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**DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY: A
STUDY OF THE GHANAIAN EXTRACTIVE SECTOR**

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Project Work has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Project Work laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication UniMAC-IJ

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, who encouraged me unconditionally throughout every step of my academic journey. To my parents, whose values of hard work and perseverance instilled in me, and to my siblings and loved ones, who supported me continuously, for their love and care, I remain forever indebted. I also dedicate this thesis to all those who are committed to promoting sustainable initiatives, hoping that the research is one step towards a fairer and sustainable future.

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ABSTRACT

Ghana's extractive sector, comprising mining and oil/gas, contributes significantly to national GDP but faces persistent environmental and social challenges requiring effective sustainability communication. Despite the adoption of global frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), major communication gaps remain, shaped by technical limitations, cultural disconnects, and the exclusion of local voices. This study explored how practitioners conceptualise and implement sustainability communication, identified gaps, and examined evaluation practices. Using a qualitative approach, 20 experts, including sustainability managers, CSR directors, consultants, and public affairs officers from multinational and local companies, were interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed four core patterns: (i) communication is dominated by compliance, with effectiveness defined by regulatory reporting rather than dialogue; (ii) stakeholder engagement is fragmented and largely crisis-driven; (iii) cultural and linguistic barriers undermine connection with communities that prefer oral and participatory forms of engagement; and (iv) evaluation systems are weak, with little structured learning. The study proposes a Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework, integrating five dimensions: strategic purpose, stakeholder mapping, culturally responsive messaging, dialogic engagement, and evaluation. The framework addresses systemic gaps by embedding cultural responsiveness and accountability, offering a developmental pathway toward credibility, inclusivity, and trust.

Keywords: sustainability communication, extractive industries, Ghana, participatory framework, stakeholder engagement

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Ghana's extractive sector represents a cornerstone of the national economy, with gold mining serving as the country's primary mineral export and contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (Guan et al., 2021). The sector expanded dramatically following the discovery of commercially viable oil reserves in 2007, with production commencing at the Jubilee Field in 2010, transforming Ghana into an oil-exporting nation and further diversifying its economic base (Adom, 2023). Beyond gold and oil, the extraction of bauxite, diamonds, and manganese has reinforced the sector's strategic importance, generating substantial revenue for both government coffers and local economies through employment creation and the development of supporting industries (Kofi et al., 2023).

However, this economic prosperity has come at considerable environmental and social costs that have undermined the sector's legitimacy and social license to operate. Mining operations, particularly in districts like Obuasi and Tarkwa, have precipitated widespread deforestation, water contamination through hazardous chemicals such as cyanide and mercury, and significant land degradation (Peprah, 2025). Similarly, oil extraction activities have posed risks of marine ecosystem damage through potential spills, gas flaring, and inadequate waste disposal practices (Ogolo et al., 2022). These environmental challenges are compounded by profound social disruptions, including forced community displacement, inadequate compensation for affected populations, poor working conditions, and health hazards for both workers and nearby communities (Ullah et al., 2025). The influx of extractive workers has further strained local infrastructure and healthcare systems while creating conflicts over land use and resource allocation, particularly affecting rural and indigenous communities who are often marginalised in decision-making processes.

The magnitude of these environmental and social challenges has elevated sustainability from an optional consideration to an imperative for the extractive sector's long-term viability. Sustainability, encompassing the integration of environmental protection, social equity, and economic development, is particularly critical in resource extraction due to the finite nature of natural resources and the potential for irreversible harm to ecosystems and communities (Hariram et al., 2023). Achieving sustainability in Ghana's extractive sector requires balancing immediate economic gains with long-term environmental stewardship and equitable distribution of benefits, necessitating strategic approaches that embed sustainability considerations into all operational aspects, from resource extraction to waste management and community engagement.

Central to this sustainability imperative is the critical role of sustainability communication – the purposeful and transparent dissemination of information regarding a firm's environmental management, social responsibility initiatives, and economic contributions to stakeholders (Sciulli & Adhariani, 2023). In the extractive sector, where operations inherently generate high environmental and social costs, effective sustainability communication serves multiple essential functions: building public trust, facilitating meaningful stakeholder engagement, reducing community conflicts, and enhancing corporate social responsibility credibility. Through open dialogue about restoration activities, community development programs, and pollution control measures, companies can establish legitimacy and address stakeholder concerns while demonstrating genuine commitment to sustainable practices (Ishola et al., 2024).

Moreover, sustainability communication creates opportunities for meaningful stakeholder participation in decision-making processes, which is particularly crucial in contexts like Ghana's extractive sector where company-community relationships are frequently adversarial

due to competing land uses and environmental degradation concerns. When companies provide transparent platforms for discussion and actively engage local communities and other stakeholders in sustainability dialogues, they not only enhance corporate accountability but also enable communities to influence activities that directly impact their livelihoods (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). This participatory approach is fundamental to achieving long-term sustainability as it ensures that business operations align with societal needs and aspirations, ultimately strengthening the company's social license to operate and contributing to broader sustainable development goals.

Despite the evident importance of sustainability communication in legitimising extractive operations and fostering stakeholder trust, significant communication gaps persist in Ghana's extractive sector. These gaps have been widely documented in empirical studies, which show that technical communication formats often alienate local communities (Jindřichovská & Eckert, 2021), culturally insensitive messaging weakens message credibility and trust (Osei-Tutu, 2023; Saboro, 2022), and limited participatory mechanisms reinforce company–community mistrust and constrain the effectiveness of sustainability interventions (Idemudia, 2022; Pesa, 2023). Against this backdrop, sustainability communication becomes a crucial lens for examining how extractive companies can better engage with stakeholders and demonstrate an authentic commitment to sustainable development.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the adoption of global sustainability reporting frameworks like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), significant communication gaps persist in Ghana's extractive industry due to technical incapacity, cultural disconnection, and one-way reporting approaches (Yalley, 2023). While these frameworks

promote accountability and transparency, they fail to accommodate the socio-economic and cultural contexts of developing nations like Ghana (Omweri, 2024).

Technical capacity constraints represent a primary challenge, as local firms and institutions in Ghana's extractive sector lack the necessary skills, tools, and technological platforms to meet the advanced reporting requirements of GRI and EITI frameworks (Dashwood et al., 2022; Amoako et al., 2022). This limitation results in incomplete and inconsistent sustainability reporting that undermines the credibility of information disclosed to stakeholders and communities.

