, resident ownership, and long-term outcomes.

Through the understanding of development as participatory, the theory provides a solid platform for studying interactions between chiefs, locals, and professionals in Nima.

2.3.3 Social Capital Theory

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) proposed Social Capital Theory, which was extended by Robert Putnam (1993), as a framework for understanding how connections, trust, and social networks impact collective activity and growth within communities (Portes, 2024). Bourdieu defined social capital as the resources contained in social networks, emphasising how power, class, and social ties influence access to resources and social consequences (McDonald, Davis & Shen, 2024). Putnam expanded the notion by emphasising its communal character, claiming that societies with high levels of trust, shared norms, and cooperative networks have greater democratic participation, governance, and developmental results (Soithong & Suksawas, 2025). He distinguished between bonding social capital, which fosters links among specialised groups, and bridging social capital,

which brings disparate groups together to enhance collaboration (Okland, Oterholm & Brady, 2025).

In development communication, Social Capital Theory connects interpersonal connections, community cohesiveness, and collective engagement to long-term development goals (Sari, Ahmad, & Junaedi, 2024). Communication is more than just exchanging information; it is also a process of shaping social ties. Strong social capital promotes collaboration, trust, and cooperative action, whereas low social capital causes mistrust, fragmentation, political meddling, and opposition to collective projects (Chen, Lin, & Chen, 2025). This theory is especially pertinent to the current study, which looks at communication between chiefs and community members in Nima. It gives techniques for determining whether these contacts promote trust, collaboration, and shared norms, or aggravate divisions. Effective communication, open discourse, and transparent decision-making create bridging capital by uniting citizens from all backgrounds, but exclusionary policies damage networks and restrict participation.

The Social Capital Theory contributes to the study's theoretical underpinning by connecting communication patterns to trust, involvement, and social cohesiveness. In Nima's dynamic urban milieu, where political pressures, generational transitions, and social variety alter relationships, the theory offers a prism through which to see how communication may either bridge divisions and encourage development or exacerbate social fragmentation.

2. 4 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the relevant empirical and theoretical literature on development communication, participatory communication, social capital, and the changing role of

conventional leadership in urban settings. Empirical studies show that traditional leaders continue to have enormous communication power, but the success of their participation is heavily reliant on trust, legitimacy, and social capital. The research also found that, while Communication for Social Change and participatory techniques promote dialogue and empowerment, their practical application is sometimes hampered by political, institutional, and urban complications. Ghanaian studies, particularly those on Nima, found considerable community attachment and discontent with leadership responsiveness and responsibility, as well as the growth of informal leadership systems. The chapter additionally highlighted significant gaps in the literature addressing regular interaction procedures among chiefs, residents, and professional stakeholders in densely populated areas.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the study's methodological structure. It details the research design, study population, sampling methodologies, and data collection methods used to investigate communication between chiefs and community members. The emphasis is on qualitative instruments that capture narratives, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as data analytic approaches for detecting themes and patterns. Ethical issues are emphasised to preserve participants' voices, illustrating how the technique supports the study's goal of investigating communication as a driver of social change in Nima.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

The study was grounded on an interpretivist philosophy that holds that reality is socially created and best understood through the meanings people attribute to their experiences (Acharya, 2024). The adoption of an interpretivist philosophy is significant since it is consistent with the study's purpose of understanding the socially constructed realities of communication between traditional leaders and community members in Nima. Unlike positivist techniques, which focus on numerical data and generalisations, interpretivism enables researchers to investigate people's meanings, perceptions, and experiences within their cultural and social settings (Acharya, 2025). This viewpoint is critical since communication in Nima is based on traditions, local authority systems, and community norms that cannot be adequately represented by quantitative methods. By employing this strategy, the study prioritises depth, context, and subjective insight, allowing the researcher to answer the "how" and "why" questions concerning social connections and community mobilisation (Reed & Rudman, 2023).

The interpretivist ideology justifies the use of qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews and case study designs, which give rich, information on real-life situations (Thorne, 2025). This strategy guarantees that the study offers nuanced insights rather than broad generalisations, making the findings more meaningful and context-relevant. This viewpoint influenced the researcher's belief that communication, particularly between local chiefs and residents, cannot be reduced to numbers or frequencies alone; it must be understood within its cultural and social contexts (Abdulai, Ibrahim & Anas, 2023). Interpretivism prioritises knowledge over measurement, emphasising subjective insights over broad generalisations. This philosophy influenced the researchers because it emphasises the researcher's intention to discover how individuals in Nima perceive, interpret, and negotiate their interactions with conventional authority in the context of

societal change. Following this philosophical perspective, the study used a qualitative research technique.

The qualitative approach is utilised because, in line with interpretivism, it emphasised depth, meaning, and context rather over quantity. (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). It enabled the researcher to investigate the subtle ways in which communication influences and reflects social development in Nima. Following this approach, the study used a case study design. A case study design is a qualitative method of study that entails an in-depth, comprehensive examination of a delimited system such as a community, organisation, institution, or social process in its real-world environment (Tisdell, Merriam & Stuckey-Peyrot, 2025). Rather than attempting statistical generalisation, case studies strive to create contextualised and analytical insights by investigating how social phenomena emerge over time and in unique situations (Bunkar, et al., 2024). The case study approach is used in this study to investigate communication processes among local chiefs, residents, and development partners in Nima.

The case study approach allows the researcher to capture the intricate connections, power dynamics, and participatory practices contained in ordinary communication that surveys and experimental approaches cannot effectively investigate (Brennen, 2025). By contextualising communication practices within Nima's socio-cultural, political, and institutional contexts, the case study approach allows for a rich, nuanced, and context-sensitive investigation of how conventional authority contributes to or constrains participatory growth and social change. This design was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive analysis of a real-life event in its natural surroundings (Robson, 2024). The case study focuses on Nima, a community whose chiefs, according to popular opinion, take an active role in mobilising residents for development. Using this approach, the study gathered information via in-depth interviews.

3.3 Population of the Study

This study's population consisted of persons and organisations in Nima. Nima residents may comprise traditional leaders of the various ethnic groups, elders, professionals, opinion leaders and ordinary citizens who play an important role in community government and decision-making. It also included Nima inhabitants, notably those who attend community meetings, development talks, and social change initiatives. Other significant organisations included youth representatives, women leaders, and religious leaders, as they frequently impact community viewpoints and development efforts.

3.4 Sampling, Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Sampling is the process of selecting a collection of people from a larger population to represent the entire population (Giri, 2024). Because it is nearly impossible to investigate every person in a society, such as Nima, sampling allows the researcher to get relevant data that gives insights into the larger population (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Sampling was essential because the researcher wanted to gain a thorough knowledge of communication patterns within the community, which necessitated focusing on individuals with diverse experiences and views rather than a large, statistically representative sample (Tracy, 2024). Lloyd (2021) expresses the view that qualitative research prioritises depth over breadth. The study therefore focused on finding information-rich individuals who could best describe how communication promotes societal change.

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability strategy that selected participants based on their expertise, roles, and relevance to the research issue (Shamsudin, Hassim & Abd Manaf, 2024). Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to deliberately pick persons who had personal

experience with community communication procedures and could describe chiefs' roles in development projects (Lebenya, Mubangizi & Ojogiwa, 2024). Purposive sampling with the greatest variety was used to capture varied opinions across gender, age, and socioeconomic position. This guaranteed that perspectives from both community leaders and regular members were included. The researcher thus identified and chose participants per their varied experiences, rather than numerical proportion (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). The researcher began the sampling procedure with conversations with community gatekeepers, such as local chiefs and opinion leaders, and other participants who were actively involved in community initiatives and traditional activities.

The study's sample size was 15 participants, chosen based on the idea that smaller sample sizes are appropriate in qualitative research since the purpose is to obtain depth and detail rather than generalise findings (Ahmed, 2025). According to Lim (2025), qualitative case studies typically have between 10 and 30 participants, ensuring appropriate diversity while allowing for extensive interaction. The chosen quantity was deemed sufficient to generate rich and useful data to address the study's topic. The 15 participants were chosen to represent a broad range of community actors involved in communication for social change in Nima. To ensure anonymity, the participants have been assigned role-based codes thus, Local Government Official I is represented as LGO I, Local Government Official II is represented as LGO II, Local Chief I is represented as LC I, Local Chief II is represented as LC II, Local Chief III is represented as LC III, Professional (Banker) is represented as Prof-Bnk, Professional (Educationist) is represented as Prof-Edu, Trader (Male) is represented as Trd-M, Trader (Female) is represented as Trd-F, Youth Activist I is represented as YA I, Youth Activist II is represented as YA II, Religious Leader (Muslim) I is represented as RL-

M I, Religious Leader (Muslim) II is represented as RL-M II, Religious Leader (Christian) is represented as RL-C. The table for the role-based code is attached to the document as an appendix.