Cultural disconnection further compounds these challenges. Western-driven global reporting systems often overlook indigenous values, local languages, and oral communication traditions that are essential for effective information transfer in Ghana (Morris, 2022; Ofosu-Asare, 2024). This oversight creates a fundamental mismatch between global sustainability indicators and local priorities such as land rights and health concerns, exacerbating tensions between extractive companies and communities (Leonard, 2024).

The predominance of one-way communication through technical, English-language reports further marginalizes local communities, particularly rural populations with limited literacy levels (Zahid, 2025). Without accessible translation and simplification, communities remain poorly informed about sustainability practices and are unable to hold companies accountable for social and environmental impacts. This exclusionary approach fails to incorporate local knowledge and perspectives, leading to distrust and disengagement with sustainability initiatives (Magagula, 2025; Spiller et al., 2025).

These interconnected gaps erode trust between extractive companies and local stakeholders, undermining the effectiveness of sustainability communication and community engagement.

The resulting disconnect not only compromises the legitimacy of sustainability efforts but also perpetuates exclusion of marginalized communities from decision-making processes that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

Therefore, there is a pressing need for a Ghana-specific sustainability communication framework tailored to the country's extractive industry context. Such a framework would bridge existing communication gaps by incorporating indigenous languages, culturally appropriate approaches, and participatory mechanisms that enable meaningful two-way dialogue between companies and communities (Ali et al., 2021).

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 Primary Objective

To understand the existing sustainability communication practices in Ghana's extractive sector and develop a comprehensive and context-specific framework for effectively communicating sustainability.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To investigate the current conceptualisations of sustainability and sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector.
2. To examine the current sustainability communication practices in Ghana's extractive sector.
3. To explore the challenges and gaps in existing communication strategies
4. To understand how organisations evaluate the effectiveness of their sustainability communication efforts within the Ghanaian extractive sector.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the current conceptualisations of sustainability and sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector?

2. What sustainability communication practices are currently employed in Ghana's extractive sector?

3. What are the challenges and gaps present in the existing communication strategies within Ghana's extractive sector?

4. How do organisations in Ghana's extractive sector evaluate the effectiveness of sustainability communication efforts?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is focused on developing a sustainability communication framework tailored to Ghana's extractive sector, specifically targeting the mining, oil, and gas industries. It will assess the effectiveness of current communication practices between key stakeholders, including multinational companies, local businesses, regulatory bodies, and affected communities, within major extractive regions like the Western, Ashanti, and Northern regions. The study will also critically evaluate global sustainability frameworks such as GRI and EITI, analysing their relevance in the Ghanaian context and identifying gaps that hinder effective communication. The study will look at how sustainability communication has changed in response to rising extractive operations and environmental awareness between 2007 and the present.

1.6 Operational Definitions

This section provides operational definitions of key terms used throughout this study to ensure conceptual clarity and consistency.

Sustainability is the balanced integration of environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability within extractive industry operations (Kumar et al., 2024). In this study's

context, sustainability encompasses responsible resource extraction practices that minimize environmental degradation, respect community rights and cultural values, and contribute to long-term local economic development while ensuring intergenerational equity.

Sustainability Communication is defined as the two-way, participatory exchange of information between extractive companies and stakeholders regarding environmental, social, and economic impacts of mining operations (Hernández, 2025). Unlike traditional one-way reporting, sustainability communication in this study emphasizes dialogic processes that facilitate meaningful engagement, incorporate local knowledge systems, and enable community participation in decision-making processes affecting their well-being (Lebenya et al., 2024)

Stakeholder Engagement refers to the systematic and inclusive process of involving affected communities, local authorities, civil society organizations, and other relevant parties in ongoing dialogue about extractive industry operations (Kujala et al., 2022). This encompasses consultation, collaboration, and empowerment mechanisms that ensure stakeholders can meaningfully influence decisions, voice concerns, and contribute to sustainable development outcomes.

Extractive Industry encompasses companies and operations involved in the exploration, extraction, processing, and marketing of natural resources, including mining, oil, and gas sectors operating within Ghana's regulatory and cultural context (Besada & Golla, 2023)

Cultural Sensitivity denotes the adaptation of communication approaches to respect and incorporate local cultural values, indigenous languages, traditional knowledge systems, and customary communication practices in sustainability dialogue processes (Ostonovich et al., 2025)

Community Participation refers to the active involvement of local communities in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating sustainability initiatives through culturally appropriate mechanisms that recognize their agency and decision-making authority over matters affecting their territories and livelihoods (Rijal, 2023).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems encompass traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, oral communication traditions, and community-based resource management approaches that inform local understanding of environmental and social sustainability (Rani et al., 2025).

1.7 Study Limitations

This study provides useful insights into sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector, but it may face contextual constraints. The research design relies on qualitative interviews with practitioners such as sustainability managers, CSR officers, and communication strategists. This approach provides depth on organisational perspectives but may limit the inclusion of views from communities and other external stakeholders. As a result, the analysis may emphasise organisational accounts more than the broader range of stakeholder experiences.

Given the qualitative design, the findings will be valuable for thematic exploration but may not be statistically generalisable or fully representative of Ghana's extractive sector. As the study intends to employ qualitative methods, the insights generated will be rich in detail but may not encompass the full diversity of perspectives within Ghana's extractive sector. Concentrating on firms in Accra and selected operational areas means excluding perspectives from remote regions, where communication practices may differ. The design also prioritises formal organisational actors, overlooking informal or community-led communication processes.

The study reflects conditions within a specific time frame, so it does not capture changes in communication strategies, stakeholder expectations, or policy developments over time. Although the research includes both mining and oil and gas operations, the findings may not extend to other extractive activities or different regulatory or cultural contexts. The researcher's positionality may influence the quality of responses, including the potential for socially desirable responses, despite efforts to build rapport and ensure confidentiality.

While these limitations are acknowledged, the study aims to provide valuable insights that will contribute to shaping a participatory sustainability communication framework for Ghana's extractive sector.

1.8 Organisation of the Study

This research is organised into five chapters addressing different aspects of the research problem and objectives. Chapter One introduces the study background, problem statement, and research objectives. Chapter Two presents a literature review on sustainability communication and global frameworks in extractive industries. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including data collection and analysis approaches for quantitative components. Chapter Four presents findings and insights into Ghana's extractive industry sustainability communication practices. Chapter Five discusses key findings, develops a Ghana-specific sustainability communication framework, and provides policy recommendations for stakeholders and future research.

1.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter One has established the research foundation by providing an overview of Ghana's extractive industry and highlighting the associated environmental, social, and economic challenges. The chapter demonstrated the significance of sustainability communication in addressing these challenges and established the need for a context-specific communication

framework tailored to Ghana's socio-cultural and economic context. It presented the problem statement, research objectives, questions, significance, scope, and operational definitions that guide this study. Chapter Two will review theoretical and empirical literature on sustainability communication, critically examining existing frameworks and their applicability to Ghana's extractive industry context.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The chapter provides a comprehensive survey of theoretical foundations and research that can be applied to sustainability communication with particular reference to Ghana's extractive industry. The chapter begins with the theory, basing its argument on Stakeholder Theory and Environmental Communication Perspective to describe how organisations can successfully communicate sustainability and engage stakeholders. The chapter also covers some of the prominent fields of current research, such as conceptualizing sustainability, sustainability and sustainability communication, sustainability communication strategies, issues of sustainability communication, and evaluating sustainability communication. Secondly, it critiques global sustainability communication models like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) before embarking on reporting to delineate critical gaps in the extant literature for this study by building a context-driven framework for sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive industry draws from two complementary frameworks: Stakeholder Theory and the Environmental Communication Perspective. These frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding how sustainability can be effectively communicated in the extractive industry context.

2.1.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, first developed by Edward Freeman in 1984, provides a contrast to the conventional shareholder-centric business model. According to Freeman's theory, organizations must be sensitive to the interest of all stakeholders, any group or individual capable of impacting or being impacted by the organization's actions. Stakeholders extend from shareholders and employees to customers, suppliers, governments, and local communities. The theory promotes a broader concept of organizational responsibility that focuses on involving various interest groups to achieve long-term success and sustainability (Freeman, 2023).

One fundamental assumption of Stakeholder Theory is that organizations are ethically compelled to consider the interests of all their stakeholders, not only shareholders. Freeman (2023) argues that companies must manage relationships with various constituencies impacted by or shaping corporate actions, including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and others who have a stake in the firm's influence. This theory challenges shareholder primacy by contending that optimizing shareholder profit alone is insufficient in today's interdependent global economy. Instead, corporations must determine their social obligations and develop a pluralist value creation strategy that considers all stakeholders, requiring corporate governance systems that balance often conflicting interests to achieve long-term sustainability and ethical accountability (Freeman, 2023).

Another central assumption is that stakeholder interests are interconnected. Freeman posits that well-being in each stakeholder group contributes to overall organizational success. For instance, satisfied employees typically lead to higher productivity, while positive community relationships can provide social license to operate. Therefore, effective stakeholder relationship management creates balance that benefits organizations long-term through both financial and non-financial success (Freeman, 2023).

The third assumption emphasizes that successful stakeholder communication is key to organizational performance and sustainability. Stakeholder Theory advocates for open dialogue and cooperation with all stakeholders to address their concerns and integrate their suggestions into decision-making processes. This can generate innovative solutions and enhance organizational adaptability in a changing environment. Conversely, failing to engage stakeholders can lead to conflict, opposition, or reputational damage that undermines organizational objectives (Freeman, 2023).

This theory is particularly relevant to investigating sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector. Employing Stakeholder Theory, this research recognizes the diverse stakeholders impacted by extractive activities, including local communities, environmental groups, and regulatory bodies. Understanding these relationships is vital for developing effective sustainability communication strategies that address specific needs and concerns of diverse stakeholder groups. Aligning sustainability efforts with stakeholder interests can enhance companies' social license to operate, mitigate conflicts, and promote community trust.

Despite its influence, Stakeholder Theory faces critiques regarding its applicability when stakeholder interests conflict. Mukhtar and Bahormoz (2022) highlight the lack of concrete guidance for prioritizing competing stakeholder interests. Additionally, critics argue that considering broad stakeholder ranges may dilute organizational focus, potentially undermining strategic clarity and competitive advantage. Despite these limitations, Stakeholder Theory remains valuable for exploring complex dynamics between businesses and their social and environmental contexts, particularly in Ghana's extractive sector where economic imperatives intersect with pressing social and environmental concerns.

2.1.2 Environmental Communication Perspective

The Environmental Communication Perspective, developed through the work of scholars like Robert Cox, Anders Hansen, and others, explores how communication shapes public understanding and responses to environmental issues (Cox & Depoe, 2022; Hansen, 2010; Pezzullo & Cox, 2017). This viewpoint holds that communication is more than just a tool for disseminating information; it is a powerful force that shapes environmental challenges and influences human behavior and policy creation. The perspective emphasizes the interplay between media, public discourse, and environmental action, making communication central to addressing environmental challenges.

One core premise of the Environmental Communication Perspective is that communication shapes how people perceive environmental problems. Environmental issues are often complex and not directly observable, so their presentation in media and public discussions significantly influences public awareness and concern (Cox & Depoe, 2022; Hansen, 2010). For example, framing climate change as an imminent crisis rather than a distant future event can motivate more immediate responses from policymakers and the public. This suggests that communication creates the lens through which environmental issues are understood.

A second premise is that environmental communication can mobilize individuals and communities toward action. The perspective holds that effective environmental communication can prompt behaviour change by providing clear, relevant, and actionable information that enables informed decision-making about environmental practices (Foroughi et al., 2025). Communication can help to bridge the gap between awareness and action, because when individuals understand their environmental impact, they are more inclined to engage in sustainable behaviour.

Another key premise emphasizes that communication should be a participatory process involving diverse stakeholders. The Environmental Communication Perspective stresses dialogue and collaboration between scientists, policymakers, communities, and other stakeholders to address environmental challenges effectively (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017). This approach fosters inclusive conversations that consider varying perspectives; ensuring solutions are both environmentally sound and socially just. Participatory approaches are more effective than top-down expert-to-public communication.

The Environmental Communication Perspective is crucial for this study's analysis of how sustainability and environmental issues are communicated within Ghana's extractive sector. It provides a framework for examining strategies, tools, and messaging techniques organizations use to convey environmental impacts and sustainability initiatives to various stakeholders. The perspective's emphasis on clear, credible messaging is particularly relevant in Ghana's extractive sector, where environmental degradation, pollution, and community displacement are significant concerns.