The participants for this study were purposefully selected to provide a comprehensive perspective on community development in Nima. The Metropolitan Chief Executive and Assembly members were included because, as representatives of the local authority, they play a crucial role in facilitating and implementing the government's developmental programmes at the local level. Their involvement ensures that the study captures insights into policy execution and local governance. The inclusion of chiefs was essential, as they possess in-depth knowledge of the socio-economic development and cultural dynamics of the various ethnic groups in Nima. Their traditional leadership positions place them as custodians of community interests and agents of social cohesion. Religious leaders were also selected as key stakeholders. Given the significant influence of religion in the community, religious leaders are instrumental in shaping social values, mobilising community members, and supporting development initiatives.

Professionals, such as bankers and educationists, were chosen for their expertise and capacity to contribute to community development. Their specialised knowledge offers valuable perspectives on economic growth, education, and capacity building within the community. Traders were included due to their central role in the economic life of Nima. As major drivers of local commerce, their participation provides important insights into the economic challenges and opportunities facing residents. Altogether, these groups provided a well-rounded representation of stakeholders relevant to the study's objectives, ensuring a balanced and holistic understanding of the community's developmental landscape.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

The major data gathering instrument was a semi-structured interview guide created by the researcher. The guide was created to keep a clear focus on the study objectives while also allowing for the exploration of deeper findings. It included open-ended questions about the forms and channels of communication between chiefs and residents, the perceived effectiveness of these communication strategies, the role of traditional leadership in fostering social change, and the challenges and opportunities for community involvement. The semi-structured method allowed participants to freely express their thoughts while also allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions or seek clarification on new concerns. My supervisor assessed the instrument to verify that it was clear, relevant, and consistent with the study's aims.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

In November 2025, in-depth interviews were held with Nima residents who were actively involved in community communication and development initiatives. Participants were contacted in advance to explain the study's goal and organise interview sessions at times that were convenient for them. Interviews were conducted separately at venues (homes and offices) chosen by the participants, which were often peaceful and secluded settings within the community, to guarantee comfort and anonymity. Each interview lasted about 30 to 45 minutes on average, giving participants enough time to provide in-depth insights into their experiences and perspectives. To ensure data accuracy, all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. The recordings and associated field notes were securely saved in a password-protected digital folder accessible only to the researcher, ensuring participant confidentiality and data integrity for analysis. The interviews were conducted in both English and Hausa. For the English-language interviews, the researcher

employed an AI transcription application (Turbo Scribe) to generate verbatim transcripts. The Hausa-language interviews were transcribed directly by the researcher, who possesses demonstrated competence in both spoken and written Hausa.

3.7 Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis was the study's primary data analysis approach. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for qualitative research that aims to analyse participants' experiences, perceptions and meanings, rather than numerical data (Khoa, Hung & Hejsalem-Brahmi, 2023). Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify, organise, and interpret recurring patterns in the interview data, thereby enhancing understanding of how chiefs and residents communicate and influence social change in Nima. Data analysis began immediately after each interview, which was recorded verbatim, using a voice recorder. The researcher familiarised himself with the data by reading the transcripts several times to get a sense of the participants' opinions. The next phase was coding, which included labelling relevant blocks of text with short sentences that expressed their key concepts. To ensure intimate interaction with the data, coding was done manually with coloured highlighters and margin comments.

The codes reflected significant themes mentioned by participants, including confidence in leadership, community engagement, power dynamics, and cultural respect. Following initial classification, related codes were compared, aggregated, and modified into more general categories. These categories were then thoroughly evaluated and integrated to generate significant themes that captured the core of the participants' shared experiences. During the iterative process, six primary themes emerged:

- i. Trust and Credibility – exploring how confidence in chiefs affects communication outcomes.
- ii. Participation and Involvement – describing how community members engage in decision-making.
- iii. Cultural Values and Identity – examining how traditional norms shape communication practices.
- iv. Power and Influence – highlighting the dynamics between chiefs and residents.
- v. Communication Barriers – identifying challenges such as misinformation, hierarchy, and limited access.
- vi. Traditional Leadership and Development – discussing the evolving role of chiefs in promoting social change.

To ensure authenticity and demonstrate the relationship between evidence and interpretation, verbatim quotations from participants were included for each subject. The themes were reviewed to ensure internal consistency and distinctiveness, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis: (1) familiarisation with data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) theme search, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) theme writing. This methodical methodology guaranteed that the findings were believable, transparent, and thoroughly rooted in the participants' stories. The final interpretation went beyond just recounting what the participants stated; it examined how their experiences represented the larger social and cultural communication patterns in Nima. The outcome of this process provided a comprehensive, contextualised understanding of how chiefs and residents of Nima interact to shape community development.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were crucial to this study. Prior to data collection, the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UniMAC) provided official ethical approval through the Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Development (DRID). This permission verified that the study followed institutional ethical guidelines for participant safety, consent, confidentiality, and appropriate data processing. Before conducting interviews with the local chief, formal authorisation was obtained from appropriate traditional authorities, including the chiefs' palace in Nima. This method adhered to established cultural conventions and recognised the authority of traditional government systems within the community. Entry into the community and access to participants were thus carried out with the full knowledge and consent of both institutional and local government authorities. All participants were given explicit information about the study's objectives, their participation, and their freedom to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Informed permission was collected in either written or spoken form, depending on the literacy level of the subjects. Proxy words were used to protect confidentiality, personal identifiers were removed, and data was stored securely so that only the researcher could access it. Cultural sensitivity directed all encounters, ensuring that local norms and practices were followed throughout the study process.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter laid out the study's methodological approach, focusing on a qualitative research design to investigate communication between Nima chiefs and inhabitants. The study population consisted of traditional leaders, community leaders, professionals, religious leaders, and residents,

with purposive sampling used until data saturation. Data were gathered via in-depth interviews, and the primary approach for discovering patterns was thematic analysis. Ethical aspects such as informed consent, confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and participants' well-being were highlighted. This provides a credible, methodical, and ethical assessment of communication as a vehicle for social change.

Chapter Four

Presentation of Findings, Analysis and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the findings of the study's field data collection. The Chapter is based on the analysis of qualitative data from traditional leaders, community members, and other important stakeholders in Nima. The analysis is directed by the study's research objectives and questions, with a particular emphasis on understanding the link between communication between chiefs and residents and social transformation and development. The Chapter takes a thematic approach, enabling important themes to emerge from the data. The findings are also examined in connection to the study's theoretical frameworks, which include Communication for Social Change, Participatory Development, and Social Capital Theory.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

4.2.1 Background Characteristics of Participants

The study engaged participants from numerous facets of the Nima community to achieve a fair and inclusive representation of viewpoints. These included traditional chiefs, assembly members, religious leaders (both Islamic and Christian), youth leaders, traders, professionals, and regular citizens. The chiefs and elders shared their viewpoints on traditional power, governance, and customary communication procedures. Assembly members who form the local government and experts shared insights into development planning and institutional collaboration. Religious representatives emphasised moral impact and community mobilisation, while youth leaders and traders expressed their perspectives on participation, inclusiveness, and daily connection with traditional authorities.

4.2.2 How local chiefs in Nima communicate and engage with professionals and residents in identifying and prioritising development projects.

The findings demonstrate that local chiefs in Nima play an important coordinating role in the discovery and prioritising of development initiatives, particularly through traditional and face-to-face communication channels. Chiefs frequently engage locals in community meetings, durbars, and discussions with elders and religious leaders, which serve as forums for outlining development needs and soliciting community feedback. These forums are culturally accepted, adding validity to the decision-making process. Engagement with professionals and opinion leaders, such as teachers, health workers, and assembly members, is typically more selective and consultative.

Chiefs rely on these entities for technical assistance, feasibility evaluations, and external connections, particularly for initiatives involving education, sanitation, or infrastructure. However, their participation is frequently informal and relies on personal networks rather than official consultative processes.

While community members are typically informed about development projects, data show that prioritising decisions are heavily influenced by chiefs and elders, with little direct input from youth and women. Feedback systems do exist, but they are not necessarily systematic, which might influence perceived project ownership.

4.2.2.1 Dominance of Traditional Communication Channels

According to the findings, contact between Nima's local chiefs, professionals, and its residents is mostly through traditional and face-to-face methods. Chiefs primarily rely on community durbars, meetings with elders, religious gatherings, and the employment of traditional messengers to communicate information about development needs and goals “The chiefs normally use gatherings like mosque meetings and community announcements to communicate development plans because people respect those platforms.” These channels are strongly ingrained in the community's cultural framework and are commonly acknowledged as viable public involvement routes. The dominance of traditional communication methods increases message acceptability and strengthens chiefs' influence in rallying community support for development programs “Using traditional ways of communicating helps people understand and accept messages more easily, enabling chiefs to rally the community behind development projects.”