Moreover, the perspective emphasizes cultural sensitivity in communication practices. In Ghana's diverse socio-cultural landscape, stakeholders have varying understanding levels and different environmental concerns. The perspective guides investigation of how organizations can tailor communications to resonate with local communities and meet their specific needs and expectations (Okeke et al, 2024). This customization is vital for fostering effective dialogue and building trust.

Despite its contributions, the Environmental Communication Perspective faces criticism for potentially being overly idealistic about communication's effectiveness in achieving environmental outcomes. Critics note that even clear, persuasive environmental messages often fail to drive sustainable behaviours due to factors like political ideology, economic interests,

and ingrained habits (Hansen, 2010). Another criticism focuses on the perspective's tendency to underestimate power dynamics within environmental discourse, where dominant interests often shape narratives while marginalizing others (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017).

Environmental Communication Perspective and Stakeholder Theory complement each other by providing a cohesive framework for understanding how organizations can effectively engage diverse interest groups on environmental issues. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes identifying, prioritizing, and responding to various stakeholders affected by or influencing organizational actions. The Environmental Communication Perspective focuses on strategies and methods for conveying environmental information, shaping perceptions, and fostering dialogue about environmental concerns.

When combined, these frameworks guide organizations in recognizing key environmental stakeholders and using appropriate communication channels and messages to address stakeholders' environmental concerns effectively. This synergy supports mutual understanding, trust building, and proactive collaboration essential for sustainable decision-making and positive environmental outcomes. One framework identifies who to engage (stakeholders), while the other explains how environmental and sustainability issues are framed and communicated, creating a comprehensive approach to sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector.

2.2 Understanding Sustainability Communication

Sustainability, particularly in the context of corporate responsibility, has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Its development traces back to the 1987 Brundtland Report, which introduced a definition that laid the groundwork for modern sustainability discourse (Brundtland, 1987). According to the Brundtland Commission, sustainability is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987). This definition is notable for its intergenerational focus, positioning sustainability as an ethical imperative that considers the long-term impact of current actions on future generations. The Brundtland definition, however, has been critiqued for its vagueness, particularly regarding the term "needs," which lacks clear boundaries and is seen as context-dependent (Pazienza et al., 2022). This ambiguity has led to challenges in applying the definition practically, particularly in areas where economic, social, and environmental needs conflict.

Building on the Brundtland framework, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept, introduced by John Elkington in 1997, offers a more nuanced approach to sustainability by incorporating three core pillars: environmental, social, and economic performance (Elkington, 1997). TBL stresses that businesses should evaluate their success not only in terms of financial profitability but also through their social responsibility and environmental stewardship (Srivastava et al., 2022). While TBL is widely adopted in corporate sustainability practices, it has faced criticism for the difficulty of balancing these three pillars, especially when trade-offs are necessary. The challenge lies in quantifying and balancing these often competing interests, with some critics arguing that TBL oversimplifies the complexities of integrating the three dimensions (Norman & MacDonald, 2004).

Another influential concept is Ecological Modernization Theory, which suggests that technological innovation and the efficient use of resources can lead to both economic growth and environmental protection. This approach has been influential in policy discussions, particularly in promoting green technologies and sustainable business practices. However, it has been critiqued for underestimating the deeper systemic changes required for true sustainability, often focusing too much on technological fixes while neglecting broader societal and political changes (York & Rosa, 2003).

Alongside these frameworks, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of social sustainability. This concept emphasizes the need for equity, justice, and community well-being in sustainable development. Scholars like Agyeman (2008) argue that environmental sustainability cannot be fully achieved without addressing social inequalities. This perspective highlights that sustainable development must be inclusive and should actively work to reduce disparities, emphasizing the link between environmental challenges and social justice issues such as poverty and discrimination.

In summary, the definition and understanding of sustainability in corporate contexts have evolved to include not only environmental conservation, but also social equity and economic viability. While the Brundtland Report remains foundational, subsequent frameworks like TBL and ecological modernization have further refined and expanded the concept, though challenges remain in its practical application. Corporate sustainability, therefore, involves balancing competing priorities, requiring a multidimensional approach that integrates long-term environmental health, social justice, and economic prosperity.

Sustainability communication represents a critical shift from traditional corporate reporting toward dialogic, participatory engagement with diverse stakeholders about environmental, social, and economic impacts (Sciulli & Adhariani, 2023). Rather than one-way information dissemination, sustainability communication involves dynamic interaction, dialogue, and shared understanding between organizations and their stakeholders (Herrada-Lores et al., 2025). This conceptualization emphasizes communication as a process of mutual engagement where information flows both ways, allowing for exchange of ideas, concerns, and solutions.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) describe sustainability communication as the “process of sense-making and sense-giving” through which organizations and their stakeholders co-create meanings around sustainability practices. It extends beyond corporate social responsibility

(CSR) reporting by focusing on the broader communication of environmental, social, and economic goals that support sustainable development (Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2017).

The primary goal of sustainability communication is to build legitimacy and trust by demonstrating alignment between corporate practices and societal values (Schoeneborn et al., 2020). In this regard, communication becomes both a strategic and moral act: strategic in its potential to influence stakeholder perceptions, and moral in its contribution to transparency and accountability. Organizations use various tools such as sustainability reports, websites, social media, and community engagement sessions to convey their commitments and progress. In the extractive sector, sustainability communication often involves publishing environmental impact assessments, CSR performance reports, and updates on community development projects. These communications serve to justify corporate activities, attract investor confidence, and mitigate stakeholder conflict.

2.3 Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Africa and Ghana

The sustainability discourse in Africa reflects the continent's struggle to reconcile economic growth with social equity and environmental conservation. The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions a prosperous, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable Africa, while the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global benchmark for progress. However, implementation across African countries has been uneven due to governance challenges, weak institutional capacity, and dependence on extractive industries (UNEP, 2019; African Union, 2015).

In Ghana, the extractive sector which comprises gold, bauxite, manganese, and petroleum contributes significantly to gross domestic product (GDP) and foreign exchange earnings (Minerals Commission, 2019). Yet, this economic contribution has often come at social and environmental costs, including land degradation, water pollution, and community displacement

(Hilson & Maconachie, 2020). The government has introduced several regulatory frameworks, such as the Environmental Protection Act (1994), the Minerals and Mining Policy (2014), and the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2011), to promote responsible resource governance.

2.3.1 Sustainability Practices in the Extractive Industry

The extractive industry operates within a highly sensitive ecological and social environment, making sustainability a critical component of its operations. According to the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM, 2019), sustainability practices in the sector encompass responsible environmental management, community engagement, and ethical governance. Common practices include environmental rehabilitation, biodiversity conservation, waste and water management, community investment, and local content development. These activities are designed to mitigate negative impacts and promote socio-economic benefits for host communities.

In Ghana, companies such as Newmont Ghana Gold Limited, Gold Fields Ghana, and Tullow Oil have implemented diverse sustainability initiatives, including community development projects, educational scholarships, and small business empowerment programs (Newmont, 2022; Tullow Oil, 2021). Many firms have also aligned their sustainability strategies with international frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). However, research indicates that the degree of implementation varies widely, with smaller firms often lacking the capacity or commitment to maintain consistent sustainability standards (Hilson & Maconachie, 2020).

While sustainability practices in the extractive sector have expanded, critics argue that they often serve as a form of corporate legitimization rather than transformative change (Banerjee, 2008). True sustainability requires long-term commitment to environmental rehabilitation and

meaningful stakeholder participation in decision-making. This highlights the importance of communication not merely as a reporting tool but as a participatory process that aligns corporate actions with community expectations.

2.3.2 Sustainability Communication Practices in the Extractive Sector

Sustainability communication in the extractive sector involves the dissemination and exchange of information about environmental and social initiatives undertaken by firms. It includes corporate sustainability reports, environmental impact assessments, stakeholder meetings, media campaigns, and local-level engagements (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The objective is to demonstrate transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to stakeholder concerns.

In Ghana, extractive firms employ multiple channels to communicate their sustainability efforts. These include annual sustainability reports, community durbars, public consultations, and corporate websites. For instance, Newmont Ghana regularly publishes an annual sustainability report aligned with GRI standards, detailing environmental performance, safety statistics, and community investments (Newmont, 2022). Similarly, Gold Fields Ghana engages host communities through community relations teams and stakeholder forums aimed at promoting transparency. However, these efforts often remain one-directional—focusing on information dissemination rather than dialogue and feedback (Frimpong, 2020).

From a theoretical standpoint, stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and prioritizing stakeholder groups for targeted communication, while the environmental communication perspective calls for participatory, inclusive, and culturally sensitive engagement. Applying these frameworks together implies that extractive firms should design sustainability communication systems that are dialogic rather than monologic—where stakeholders are active participants rather than passive recipients of information (Cox, 2010).

A key weakness in Ghana's extractive sector is the lack of a standardized framework guiding how sustainability information is communicated. Communication tends to be reactive, fragmented, and heavily influenced by corporate public relations priorities rather than strategic sustainability objectives (Osei-Tutu, 2022). Consequently, the effectiveness of communication in promoting stakeholder trust and sustainable outcomes remains limited. Addressing this gap requires an integrated framework that aligns theory, practice, and context—a central aim of the present study.

2.4 Framing and Narratives in Sustainability Communication

Framing and narrative structures are essential elements in organizing a communication discourse. Entman (1993) defines framing as a process in which some features of reality are chosen and given greater prominence or importance in order to describe the problem, diagnose its causes, make moral judgments, and offer acceptable remedies and actions. A frame is formed by selection, emphasis, and exclusion (Gilton, 1980). A certain frame causes people to focus their attention on certain messages while ignoring others. A frame enhances the interpretation of the messages it contains by reminding viewers that the messages placed within it are relevant and are connected in some way, and that those messages that are outside of it must be ignored. From a sociological perspective, Goffman (1974) defines a frame as a social framework and mental schema that enables users to arrange their experiences. According to this viewpoint, frames are societal tools that help people to retain a common understanding of reality.

The way sustainability issues are framed significantly influences public perception and response, making framing theory central to the Environmental Communication Perspective (Entman, 1993). In extractive industries, framing sustainability as regulatory compliance versus community partnership can produce vastly different stakeholder responses. For instance,

framing environmental protection as a technical requirement may satisfy regulatory bodies but fail to address community concerns about land rights and health impacts.

Narratives serve as powerful tools for making complex sustainability issues accessible and relatable by telling stories that engage audiences emotionally and intellectually (Cox, 2010). In Ghana's extractive sector, corporate narratives often emphasize economic benefits and technical compliance, while community narratives focus on lived experiences of environmental degradation and social disruption. This aligns with the Environmental Communication Perspective's recognition that communication shapes perception and mobilizes action through strategic framing and storytelling (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017).

The disconnect between corporate framing and community narratives in Ghana's extractive sector highlights the need for communication approaches that bridge these different ways of understanding sustainability challenges. When companies frame sustainability primarily through technical or economic lenses, they may miss opportunities to connect with local communities whose concerns are often framed through social justice and environmental health perspectives.

The Environmental Communication Perspective recognizes that effective communication must be culturally embedded and contextually appropriate (Hansen, 2010). In Ghana's diverse socio-cultural landscape, sustainability communication must account for indigenous languages, oral communication traditions, and community-based decision-making processes such as *durbars* and chief-community consultations.

Digital platforms and social media offer new opportunities for engagement, yet in Ghana's context, traditional communication channels like community radio, local language broadcasts, and face-to-face meetings often prove more effective for reaching rural communities affected

by extractive activities. Research demonstrates that sustainability messages are more likely to resonate when they are delivered through culturally familiar channels and framed in ways that connect with local values and concerns (Salnikova et al., 2022).

This cultural sensitivity requirement highlights a critical gap in current sustainability communication practices, where Western-derived frameworks and English-language technical reports often fail to connect with local communities. The challenge lies in adapting global sustainability concepts to local communication contexts while maintaining message integrity and promoting meaningful stakeholder engagement.

2.5 Sustainability Communication Strategies

Sustainability communication strategies are essential for translating the complex and multifaceted concepts of sustainability into actionable messages that resonate with diverse audiences. These strategies aim to promote awareness, foster behaviour change, and engage stakeholders in sustainable practices. According to Adiga (2024), effective communication strategies must be tailored to the target audience, their values, motivations, and cultural contexts, ensuring that sustainability messages are both relevant and compelling. The effectiveness of a sustainability communication strategy is not only about disseminating information but also about fostering engagement and facilitating collective action. As such, sustainable communication must be participatory, context-sensitive, and capable of addressing both cognitive and emotional responses to sustainability issues (Violos et al., 2025).