However, the data show that such channels are typically one-directional, with a concentration on information transmission rather than engaging in discourse. While these venues keep communities informed about development projects, they provide little room for formal discourse, particularly

among the youth. As a result, while conventional communication channels provide cultural legitimacy, they may limit inclusive involvement in selecting and prioritising development initiatives. The following are supports from the data:

“Most of the issues about development are discussed during community durbars and meetings with elders because that is how information has always been shared in this community.” (LC I)

“If there is any development project coming, we usually hear it when the chief calls a meeting or sends elders to inform us. (YA II)

“The chiefs normally use gatherings like mosque meetings and community announcements to communicate development plans because people respect those platforms.” (RL-M I)

“Engagement with the chief is mostly face-to-face. Important discussions about projects happen during traditional meetings (Pro-Edu)

The data from the participants indicate that traditional communication channels remain the primary means through which development information is shared in Nima. Chiefs and elders rely on established community platforms, such as durbars, mosque gatherings, and face-to-face meetings, to disseminate information about development projects and engage with residents. This reflects a continuity of long-standing communication practices, reinforcing the authority and legitimacy of traditional leadership. As one local chief explained, “Most of the issues about development are discussed during community durbars and meetings with elders because that is how information has always been shared in this community”. Residents confirmed this pattern, noting that they are informed about projects through these traditional channels. A youth participant stated, “If there is

any development project coming, we usually hear it when the chief calls a meeting or sends elders to inform us”. Similarly, a religious leader highlighted the strategic use of respected platforms “The chiefs normally use gatherings like mosque meetings and community announcements to communicate development plans because people respect those platforms”. Professionals also observed that meaningful engagement often occurs face-to-face during these traditional assemblies “Engagement with the chief is mostly face-to-face. Important discussions about projects happen during traditional meetings”. These findings suggest that traditional, culturally embedded communication mechanisms continue to play a central role in development communication in Nima. By leveraging established and respected forums, chiefs are able to ensure that messages are received, understood, and accorded legitimacy by community members. This underscores the importance of aligning development initiatives with locally accepted communication practices to enhance participation, trust, and community mobilisation.

4.2.2.2 Centralised Decision-Making by Local Chiefs

Another key theme emerging from the study is the concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of chiefs and senior elders. Although chiefs communicate with citizens and experts, traditional leaders have a great amount of control over which development projects are prioritised. Community contributions are considered, but they are vetted by established hierarchical processes. This centralised strategy is culturally supported by respect for traditional authority and the assumption that chiefs have the knowledge and expertise to act in the common good. However, the data imply that such a structure might hinder community ownership of development projects, especially when citizens believe their inputs have little effect on final choices. The dominance of chiefs and elders in prioritisation procedures reveals a top-down communication pattern, which

may limit communication's transformational potential for societal change if participatory decision-making is not fully embraced. The following are supports from the data:

“We listen to what people say during meetings, but in the end, the elders and I decide which project is most important for the community.” (LC II)

“Sometimes we share our ideas at the meetings, but the final decision usually comes from the chief and the elders.” (Trd-F)

“Consultations are done, but prioritisation of development projects is largely controlled by the traditional leadership.” (LGO II)

“Even though we are informed and asked to attend meetings, the chief and elders take the final decision on development issues.” (YA I)

The analysis from the participants reveals that decision-making regarding development projects is predominantly controlled by traditional authorities. While community consultations and meetings are held, these engagements often serve more as symbolic exercises rather than genuine participatory processes. For instance, one local chief explained, “We listen to what people say during meetings, but in the end, the elders and I decide which project is most important for the community”. Similarly, a local government official noted, “Consultations are done, but prioritisation of development projects is largely controlled by the traditional leadership”. Community members also reflected on the limited influence of their contributions during these consultations. A female trader stated, “Sometimes we share our ideas at the meetings, but the final decision usually comes from the chief and the elders”, while a youth commented, “Even though

we are informed and asked to attend meetings, the chief and elders take the final decision on development issues”. These statements collectively indicate a top-down approach to participatory communication, where residents are informed and consulted but do not hold meaningful decision-making power. Although the process allows for dialogue and the expression of community preferences, the ultimate authority remains with traditional leaders, highlighting a tension between participatory ideals and the hierarchical structures inherent in urban chieftaincy. This dynamic has significant implications for the extent to which development initiatives in Nima are truly community-driven, suggesting that participation is structured within the limits defined by traditional authority rather than being fully emancipatory or shared.

4.2.2.3 Advisory Role of Professionals and Opinion Leaders

Another important theme arising from the study is the advisory role of professionals and opinion leaders. The data also show that professionals and opinion leaders, such as teachers, health workers, assembly members, and community-based professionals, mostly serve as advisors rather than decision-makers in development planning. Chiefs use these individuals to give technical expertise, feasibility evaluations, and project execution advice, particularly in areas requiring a specific understanding. Engagement with professionals is frequently informal, relying on personal networks or perceived knowledge rather than organised consultation processes. While their technical expertise improves the quality and feasibility of development projects, professionals are rarely engaged in establishing development priorities. This restricts the extent to which evidence-based planning may influence project selection. The findings suggest that, while chiefs understand the significance of professional knowledge, its incorporation into decision-making is still

secondary to traditional authority structures, sustaining a hierarchical communication paradigm within the community. The following are supports from the data:

"Professionals are usually consulted only when technical advice is needed, but when it comes to deciding which project should come first, that decision is taken by the chief and the elders." (Prof-Ban)

"The chiefs listen to professionals, but mostly for advice. They are not part of the final decision-making on development priorities." (Prof-Edu)

"There is no formal system where professionals are invited to plan development projects. Most of the time, it is based on who the chief knows personally." (RL-C)

"Even though professionals understand what the community needs from an evidence-based perspective, their ideas are often secondary to traditional authority and customary decision-making." (Trd-M)

The data reveal that professionals' involvement in development planning in Nima is largely consultative and advisory, with limited influence over the final decisions regarding project prioritisation. While professionals may offer technical expertise or evidence-based recommendations, the ultimate authority consistently resides with the chief and the elders. One professional explained, "Professionals are usually consulted only when technical advice is needed, but when it comes to deciding which project should come first, that decision is taken by the chief and the elders". Similarly, another professional noted, "The chiefs listen to professionals, but mostly for advice. They are not part of the final decision-making on development priorities".

Participants also highlighted the informal and relational nature of professional involvement in project planning. A research leader observed, “There is no formal system where professionals are invited to plan development projects. Most of the time, it is based on who the chief knows personally”. A trader further emphasised the secondary role of technical expertise, stating, “Even though professionals understand what the community needs from an evidence-based perspective, their ideas are often secondary to traditional authority and customary decision-making”. These findings indicate that while professionals provide essential technical knowledge, their contributions are constrained by traditional governance structures, which prioritise customary authority over evidence-based decision-making. This dynamic demonstrates a hierarchical participatory system, where professional input is acknowledged but rarely dictates outcomes. Consequently, development planning in Nima reflects a balance between technical expertise and entrenched traditional authority, with chiefs and elders retaining control over which projects are prioritised. This has implications for the effectiveness and responsiveness of development initiatives, particularly when professional insights conflict with customary preferences or personal networks.

4.2.3 Characterization of interaction between the chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima.

Local chiefs and stakeholders interact in a collaborative but top-down framework governed largely by the local government. While the assembly has a cordial relationship with traditional authority, it normally convenes sessions to update chiefs on predetermined projects rather than involving them as co-planners. Chiefs frequently serve as simply endorsers or "compulsory entry points" for local government goals. There is a substantial "downward" communication gap since information presented in assemblies seldom reaches ordinary citizens or youngsters. Lateral contact with other

prominent groups is also strained; religious leaders describe a lack of developmental conversation with chiefs, and professionals believe their knowledge is rarely used. Interactions with traders and youths are mostly reactive or ceremonial. Traders want chiefs' assistance for conflict settlement rather than growth planning. Furthermore, youth activists see the involvement as lacking vision, giving it a low rating owing to a lack of inclusion. These relationships are further hampered by budget restrictions, since many chiefs must personally pay for their community participation initiatives.

4.2.3.1 Communication Flow and Transparency

The theme communication flow and transparency emerges as one of the key themes. The study identifies significant flaws in communication flow and openness between local chiefs and stakeholders, portraying the system as top-heavy and mostly one-way. Although the Municipal Assembly has monthly meetings with chiefs, information seldom reaches sub-chiefs or ordinary inhabitants, leaving communities uninformed about development plans. Transparency is further harmed by the absence of institutionalised data-sharing methods, such as a lack of databases on local experts and insufficient financial openness, particularly on budget allocations. This has contributed to a decline in stakeholder trust. Key groups like youths and traders are frequently notified just after decisions have been taken, perpetuating a reactive approach that limits meaningful involvement. Cultural and language obstacles, particularly the use of English in official talks, limit access to information. Thus, communication remains fragmented and state-centred, rather than inclusive, emphasising the need for digital platforms for increasing transparency, involvement, and community trust. The following are supports from the data:

“Even though the chiefs attend meetings at the Municipal Assembly, most of the information does not come back to the community, so people are often unaware of what development plans exist.”(YA I)

"There is no clear system for sharing information, especially about budgets or who is involved. This makes people suspicious and reduces trust." (Trd-M)

"We usually hear about projects when they are about to start. By that time, the decisions have already been taken somewhere else.” (Prof-Ban)

"If there were digital platforms where updates were shared regularly, more people would be informed and able to contribute instead of reacting at the last minute.”(YA II)

The data from the participants indicate that information flow between traditional leaders, development authorities, and community members in Nima is often limited and delayed, leading to gaps in awareness and trust. Although chiefs participate in municipal meetings, the information shared at these platforms rarely reaches the broader community. A youth participant notes that, “Even though the chiefs attend meetings at the Municipal Assembly, most of the information does not come back to the community, so people are often unaware of what development plans exist”. This suggests that the communication chain between local governance structures and residents is weak, preventing meaningful participation. Community members also highlighted the absence of formal systems for disseminating information, particularly regarding budgets or stakeholder involvement. As one trader explained, “There is no clear system for sharing information, especially about budgets or who is involved. This makes people suspicious and reduces trust”.

Professionals corroborated this point, noting that residents often receive information only when projects are about to commence: “We usually hear about projects when they are about to start. By that time, the decisions have already been taken somewhere else”. Participants suggested that digital platforms could improve transparency and inclusivity by providing timely updates and enabling broader participation. A youth commented, “If there were digital platforms where updates were shared regularly, more people would be informed and able to contribute instead of reacting at the last minute”. These findings reveal that limited information sharing and delayed communication undermine community trust and reduce opportunities for participatory engagement. While traditional channels and face-to-face meetings remain important, there is a clear need to integrate structured, timely, and possibly digital communication mechanisms to ensure residents are adequately informed and able to contribute meaningfully to development planning in Nima.

4.2.3.2 Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement

The theme of inclusivity and stakeholder engagement in Nima is distinguished by a substantial gap between the formal recognition of diverse community groups and their real participation in the development process. While the local government has a cordial relationship with local leaders, involvement is mostly top-down and selective. Traditional authorities are frequently seen by the assembly as "compulsory entry points" for already-decided projects, rather than as co-planners in the planning process. This leads to passive involvement, with chiefs serving as endorsers of a "fixed" project menu rather than active negotiators for community-specific requirements. Furthermore, favouritism and the marginalisation of local skills undermine inclusion. Youth

activists claim that leaders frequently deal primarily with known persons, failing to "scan" the community for skilled inhabitants who care about the public good.

There is also a noticeable lack of professional participation; there is currently no database of indigenous specialists available to give technical advice on government plans. Traders and religious leaders are usually confined to the periphery, learning about choices only after they have been made. As a result, engagement in Nima remains reactive and ceremonial, failing to reach the broad-based, bottom-up participation envisioned by decentralisation programs. The following are supports from the data:

"Most of the time, the assembly already has the project in mind. We the chiefs are informed, but are not involved in planning it from the beginning." (LC I)

"We chiefs are treated more like compulsory entry points. Once we agree, the project moves on, even if the wider community has not been properly consulted."(LC III)

"Religious leaders, who command large, regular gatherings, are largely underutilised in reaching out to their congregants for inclusive communication." (RL-M II)

"Youth groups are hardly involved unless the leaders already know you personally. There are many skilled young people here, but nobody makes the effort to identify or engage them." (YA I)

The responses from the participants suggest that there is a disconnect between the goals of decentralisation and the realities of stakeholder participation in Nima. While inclusion is

acknowledged as critical for effective project identification, participant testimonials reveal that this notion is rarely followed in reality. The distinction between informing and consulting stakeholders is critical. Traders, for example, are frequently excluded from early decision-making and only informed once plans have been finished, resulting in projects that do not represent community concerns, such as sanitation or market facilities. This imbalance can lead to resistance and impair development objectives. The engagement process also ignores significant social players. Religious leaders, despite their strong community links and moral authority, are underutilised as communication and mobilising vehicles.

Essentially, the current approach is restricted and top-down, failing to use existing community networks. To significantly increase community well-being in Nima, the study concludes that a collaborative, multi-stakeholder agenda focused on co-design, rather than state-led briefings, is required for sustainable development.

4.2.3.3 Trust and Perceived Legitimacy

The theme of trust and perceived legitimacy is a conflict between traditional reverence for leaders and rising contemporary cynicism. Although chiefs are constitutionally recognised as community custodians, their legitimacy is being questioned owing to inadequate transparency and a trend towards purely ceremonial duties. Trust is said to be diminishing, owing to financial and operational opacity around development initiatives. Stakeholders, particularly traders and youth, are worried about opaque funding allocations and decision-making criteria, raising concerns that programs serve narrow interests rather than the greater good. When citizens are only notified at the last minute, such as at sod-cutting ceremonies, leadership engagement is perceived as shallow, undermining the chiefs' moral authority.

Furthermore, chiefs are frequently seen as more prominent at social gatherings than in influencing municipal decisions, perpetuating stereotypes of inactivity. This implies that regaining trust and legitimacy requires a more inclusive, imaginative leadership style that encourages openness, leverages local expertise, and fosters open, multidirectional communication. The following are supports from the data:

"People still respect the chiefs culturally, but when it comes to development issues, trust is reducing because we are not told how decisions or funds are handled."(Prof-Edu)

"We only hear about projects during sod-cutting ceremonies. By then, everything has already been decided, so it feels like we are just being informed, not involved."(YA II)

"Chiefs can reject or suggest modifications, but no changes have occurred to such project so far." (LC I)

"If the chiefs were more open and worked closely with professionals and youth, people would trust them more and see them as real leaders, not just traditional figures." (Prof-Ban)

The response suggests a rising concern of trust and perceived legitimacy in Nima, as governmental domination and secrecy weaken traditional leaders' moral authority. Trust is diminishing as a result of insufficient financial transparency and community engagement in decision-making, with communities only being notified after the project begins. This "transparency gap" breeds distrust, with suspicions that development favours commercial interests above the public welfare. As a result, chiefs are increasingly considered as ceremonial characters, appearing at social occasions

such as weddings and funerals but not as active agents of progress. Their inability to offer independent proposals fosters the impression of inactivity and servitude. Residents regard the local government as the major decision-maker, reducing the chiefs' functional value.

The study indicates that regaining legitimacy necessitates chiefs moving beyond symbolic duties, adopting a transparent and participative approach, and actively advocating for community-specific issues, so re-establishing confidence and reaffirm their role as accountable and visionary local leaders.

4.2.4 Nature of communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders.

Communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders including professionals and development stakeholders in Nima is formal but operationally fragmented, with a preference for state-led notification over community-wide discourse. According to the data, the principal communication hub exists between the Municipal Assembly and the chiefs; the flow is predominantly top-down. The Assembly often contacts traditional leaders to "brief" them on pre-determined project menus, presenting chiefs as symbolic endorsers rather than active co-designers of development. This results in a "notification-only" loop, in which the theoretical ability to edit projects is rarely used. Furthermore, there is a significant communication gap between conventional leadership and the professional class. Due to the lack of an institutionalised database of indigenous professionals, Nima's professionals' technical expertise is rarely used to examine government proposals.

This problem also relates to religious leaders and the youth, who are underutilised while having enormous social capital. While old hierarchies frequently operate as cultural obstacles to open discussion, there is growing agreement that modern technologies such as WhatsApp and Facebook may serve as critical bridge builders. Transitioning from a reactive, state-centric paradigm to a networked strategy that includes professionals, youth, and religious leaders is critical for building a more transparent and inclusive development agenda in Nima.

4.2.4.1 Top-Down Governance and Passive Consultation

The theme of Top-Down Governance and Passive Consultation in Nima emphasises a strong power imbalance in local development planning, with the state dominating decision-making. The interaction between the local government and traditional authority is primarily one-way, with chiefs receiving updates on completed projects rather than engaging in true collaboration. Instead of co-designing projects, the Assembly informs leaders on established project ideas, treating them as recipients rather than participants. As a result, chiefs serve mostly as symbolic endorsers, providing legitimacy for state-led actions, which are sometimes referred to as "national cake." Although heads theoretically have the right to recommend adjustments or reject projects, the paper notes that this has never occurred in practice.