In terms of tactics, sustainability communication strategies often rely on a combination of traditional and digital media channels to reach their audiences. Social media platforms, in particular, have become a crucial tool for sustainability communication, offering a space for interactive and participatory engagement. Studies suggest that social media enables a more dynamic and immediate exchange of information, creating opportunities for users to share

sustainability messages and experiences, thus amplifying their impact (Zhang, Fan, Yao, Hu, & Mostafavi, 2019). However, this expanded reach also presents challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and the risk of audience fragmentation, making it crucial for sustainability communicators to establish credibility and foster trust in their messages (Fisher et al., 2021). Additionally, organizations and campaigns must recognize the importance of using different media strategies based on their audience's demographic and psychographic characteristics. For example, younger audiences may be more responsive to visually-driven platforms like Instagram or TikTok, whereas older demographics may prefer more traditional channels such as television or print media (Achyridou, 2024).

Scholarly work suggests that sustainability discourse should resist constructing divisions between ecological and social priorities, emphasizing their interconnectedness (Haller, 2017). The literature emphasizes that effective sustainability communication should reflect the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic dimensions, emphasizing the holistic nature of sustainable development (Häkkinen & Nuissalo, 2013). The interdependence of these dimensions suggests that sustainability messages must integrate a variety of perspectives, such as environmental protection, economic growth, and social justice, into a coherent narrative that resonates with diverse audiences. Presenting sustainability messages in ways that acknowledge environmental, social, and economic concerns allows organisations to address the diverse interests of multiple stakeholder groups, including regulators, investors, and host communities.

Sustainable communication strategies are essential for raising awareness, fostering behaviour change, and engaging diverse stakeholders in sustainability initiatives. The literature underscores that the success of sustainability communication depends on the clarity of the messages, the use of appropriate media channels, and the ability to frame sustainability issues in ways that resonate with different audiences. Tactics such as framing, storytelling, and

emphasizing social norms can significantly enhance the effectiveness of sustainability communication efforts. As the urgency of addressing sustainability challenges continues to grow, the development of more targeted, engaging, and action-oriented communication strategies will be essential for achieving sustainable outcomes at both individual and collective levels.

In addition, social media has been identified as a powerful tool for sustainability communication, enabling organizations and campaigns to engage directly with audiences, amplify messages, and create interactive platforms for discussion (Huang, Clarke, Heldsinger, & Tian, 2019). However, research also points to challenges such as the oversaturation of sustainability messages, which can lead to message fatigue or scepticism (Hickerson & Stamps, 2023).

Effective sustainability communication strategies must move beyond traditional one-way reporting to embrace participatory, culturally responsive approaches that engage diverse stakeholders meaningfully. These strategies are particularly crucial in Ghana's extractive sector, where communication failures often stem from misaligned approaches that prioritize regulatory compliance over genuine stakeholder engagement (Adiga, 2024).

2.6 Barriers to Sustainability Communication

Sustainability communication faces significant barriers that hinder effectiveness in conveying messages and influencing behavioural change, particularly in Ghana's extractive sector where structural, cultural, and credibility challenges intersect.

Structural and institutional barriers hinder effectiveness of sustainability communication. Thus, lack of institutional capacity and appropriate frameworks creates fundamental obstacles to effective sustainability communication. Many local firms and institutions in Ghana's extractive

sector lack the necessary skills, tools, and technological platforms to meet advanced communication requirements (Slawinski et al., 2017). The absence of robust regulatory frameworks that mandate meaningful stakeholder engagement, rather than mere compliance reporting, perpetuates one-way communication approaches. Additionally, the fragmented nature of sustainability governance—spanning various sectors and scales—compounds the difficulty of crafting unified and consistent messages (Allioui & Mourdi, 2023).

Also, cultural and contextual barriers such as of lack of common language and understanding create significant communication obstacles. The term "sustainability" itself carries different meanings depending on cultural, political, or economic contexts, with some viewing it as primarily environmental while others frame it in terms of economic growth or social justice (Hariram et al., 2023). Technical, English-language reports often fail to connect with local communities, particularly in contexts where oral communication traditions and indigenous languages dominate. Information overload in the digital age leads to "information fatigue," where audiences become desensitized to sustainability messages, while the complexity of technical sustainability topics makes them difficult for general publics to understand (Alzubairi, 2021).

In addition, credibility and trust issues could pose significant challenge to sustainability communication. The prevalence of green washing, where organizations make exaggerated or false claims about sustainability practices has eroded trust and created scepticism toward sustainability messages, particularly from corporations perceived to have ulterior motives (Malmlund, 2024). This credibility crisis is compounded by psychological barriers such as cognitive dissonance, where individuals experience discomfort when confronted with information contradicting their existing beliefs or behaviors (Shah & Lacaze, 2025). The

concept of "psychological distance" also reduces engagement, as people perceive sustainability issues as distant or irrelevant to their daily lives (Miller & Rice, 2025).

In Ghana's extractive sector, these barriers manifest as persistent communication failures where communities remain excluded from meaningful dialogue, technical reports fail to address local concerns, and corporate sustainability claims are met with skepticism due to limited transparency and accountability in communication practices.

2.7 Sustainability Communication Evaluation

Evaluating sustainability communication effectiveness is crucial for determining message impact on fostering sustainable behaviours and mindsets, yet this evaluation goes beyond assessing reach to include comprehension, engagement, behavioral impact, and long-term attitudinal shifts (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018).

The long-term, complex nature of sustainability requires evaluation frameworks that incorporate both short-term indicators (knowledge and awareness changes) and long-term indicators (enduring attitude, value, and behaviour changes) to capture communication effectiveness fully (Durbin & Filer, 2021). Evaluation becomes essential for building credibility and accountability in sustainability communication, particularly given widespread scepticism about corporate sustainability claims. The credibility of communicators has been empirically identified as critical—messages from trustworthy sources like scientists or reputable organizations result in more positive engagement, while green-washing prevalence necessitates rigorous evaluation to differentiate genuine efforts from superficial claims (Williams, 2025).

Participatory evaluation methods involve stakeholders directly in assessment processes, ensuring cultural appropriateness and relevance while allowing iterative feedback for strategy refinement (Clarke et al., 2022).