This suggests that consultation is mostly ceremonial, intended to legitimise government decisions rather than incorporate local concerns. Traditional leaders' unwillingness to offer independent proposals or oppose official plans distances them from substantive development planning and increases reliance on central government direction. The following are supports from the data:

“The Assembly brings what they call government projects for Nima, and the role of the chiefs is to accept and support them.”(LC II)

“Most of the projects come from the Assembly already decided. We, the chiefs, are called mainly to be informed, not to plan or design anything.” (LC III)

"Consultation is mostly formal. Once the chiefs are briefed, the project is treated as approved, even if community concerns are not addressed.”(YA I)

"Sometimes it feels like the chiefs are only there to legitimise government projects, the ‘national cake’, rather than to push for what the community really needs." (Prof-Edu)

The response from the participants reveals that the governance arrangement in Nima indicates a significant power imbalance, with the state using a command-and-control approach to community development. Interaction between the Municipal Assembly and traditional authority is typically one-way, with chiefs being briefed on completed projects rather than participating in collaborative planning. This establishes the state as the principal creator of development programs, while traditional leaders take on passive roles within a preset framework. Such dynamics result in symbolic inclusion, with chiefs serving primarily as mandatory entrance points for legitimising state activity, rather than as actual co-planners. Although conventional authorities theoretically can influence or reject suggestions, the lack of such actions in practice indicates entrenched apathy. This predicament is exacerbated by the local government's inadequate use of chiefs' local expertise in determining development priorities. As a result, the top-down governance system creates a gap between official development outcomes and grassroots realities, since people are told about decisions rather than actively shaping them.

4.2.4.2 Institutionalised Professionalism

Another theme derived from the data is institutionalised professionalism which was found to be almost non-existent in Nima. This represents a structural flaw that separates the community's substantial technical and intellectual talent from its development processes. Despite the existence of trained professionals, no institutional processes exist to include them in decision-making institutions. The lack of an institutionalised database of local specialists is a crucial indicator of this gap, limiting leadership's capacity to access specific expertise when assessing or proposing development projects. This leads to misinformed governance, since some local chiefs may lack the technical expertise to improve state-imposed project designs. Although many professionals are eager to help, the lack of organised interaction platforms and the prevalence of ceremonial traditional traditions limit their involvement. Professionals' occasional autonomous initiatives fail to affect larger policy due to a lack of official support. As a result, development is mostly reactive rather than strategic. Stakeholders believe that formal involvement with experts would considerably increase governance quality, infrastructure outcomes, and trust in local leadership. The following are supports from the data:

"There are many professionals in Nima, but there is no formal way or a database for the chiefs or the Assembly to identify and engage them for development planning." (RL-C)

"Most of the time, professionals want to contribute, but there is no formal way to do it. It's always about social things, not technical or professional advice for the community." (Prof-Ban)

"Many of us are willing to support development, but our involvement is mostly limited to social or ceremonial activities, not technical decision-making."(Prof-Edu)

"If professionals were formally engaged, development would be more strategic. Now, things happen only when there is a problem, not through proper planning." (RL-M II)

The responses highlight a significant structural flaw in Nima's development system: the lack of institutionalised professionalism. Although the community has people who hold significant intellectual and technical competence, this resource is underutilised due to a lack of institutional participation mechanisms. The lack of an indigenous expert database limits traditional leadership's ability to locate and mobilise specialists to evaluate government proposals or launch community-led projects. As a result, experts who want to contribute are frustrated since contacts with chiefs are mostly social and ceremonial in nature, rather than technical counsel. This gap prevents social capital from being converted into developmental capital, leaving the community disorganised as a professional force. As a result, the local government offers essentially preset project proposals, portraying chiefs and citizens as passive recipients rather than collaborators in establishing priorities. Therefore, a lack of institutionalised professionalism stifles strategic growth. Formal consultation platforms would allow traditional leaders to successfully argue for technically sound, community-driven development.

4.2.4.3 The Conflict-Driven Nature of Engagement

Another theme is that the conflict-driven nature of Nima's participation reveals a structural restriction in the utilisation of traditional authority for development purposes. The findings demonstrate that engagement between local chiefs and stakeholders is predominantly reactive, happening mostly during conflicts or crises rather than through constant, proactive cooperation. The local chief is often regarded as a court or mediation place, with traders and citizens seeking

traditional authorities to resolve issues. While this peacekeeping function is crucial, it limits chieftaincy to crisis management and ignores its potential as a strategic platform for development planning. During times of stability, contact between chiefs and crucial groups such as youth, professionals, and market leaders sometimes lapses, resulting in a developmental silence.

This reactive strategy inhibits long-term visioning and strengthens top-down government, with the Municipal Assembly being the primary driver of development objectives. As a result, initiatives are often disclosed only after decisions are made, allowing communities to react rather than shape results. A shift to proactive, development-oriented participation is required for long-term growth.

The following are supports from the data:

“Most of the time, we only go to the chief when there is a serious problem or conflict that we cannot solve ourselves.” (LGO II)

"Interaction is not constant. It's periodic and often triggered by an issue. It usually happens when there is a dispute, not when we are planning for development. 'How do we fix this trouble?'" (LGO I)

"There is a communication gap when things are 'fine.' Because the relationship is built on solving conflicts, if there is no conflict, there is no conversation. This makes it hard to build a long-term development plan." (RL-M I)

“When things are calm, there is little engagement with youth or professionals. Communication only increases when there is a crisis.” (RL-C)

The governance setting in Nima is characterised by a dichotomy in which traditional leaders wield significant social influence while engaging stakeholders primarily through reactive, crisis-driven interactions. According to testimonies, contact between chiefs and groups such as traders and adolescents occurs mostly when problems emerge, rather than via long-term developmental discussion. Market actors, despite their economic importance, see the chief's palace primarily as a dispute resolution facility, rather than as a platform for strategic planning or economic strategy. This legal perspective limits chieftaincy to dispute resolution, resulting in “developmental silence” during periods of calm. In the absence of a regular consultative framework, involvement is episodic and focuses on fixing immediate problems rather than defining long-term development. As a result, traditional leadership is locked in maintenance governance, unable to mobilise large coalitions to influence state-imposed development plans. The findings show that chiefs must transition from reactive crisis managers to proactive partners who maintain conversation and preparation even in the absence of conflict.

4.3 Discussions of the Study

4.3.1 Communication between local chiefs, professionals and residents in relation to prioritising development projects.

The study highlights the central role of traditional chiefs in Nima's development through communication conducted via culturally recognised channels such as durbars and community gatherings. While these forums provide trust and legitimacy, they primarily serve as avenues for one-way information dissemination rather than participatory dialogue, reflecting the top-down tendencies described by Participatory Development Theory. Residents, youth, and professionals are often excluded from co-creating knowledge, limiting meaningful engagement and community ownership. As one participant noted, “Even when the youth take part in community forums, their

input has limited impact, reinforcing traditional patriarchal and gerontocratic systems.” Communication for Social Change (CFSC) Theory explains how these unidirectional communication practices hinder empowerment, dialogue, and collective action.

Professional advice is mostly advisory, and technical knowledge rarely shapes final decisions, reducing trust and threatening project sustainability. Social Capital Theory further clarifies that while bonding capital within traditional networks ensures legitimacy, weak bridging capital across youth, professionals, and other community actors limits collaboration and underutilises social and intellectual resources. Strengthening inclusive engagement and bridging social networks could enhance trust, shared responsibility, and effective collective action. The findings indicate that sustainable development in Nima requires institutionalised participatory structures, two-way dialogue, professional integration, and robust bridging social capital to transform traditional authority into an active facilitator of inclusive, community-driven urban development.

This restricts meaningful community engagement and shared ownership, according to participatory and communication-for-social-change viewpoints. Participation in development planning tends to be selective and informal, so local expertise is not fully utilised. As one participant noted, “Even when the youth take part in community forums, their input has limited impact, reinforcing traditional patriarchal and gerontocratic systems”. Similarly, professional engagement is often limited to advisory roles, meaning that technical knowledge and evidence-based input rarely influence final decisions in a systematic way. This reduces perceived project ownership and threatens sustainability. Communication is also primarily unidirectional, relying on individual leadership styles rather than institutionalised procedures. Bonding links remain robust in terms of social capital, but cross-group relationships are weak.

The findings indicate that, while traditional authority offers cultural legitimacy, sustained urban development in Nima necessitates institutionalised professionalism, inclusive involvement, and robust two-way communication channels. Odoom et al.'s (2024) research on participatory communication in Ghana reveals that development communication is frequently top-down, with limited two-way dialogue and low application of participatory communication principles, resulting in weak citizen empowerment and low ownership of development outcomes. Similarly, a study by Ashade and Osawe (2025), *Participatory Governance: Assessing the facilitative leadership role of traditional rulers in the implementation of a decentralised policy in Nigeria*, highlights that while chiefs can mobilise and position communities for involvement in government initiatives, their effectiveness depends on skills, motivation, and collaborative frameworks rather than formal institutional processes. Both studies agree that culturally valid leadership structures should be supplemented with institutionalised, participatory procedures to improve inclusiveness, collaborative decision-making, and long-term growth.

4.3.2 Interaction between the chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima can be characterised.

Interactions between traditional authorities and stakeholders in Nima reflect a socially friendly but structurally unbalanced system that may be critically studied using the CFSC, Participatory Development, and Social Capital theories. According to the CFSC, while chiefs provide culturally acceptable channels that develop trust and collective identity, interaction remains mostly top-down, with the Municipal Assembly holding sessions to brief rather than co-create. This restricts meaningful discourse, reflection, and feedback, limiting the community's capacity to influence development agendas and reducing communication's transformational power. Participatory Development Theory emphasises the exclusion of key stakeholders, such as professionals, youth,

and women, from decision-making processes. Engagement is frequently reactive, crisis-driven, and informal, which precludes systematic engagement, knowledge co-creation, and shared ownership.

Local chiefs' low resources exacerbate this "participation ceiling," which limits broad participation and reduces empowerment. According to Social Capital Theory, although bonds inside conventional systems are robust, bridging capital between varied groups is weak. Limited lateral connection with professionals and religious leaders fractures Nima's intellectual, social, and spiritual resources, limiting collective action and long-term viability. As a result, institutionalised professionalism, two-way participatory communication, and increased bridging social capital are required in Nima to change interactions from symbolic inclusion to co-created, community-driven growth. Dotsey et al. (2024) revealed that traditional leaders had tremendous cultural legitimacy and mobilising potential, as well as socially accepted venues for engaging residents. However, the study concludes that in the absence of formal methods for organised involvement, encounters frequently stay symbolic, limiting chances for collaborative planning and knowledge co-creation.

Similarly, Matsiliza (2024) notes that traditional authorities function within restrictive governance frameworks, limiting their autonomy and ability to enable inclusive decision-making. Chiefs' engagement in development is frequently episodic and reliant on personal networks, with marginalised groups and professionals under-represented in planning procedures. These findings demonstrate that, while chiefs can build trust and togetherness, institutional barriers and top-down practices limit meaningful participation. For long-term community development, established participatory institutions and inclusive communication channels are required to turn customary legitimacy into effective, co-created outcomes.

4.3.3 Nature of communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders, including professionals and development stakeholders of Nima.

The study reveals that Nima's communication environment is socially accepted but functionally fragmented, with traditional chiefs central to development yet largely controlling decision-making. Participatory Development Theory explains that meaningful development requires two-way communication and shared decision-making (Chaka & Adanlawo, 2023). In practice, chiefs often act as symbolic endorsers, with government-advised initiatives predetermined and residents, youth, and professionals excluded from co-creating solutions. This top-down approach limits community ownership and meaningful engagement in development projects. Communication for Social Change (CFSC) Theory highlights how communication can empower communities and foster collective action. In Nima, one-way and reactive information flows prevent dialogue, reduce trust, and restrict stakeholder participation. Institutionalised participatory forums, digital platforms, and inclusive engagement of youth, professionals, and religious leaders could transform communication into a participatory, empowering tool.

Social Capital Theory demonstrates that while strong bonding within traditional networks provides legitimacy, weak bridging capital between diverse actors restricts cooperation and underutilises social and intellectual resources. Strengthening connections across these groups would enhance collaboration and support sustainable, community-driven development. Together, these theories illuminate Nima's development challenges, showing that hierarchical communication, limited participatory dialogue, and fragmented networks inhibit inclusive development. Addressing these gaps through structured participatory mechanisms, integration of professional expertise, and enhanced bridging social capital would enable chiefs to become active facilitators of inclusive, sustainable development. Khumalo (2021) emphasised the importance of participatory

communication in creating social cohesion and long-term community development in the context of the Masibumbane Listeners' Club.

According to the study, authentic participatory communication fosters trust, collective involvement, and a sense of shared responsibility among community members. Inclusive discourse enables stakeholders to make significant contributions, co-create knowledge, and actively engage in developmental decision-making processes. However, in many urban and traditional governance situations, these participatory principles are jeopardised by fragmented and one-way communication arrangements. Elizabeth Ndaba and Ngcobo (2024) back this up in South African municipalities, where interactions between municipal authorities and traditional leadership institutions frequently lack coordination and strategic involvement. Communication is often top-down, restricting the engagement of experts, youth, and other stakeholders, reflecting Nima's issues.

Both studies insist that without organised, two-way communication and the inclusion of various players, social and intellectual resources are underutilised, hurting collective action and long-term development results. These findings emphasise the need to develop institutionalised participatory forums that bring together traditional authority, technical competence, and community perspectives.

4.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presents and analyses data on communication between traditional chiefs, community members, and other stakeholders in Nima, using Communication for Social Change (CFSC), Participatory Development, and Social Capital Theory. The study demonstrates that chiefs play an important role in development through culturally acknowledged channels such as durbars and

community meetings. While these venues foster trust and legitimacy, they are primarily one-way, which limits interactive conversation and community ownership. Chiefs and elders manage project priority, resulting in highly centralised decision-making. Professionals, youth, and religious leaders make informal, often reactionary contributions, and their expertise is seldom institutionalised. This causes developmental gaps, inhibits co-creation, and decreases inclusion. Substantial connection social capital within established networks lends credibility, but insufficient bridging capital across disparate groups inhibits collaboration and information exchange. Nima's sustainable development requires institutionalised participatory processes, two-way communication, professional integration, and digital platforms to change top-down government into inclusive, community-driven, and successful development.

Chapter Five

Summary of Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter concludes the study. It begins with a brief overview of the study's background, objectives, theoretical frameworks, methodology, and main findings on communication for social change in Nima. The chapter further addresses the findings in connection to the research objectives, with an emphasis on chiefs' communication techniques, stakeholder interactions, and involvement with development actors. The chapter further deals with the summary of the findings key issues of the study in the context of Communication for Social Change, Participatory Development, and Social Capital theory and draws conclusions from the study, makes recommendations for policy, practice, and research, and discusses the limitations and implications of the findings.

5.2 Summary of the study

Communication has long been recognised as a vital tool for social change and community development, particularly in contexts where traditional leadership structures remain influential. This study, situated in Nima, a culturally diverse and densely populated urban district in Accra, Ghana, set out to explore how local chiefs interact with residents, professionals, and other

stakeholders, and how these communication practices shape development outcomes. The overarching goal was to analyse the dynamics of chief-resident communication and to assess its implications for participatory development, trust-building, and sustainable urban growth. The research was guided by three key objectives:

- i. To examine how local chiefs in Nima communicate and engage with professionals and residents in identifying and prioritizing development projects.
- ii. To explore how the interaction between the chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima can be characterized
- iii. To investigate the implications of the nature of communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders, including professionals and development stakeholders of Nima

These objectives were framed within the broader discourse of development communication, which emphasises participatory, dialogical, and inclusive approaches to fostering social change.

The literature review provided the theoretical foundation for the study, drawing on Communication for Social Change Theory, Participatory Development Theory, and Social Capital Theory. These frameworks offered lenses for understanding the role of dialogue, participation, and trust in shaping collective action. Previous studies highlighted the enduring influence of chiefs in Ghanaian society, particularly in conflict resolution and community mobilisation, while also pointing to challenges such as tokenistic participation, weak feedback systems, and political interference. Importantly, the review identified a gap in empirical research on urban chief-resident communication, especially in diverse and politically complex settings like Nima, where generational shifts and digital transformation are reshaping traditional governance.

Methodologically, the study adopted an interpretivist qualitative case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fifteen purposefully selected participants, including chiefs, government officials, professionals, religious leaders, youth activists, traders, and residents. Thematic analysis was employed to examine communication practices, participation, and power relations, while ethical considerations ensured confidentiality, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity. The findings revealed several critical insights. Chiefs in Nima continue to rely heavily on traditional communication channels such as community forums, town criers, and storytelling. Decision-making processes, however, remain centralised, with chiefs exercising authority while professionals and opinion leaders play largely advisory roles.

Communication was found to be marked by limited transparency, weak feedback mechanisms, and significant trust deficits, which hindered effective collaboration. Stakeholder engagement was uneven, with youth and professionals often sidelined, while political interference and the absence of institutionalised professionalism further complicated interactions. In some cases, communication was conflict-driven, reflecting tensions between traditional authority and modern governance expectations. The study concluded that Nima's development is constrained by insufficient participatory and dialogical communication, which limits the potential for inclusive and sustainable urban growth.