Despite the recognised importance of evaluation in sustainability communication, existing literature provides limited insight into how communication effectiveness is systematically assessed within extractive sector contexts, particularly in developing-country settings. Cross-cultural research indicates that sustainability communication strategies effective in one socio-cultural environment may not translate effectively to another, underscoring the need for context-sensitive evaluation frameworks that account for cultural relevance and stakeholder interpretation (Ostonovich & Khudayberdievich, 2025). This gap in the literature highlights the need for empirical investigation into how sustainability communication is evaluated in specific national and sectoral contexts, such as Ghana's extractive industry.

2.8 Sustainability Communication Frameworks

Sustainability communication frameworks serve as vital tools for organizing and disseminating sustainability messages across cultural, political, and socio-economic divides in a globalized world. These frameworks offer systematic techniques to increasing environmental awareness, promoting common knowledge, and catalyzing social action to address major issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion (UNEP, 2023). While some emphasize global coherence and universal values, others focus on localized narratives or participatory approaches, highlighting the tension between scalability and cultural specificity (Zapata-Barrero & Mansouri, 2022). Several key global frameworks have emerged, each reflecting diverse methodologies and objectives rooted in principles of environmental ethics, cross-cultural communication, and systems thinking (Caudill et al., 2024; UNEP, 2023).

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) provides standardized guidelines for organizations to report on their environmental, social, and economic impacts. The GRI framework emphasizes transparency and accountability through systematic disclosure of sustainability performance indicators (GRI, 2023). However, critics argue that its technical complexity and Western-centric design make it difficult for organizations in developing countries to implement effectively, often resulting in compliance-focused reporting rather than meaningful stakeholder engagement (Suhardjo et al., 2025).

The UNEP Communication Framework, demonstrated through initiatives like World Environment Day and the "Act Now" campaign, creates globally resonant messages highlighting universal themes and encouraging collective action (UNEP, 2023). Despite its global reach, UNEP's approach often lacks cultural specificity needed to resonate deeply with diverse local audiences, with its reliance on universal slogans and top-down communication methods risking alienation of communities with differing priorities and values.

The Climate Outreach Framework emphasizes culturally tailored narratives and audience segmentation, leveraging social psychology and framing theory to craft messages that resonate with specific values and beliefs (Zarate, 2025). While it is effective in addressing diverse ideological groups, its reliance on segmentation poses scalability challenges, particularly in resource-limited settings, and its predominant Western focus reduces applicability in non-Western regions where environmental priorities may differ significantly (Abid, & Polo, 2025).

The Common Cause Framework, rooted in psychological theory, emphasizes intrinsic human values such as compassion, community, and fairness as foundations for promoting sustainable behavior, shifting emphasis from immediate incentives to broader value-based narratives (Heinonen et al., 2025). However, its abstract focus on intrinsic values can delay necessary

action in urgent environmental crises, and assessing tangible impact of value shifts poses evaluation challenges (Sjöstedt & Hulme, 2023).

Within the extractive sector, several frameworks have been adapted to address specific industry challenges related to environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic disparity. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) promotes transparency by requiring governments and companies to disclose information about revenues, contracts, and licenses, encouraging public participation through citizen access to information (EITI, 2023). In Ghana, EITI implementation has increased awareness of resource revenue management, but its focus remains primarily on financial transparency rather than comprehensive sustainability communication. Critics note that while EITI enhances accountability, it fails to facilitate meaningful dialogue between companies and affected communities, particularly regarding environmental and social impacts (Le Billon et al, 2021).

The International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) Sustainable Development Framework provides guiding principles encouraging member companies to adopt best practices in environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and community engagement (Kulshrestha et al., 2024). The framework stresses ongoing dialogue with local communities to ensure equitable benefit-sharing from extractive activities. However, its voluntary nature results in inconsistent application across companies and regions, with implementation often focusing more on reporting compliance than addressing underlying power imbalances between multinational corporations and local stakeholders (Bebbington & Humphreys Bebbington, 2020).

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR), developed through partnerships between governments, NGOs, and companies, provides guidelines for addressing human rights and security issues in extractive regions (Mohammed et al., 2022). While

advocating for comprehensive risk assessments and community consultations, enforcement challenges persist, especially in areas with weak governance structures, and the framework remains reactive rather than anticipatory in addressing potential conflicts (Beco, 2024).

2.9 Empirical Studies

Empirical research on sustainability communication demonstrates that communication effectiveness is closely linked to how messages are structured, contextualised, and aligned with audience realities. Across disciplines and sectors, studies consistently show that sustainability communication moves beyond awareness-raising when it emphasises actionable guidance, personal relevance, and social influence.

White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019), for example, examined behaviour-focused sustainability messaging and found that messages encouraging personal responsibility and agency were more likely to motivate sustainable actions than abstract or collective appeals. At the organisational level, Fleming, Wise, Hansen, and Sams (2017) reported that sustainability communication strategies grounded in practical examples, clear instructions, and achievable targets were associated with stronger organisational uptake of sustainable practices. Complementing this, Cialdini and Jacobson (2021) demonstrated that communication strategies drawing on social norms and peer influence increased the likelihood of behaviour change by reinforcing perceptions of shared responsibility.

Further empirical work highlights the importance of contextual relevance in sustainability communication. Kolandai-Matchett and Armoudian (2020) found that messages focused on small, attainable actions produced more positive engagement outcomes than messages framed around large-scale global crises. Similarly, Homar and Cvelbar (2021) observed that sustainability communication rooted in local or personal contexts generated higher levels of engagement than abstract, global framing. Research by Kim and Lee (2018) further

underscored the role of source credibility, showing that transparent and authentic communication significantly enhances trust and long-term engagement with sustainability initiatives.

Sectoral and regional studies provide additional insight into how sustainability communication is practised in institutional contexts. In Europe, Ihlen and Verhoeven (2017) found that organisations increasingly use integrated reporting to align sustainability communication with corporate strategy, while Schoeneborn, Morsing, and Crane (2020) observed that dialogic communication approaches, characterised by stakeholder inclusion and feedback mechanisms, were associated with stronger legitimacy outcomes.

Within the extractive sector, empirical studies reveal persistent challenges. Jenkins and Yakovleva (2006), analysing mining reports in Australia and Canada, identified a strong emphasis on technical performance and regulatory compliance, with limited attention to community dialogue. In Latin America, Bebbington et al. (2018) showed that sustainability communication practices in mining often reproduce power asymmetries, marginalising indigenous and local voices rather than facilitating inclusive engagement.