In essence, the study underscores the importance of enhancing participative, inclusive, and dialogical communication in Nima. While chiefs remain central to community organisation and leadership, their ability to foster genuine social change depends on bridging trust gaps, empowering residents, and embracing collaborative approaches. By situating traditional leadership within Ghana's constitutional and decentralised governance frameworks, the study contributes both to academic discourse and to practical policymaking, offering insights into how

communication can be harnessed to promote equitable and sustainable development in urban African contexts.

5.3 Key Findings

5.3.1 How local chiefs in Nima communicate and engage with professionals and residents in identifying and prioritising development projects.

The findings reveal that local chiefs in Nima occupy a central position in communicating and coordinating the identification and prioritisation of development initiatives, primarily through culturally embedded, face-to-face platforms such as durbars, community meetings, and consultations with elders and religious leaders. From a Participatory Development Theory perspective, these forums demonstrate a degree of inclusion by informing community members about development needs. However, participation remains largely consultative rather than collaborative. Decision-making authority is concentrated in the hands of chiefs and elders, with youth and women having minimal influence. This aligns with participatory development critiques that caution against “participation without power,” where community presence does not translate into shared control over development priorities.

From a Communication for Social Change (CFSC) point of view, the dominance of traditional, one-way communication limits dialogue, collective problem-solving, and co-creation. Although feedback mechanisms exist, they are inconsistently applied, reinforcing a top-down communication model. CFSC emphasises iterative, horizontal communication processes that allow communities to negotiate meanings and jointly shape development outcomes. The reliance on leadership style rather than institutionalised procedures suggests that communication for change in Nima is personality-driven rather than system-driven, constraining sustained social

transformation. Using Social Capital Theory, the findings indicate strong bonding social capital within traditional and religious networks, which enhances trust, legitimacy, and compliance. However, bridging social capital remains weak. Professionals and opinion leaders are engaged informally and selectively, often through personal relationships rather than structured consultative mechanisms.

This limits knowledge exchange across social groups and prevents the systematic use of technical expertise. Consequently, while chiefs successfully mobilise trusted networks, the lack of cross-group collaboration fragments Nima's social and intellectual resources. The findings suggest that although traditional authority facilitates awareness and legitimacy, sustainable development in Nima requires a shift towards institutionalised participatory structures, two-way communication, and stronger bridging social capital to integrate youth, women, and professionals into decision-making processes.

5.3.2 Characterisation of the interaction between the chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima can be characterised.

The findings indicate that relationships between chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima are framed as collaborative but operate largely through top-down processes. From a Participatory Development Theory perspective, this reflects limited and uneven participation. Although chiefs maintain cordial relations with the Municipal Assembly, their involvement is mainly reactive, as development initiatives are typically initiated at the assembly level and presented as predetermined proposals. This reduces chiefs to implementers or legitimising agents rather than co-planners, undermining the core participatory principle of shared decision-making. The minimal and largely ceremonial involvement of traders, youth, and adolescents further illustrates tokenistic

participation, where inclusion exists in form but not in substance. From the standpoint of Communication for Social Change (CFSC), the findings reveal significant communication gaps, particularly in the downward flow of information.

Decisions taken at the Municipal Assembly are not consistently communicated back to community members, resulting in weak feedback loops and limited opportunities for dialogue. CFSC emphasises sustained, two-way communication that enables communities to negotiate meanings, influence decisions, and collectively shape development pathways. In Nima, however, communication remains episodic and project-driven, constraining genuine social change and reinforcing dependency on elite actors. Applying Social Capital Theory, the study shows strong bonding social capital within traditional leadership structures, which sustains legitimacy and internal cohesion. However, bridging social capital between chiefs, professionals, religious leaders, traders, and youth is weak and underdeveloped. Engagement with professionals and religious leaders is inconsistent and rarely institutionalised, limiting knowledge sharing and cross-group collaboration.

Chiefs' resource constraints further weaken these bridging ties, reducing their capacity to sustain inclusive stakeholder engagement over time. The findings suggest that while traditional authority provides legitimacy, effective development in Nima requires strengthened participatory structures, institutionalised two-way communication, and enhanced bridging social capital to move beyond symbolic collaboration towards inclusive and sustainable development.

5.2.3 The nature of communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders, including professionals and development stakeholders of Nima.

The findings reveal that communication between local chiefs and other stakeholders in Nima is formal in structure but fragmented in practice, with a strong bias toward state-led, top-down information flow. From a Participatory Development Theory perspective, this communication pattern undermines the principles of shared decision-making and collective ownership. Although chiefs interact regularly with the Municipal Assembly, these engagements are largely centred on pre-determined development initiatives, positioning chiefs as symbolic endorsers rather than co-creators of development agendas. Consequently, communication operates more as a notification mechanism than as a participatory space where stakeholders can negotiate priorities and influence outcomes. This limits meaningful participation by professionals, youth, and religious leaders, whose involvement is either inconsistent or absent.

Viewed through the lens of Communication for Social Change (CFSC), the findings demonstrate a lack of sustained, two-way dialogue necessary for social transformation. CFSC emphasises inclusive, dialogic communication processes that enable communities to reflect, deliberate, and act collectively. In Nima, however, the absence of structured channels for feedback and collaboration results in reactive and episodic engagement, weakening transparency and trust. While traditional hierarchies constrain open discourse, the emergence of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook presents opportunities to foster continuous dialogue, expand participation, and overcome entrenched communication barriers. Applying Social Capital Theory, the study highlights strong bonding social capital within traditional authority structures, which sustains cultural legitimacy but limits broader inclusion.

Bridging social capital connections between chiefs, professionals, youth, and religious leaders remains weak due to the lack of institutionalised networks and databases for mobilising local expertise. This fragmentation reduces knowledge exchange and collective problem-solving capacity. The findings suggest that sustainable development in Nima requires a shift towards participatory communication structures, dialogic engagement in line with CFSC principles, and stronger bridging social capital through networked and collaborative communication systems.

5.3 Implications of the study for development in Nima

According to the study, Nima's development is limited due to a lack of professional engagement in planning and execution processes. Professionals are mostly missing from formal interactions with local chiefs and municipal officials. This gap affects development because it leads to initiatives that are frequently reactive, poorly planned, and not properly aligned with technical standards and long-term community requirements. Without professional assistance, development projects tend to focus on short-term issue solutions rather than long-term planning, lowering their overall effectiveness. Similarly, the underutilisation of religious leaders, despite their great moral authority, organisational skills, and daily engagement with inhabitants, is a squandered potential for growth. Religious leaders are highly trusted players in Nima, with the ability to rally communities, form attitudes, and promote behaviour change in areas such as sanitation, education, health, peacebuilding, and youth development.

Their limited participation means that development attempts do not fully exploit existing social capital. This aspect, therefore, does not now encourage development, but rather undermines community ownership and engagement. The study also suggests that over-centralisation of

decision-making around conventional authority and local government authorities marginalises other important stakeholders. While chiefs play a significant role in mediation and legitimacy, their involvement is mostly conflict-oriented and symbolic, rather than strategic and collaborative. This limits innovation, transparency, and inclusive growth.

5.3.1 Practical Measures to Address Identified Gaps

The study emphasises the importance of institutional reforms in Nima that promote inclusive and evidence-based development planning. One significant proposal is that local governments established formal advisory groups to rely on the experience of community workers and academics. By including the participation of engineers, planners, educators, and other professionals, development projects may be directed by evidence-based decision-making, resulting in better project design, more successful execution, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures. This method would also ensure that Nima's local intellectual resources are used systematically rather than on an as-needed basis. Furthermore, religious leaders should be publicly identified as strategic development partners, rather than being limited to moral or spiritual functions.

Because of their importance and trust in the community, including religious leaders into development planning may improve communication reach, legitimacy, and community engagement. Furthermore, development planning methods should shift from mostly top-down briefings to participatory co-creation approaches. This method would allow citizens, professionals, and religious leaders to collaborate on identifying development goals, creating shared ownership and long-term project viability. Additionally, traditional chiefs should get specialised training in development communication, stakeholder coordination, and basic project management.

Strengthening these abilities would allow chiefs to go beyond their conventional dispute resolution duties and become more effective facilitators of inclusive, community-led development.

5.4 Study Limitations

This study has constraints that influence the scope and interpretation of its findings. These limits, however, do not weaken the study's rigour or usefulness; rather, they give critical contextual boundaries for understanding the findings. First, the study's scope was confined to Nima. While this limits wide generalisation to other urban populations in Ghana, the selection of Nima as a single case study was planned and methodologically sound. Nima's dense population, cultural variety, active traditional leadership, and continuous development issues make it an excellent case study for researching communication for social change in urban contexts. Even if statistical generalisation is not claimed, the findings' analytical usefulness is strengthened by the depth of contextual knowledge produced. Second, the study employed a very small, purposefully selected sample of fifteen subjects.

Although this reduces representational scope, it is consistent with the research's interpretivist and qualitative approach, which prioritises depth, meaning, and experience knowledge above quantitative coverage. The presence of chiefs, professionals, government officials, religious leaders, youth activists, traders, and citizens guaranteed analytical variety and allowed for the triangulation of viewpoints, which increased credibility and reliability. Third, the qualitative interpretivist method may involve subjectivity in data interpretation. This constraint was addressed by comprehensive theme analysis, thoughtful reflection, and adherence to ethical research

standards. The methodology was especially relevant given the culturally ingrained and relational character of communication in Nima, which cannot be fully represented by quantitative methods. Subsequently, time, and resource constraints hampered data collecting. Nonetheless, the study was effective in gathering rich, authentic data by establishing trust, adhering to cultural standards, and involving participants from a variety of stakeholder groups. Essentially despite these limitations, the research is methodologically good, conceptually founded, and empirically robust. Its strengths are its contextual richness, analytical rigour, and contribution to understanding communication for social change within Ghana's urban traditional leadership systems.

5.5 Conclusions

This study concludes that Nima's local chiefs continue to play an important role in community development communication and participation, acting as vital intermediates between the state and the community. Their authority and use of culturally recognised forums, such as durbars, community meetings, and elder consultations, lend credibility to development processes while also keeping locals informed about development projects. However, the study discovered that these communication methods are generally traditional, informal, and hierarchical, resulting in restricted engagement, particularly among youth, women, and other disadvantaged groups. Although the contacts between chiefs and stakeholders appear to be amicable and constructive, they are primarily top-down in actuality. Chiefs are frequently seen as reactive characters and symbolic supporters of predetermined government programs, rather than as active co-planners.

This restricts genuine stakeholder involvement and reduces the flow of information at the grassroots level. Engagement with professionals, religious leaders, and development stakeholders is uneven and under-institutionalised, resulting in underutilisation of local skills and social capital.

Therefore, communication in Nima is officially regulated but operationally fragmented, with a focus on state-led notification rather than inclusive discourse. This reduces transparency, community ownership, and sustainability of development efforts. The study concludes that transitioning to a more networked, participatory, and digitally supported communication framework, one that includes chiefs, professionals, religious leaders, youth, and residents, is critical for improving inclusive and effective community development in Nima.

5.6 Recommendations

The study's findings emphasise the need for more inclusive and integrated methods to development communication in Nima. In this sense, local chiefs are encouraged to implement purposeful engagement methods that broaden involvement beyond traditional elites to include youth and the general public. Creating organised places for youths and marginalised groups to participate in discussions helps improve discourse, establish shared ownership, and guarantee that development projects are responsive to various community needs. Furthermore, stronger coordination between local government officials and traditional leaders is required for optimising the effectiveness of local expertise. One practical step is to create a complete database of Nima professionals, including those with expertise in education, health, engineering, and sanitation. Institutionalising access to such knowledge would encourage evidence-based planning and lessen reliance on informal or personal networks.

The study emphasises the significance of transparency and information flow. Clear and consistent feedback mechanisms should be implemented to guarantee that decisions and debates at the Municipal Assembly and traditional leadership levels are successfully communicated to citizens. Regular updates would minimise distrust and promote informed involvement. Furthermore,

religious leaders and nonprofit organisations with significant community influence should be purposefully included in development communication and mobilising initiatives. Their engagement can improve outreach, legitimacy, and collective action in Nima, resulting in more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

5.7 Suggestions for Future Research

- i. Future studies could conduct a comparative studies between Nima and other urban Zongo communities in Accra.
- ii. Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach to measure levels of participation, trust, and perceived legitimacy across a larger population.
- iii. Future studies could examine the impact of digital and social media platforms on participatory governance, transparency, and youth engagement in Nima.

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Appendix

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Abubakar Garba Osuman, and I am a Master of Arts student at the University of Media, Arts and Communication. I am undertaking a dissertation as a requirement for graduation, and I am seeking permission to interview participants who can provide information to illuminate the interactions between local chiefs and residents in Nima, as well as the implications for development. This research is conducted strictly for academic purposes and is not intended for commercial use. All content gathered will be analysed and reported in a way that participants will not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from this study. As a key member of the Nima community, you are therefore invited to participate in the above stated research project. The aim is to better understand how local chiefs interact and collaborate with people, professionals, and other stakeholders to identify and prioritise community development initiatives. Your insights will throw light on the nature, effectiveness, and challenges of these communication systems and may contribute to more active community engagement and development projects. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to skip any questions or withdraw at any point. I count on your participation and honest information.

Thank you.

Section A: Demographic Information

Please provide the following information. This will help us understand the background of participants and analyse responses in context. Your answers will remain confidential.

1. Gender:

Male

Female

2. Age:

18–25 years

26–35 years

36–45 years

46–55 years

56 years and above

3. Role in the Community:

Chief

- Elder

- Metropolitan Chief Executive (MCE)

- Assembly Member

- Community Leader

- Youth Activist

- Resident

4. Level of Education:

- No formal education

- Primary education

- Secondary education

- Tertiary education

5. Length of Residency in Nima (for residents):

- Less than 1 year

- 1–5 years

6–10 years

More than 10 years

6. Participation in Community Development Activities:

Regularly

Occasionally

Rarely

Never

Section A: Communication Practices and Channels

1. As a chief, MCE, or assembly member, could you describe how you usually communicate with residents or stakeholders about development projects in Nima?
 - i. What communication channels, formats, or traditional rituals do you most often use to engage these groups?
 - ii. Have you observed any recent shifts in the way you or others communicate about development, such as new tools, styles, or approaches?
2. How frequently do you initiate communication with residents or stakeholders regarding development issues in Nima?

- i. From your perspective, is the messaging about development projects consistent over time? What factors influence the regularity and consistency of these communications?

Section B: Participation and Inclusion in Development – Adapted for Chiefs/MCE/Assembly Members

3. From your leadership position, who do you involve or consult when identifying and prioritising development needs in Nima?
 - i. Can you describe how you (as chief/MCE/assembly member) influence which needs are prioritised?
 - ii. In your experience, how do other stakeholders, such as elders, youth, professionals, or community groups, contribute to this decision-making process?
4. Can you provide an example where direct engagement or consultation between yourself (or the chieftaincy/assembly) and residents or professionals resulted in modifications to a development project's design, priorities, or implementation?
 - i. What factors enabled such engagement to produce tangible changes?

Section C: Nature and Quality of Interactions

5. From your experience, how would you describe the interactions between chiefs and community stakeholders like yourself?
 - i. Do you find the tone of these interactions to be respectful, trusting, transparent, and inclusive? Can you share specific examples?
6. What do you believe are the key factors that make these interactions with chiefs and officials effective or less effective?

- i. Are trust, transparency, inclusivity, or the availability of time particularly important to you? Why?
- 7. What challenges or barriers have you observed that make communication and engagement with chiefs and officials difficult?
 - i. For example, do cultural norms, lack of resources, religious concerns, or conflicting interests play a role? Could you explain how these affect participation or information flow?

Section D: Perceptions and Reactions to Communication

- 8. From your experience or observation, how do stakeholders usually respond to the communication approaches used by chiefs and officials?
 - i. Are these messages generally accepted, critiqued, or negotiated? Could you provide examples?
- 9. How open and inclusive do you believe the communication process is between chiefs and the various community groups involved in development?

Section E: Impact on Social Change and Development Outcomes

- 10. How do the communication practices between chiefs and stakeholders influence participation, trust-building, collaboration, and ultimately development outcomes in Nima?
- 11. In your opinion, what role do chiefs play in fostering social change through communication?

Section F: Recommendations for Improvement

12. What practical recommendations would you offer to enhance communication between local chiefs and community stakeholders in Nima?

- i. How can clarity, reach, and timeliness of communication be improved?
- ii. What steps can increase transparency, inclusivity, and incorporate effective feedback mechanisms?
- iii. How could incorporating new communication platforms or tools (digital or traditional) improve participation and dialogue?

Closing:

Is there anything else you would like to add about communication and social change in Nima?

Thank you for your valuable insights.

End

THANK YOU

Role-Based Codes

To ensure anonymity, the participants have been assigned role-based codes

- i. Local Government Official I → LGO I
- ii. Local Government Official II → LGO II
- iii. Local Chief I → LC I
- iv. Local Chief II → LC II
- v. Local Chief III – LC III
- vi. Professional (Banker) → Prof-Bnk
- vii. Professional (Educationist) → Prof-Edu
- viii. Trader (Male) → Trd-M
- ix. Trader (Female) → Trd-F
- x. Youth Activist I → YA I
- xi. Youth Activist II → YA II
- xii. Religious Leader (Muslim) I → RL-M I
- xiii. Religious Leader (Muslim) II → RL-M II
- xiv. Religious Leader (Christian) → RL-C