African-focused studies largely examine sustainability communication through the lens of corporate social responsibility. Research in South Africa and Nigeria indicates that extractive firms frequently adopt selective communication strategies that prioritise corporate reputation management over transparency and stakeholder inclusion (Mersham & Skinner, 2016; Idemudia, 2017). These patterns suggest that sustainability communication in extractive contexts is often shaped by institutional pressures rather than participatory objectives.

In Ghana, empirical research on sustainability communication remains limited. Frimpong (2020) documented community perceptions of corporate communication practices in the mining sector, noting that sustainability and CSR communication was often experienced as top-down and inaccessible. Botchway (2020) similarly observed that sustainability

communication in Ghana's mining industry is heavily influenced by international reporting standards, with limited adaptation to local communication needs. Osei-Tutu (2022) highlighted the potential of local media and community dialogue platforms to enhance social accountability, but identified inconsistencies in how firms engage different stakeholder groups. Collectively, these empirical studies indicate that while sustainability communication is gradually shifting from disclosure toward engagement, communication effectiveness remains strongly shaped by contextual factors such as culture, literacy, governance structures, and power relations. Importantly, existing studies document practices and perceptions but stop short of developing integrated, context-specific frameworks to guide sustainability communication in extractive sectors. This gap is particularly evident in Ghana, where no comprehensive framework currently exists to structure sustainability communication in ways that prioritise participation, cultural responsiveness, and systematic evaluation.

2.9.3 Limitations and Gaps in Current Frameworks

Although numerous studies have explored sustainability reporting and CSR communication, there is a paucity of research focused on developing frameworks for sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector. Existing research tends to emphasize what companies communicate through reports or media rather than how communication processes can be structured to enhance stakeholder inclusion, transparency, and trust.

Moreover, few studies integrate Stakeholder Theory and Environmental Communication perspectives to analyze or guide sustainability communication practices. While stakeholder theory identifies the actors involved, it does not sufficiently explain the discursive, cultural, and participatory dynamics of communication. Similarly, environmental communication studies often lack context-specific application to corporate sustainability. Integrating these

frameworks would provide a more comprehensive approach to understanding both the relational and discursive dimensions of sustainability communication.

Empirical studies in Ghana have largely examined corporate sustainability from a CSR or compliance standpoint, with minimal exploration of local stakeholder perceptions and communication processes. Consequently, there is limited guidance for practitioners seeking to design communication frameworks that address Ghana's socio-political, linguistic, and cultural realities. This gap underscores the necessity of the present study to develop a context-sensitive sustainability communication framework informed by qualitative insights from key stakeholders in Ghana's extractive industry.

2.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to sustainability communication in the extractive sector, with particular reference to Ghana. The theoretical frameworks—Stakeholder Theory and Environmental Communication Perspective—provided the foundation for understanding how organizations identify key actors and communicate environmental and social information. The conceptual review traced the evolution of sustainability and sustainable development, highlighting the tension between resource extraction and ecological stewardship in Africa and Ghana.

The chapter further examined sustainability communication as a strategic and participatory process, distinct from traditional CSR reporting. It analyzed sustainability practices and communication approaches within extractive industries, identifying a persistent gap between corporate intentions and community perceptions. The review also discussed barriers—both general and context-specific—that hinder effective sustainability communication, including low literacy levels, weak institutional enforcement, and credibility challenges.

Empirical studies reviewed demonstrated global and local trends, revealing that most sustainability communication remains one-directional and underpinned by instrumental motives. A critical knowledge gap was identified: the absence of an integrated, context-specific framework to guide sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector.

The insights gained from this review inform the study's conceptual framework and research design presented in the next chapter. Chapter Three thus builds upon the theoretical and empirical foundations established here to outline the methodological approach used to develop a practical framework for sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive industries.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed to examine the intricacies of sustainability communication, detailing the philosophical and practical considerations that underpinned the study's design. The chapter discussed the research paradigm, approach, demographic and sample strategy, data gathering methods, analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. The chosen methodology was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of sustainability communication practices from the perspectives of participants actively engaged in this field.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm, which was appropriate for examining how sustainability communication is understood, constructed, and practiced within Ghana's extractive sector. Interpretivism assumes that meaning is socially produced and shaped by context, interaction, and lived experience, making it suitable for research that seeks to understand communication processes rather than measure predetermined variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Sustainability communication in extractive settings involves negotiation among diverse stakeholders, including corporate actors, regulators, and communities, each operating within distinct cultural and institutional contexts. An interpretivist paradigm allowed the study to explore these multiple perspectives and the meanings participants assigned to sustainability messages as they were produced and interpreted in practice (Tomaselli, 2022).

By adopting this paradigm, the study foregrounded participants' subjective experiences and contextual interpretations, enabling a nuanced understanding of sustainability communication

as a socially embedded process. This approach aligned directly with the study's objective of examining how sustainability communication is practiced and experienced within Ghana's extractive sector, rather than testing causal relationships or generating statistical generalisations.

3.2 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach to capture the complexities and nuances of sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector context. Qualitative research prioritises depth over breadth and enables close engagement with participants to understand not only what sustainability messages mean to them, but also how they negotiate these meanings within their professional and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The qualitative approach enabled the study to remain responsive to emerging themes during the research process, allowing for iterative and adaptive data collection and analysis. This flexibility was crucial for exploring sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector, where corporate practices, community expectations, and regulatory requirements intersect in complex ways (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

3.3 Population

A research population refers to the complete group of individuals, units, or cases that share characteristics relevant to a study's objectives. In qualitative inquiry, the population is defined by its ability to provide meaningful insight into a phenomenon rather than by statistical representativeness. Robinson (2014) explains that defining a sample universe requires

specifying the characteristics essential for addressing the research questions, ensuring that potential participants possess the experience needed to inform the study. This approach aligns with qualitative research goals, which privilege depth, contextual richness, and experiential knowledge over numerical generalisation.

For this study, the population comprised practitioners involved in sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector. These individuals operated at the interface of corporate sustainability initiatives, regulatory expectations, and stakeholder engagement processes. Their perspectives were essential for understanding how sustainability messages are conceptualised, communicated, and interpreted within organisational settings. Ghana-focused research confirms that practitioners engaged in sustainability initiatives possess experiential insights that make them appropriate sources of empirical evidence (Anani-Bossman & Doe, 2025).

3.4 Sampling and Sampling Technique.

Sampling in qualitative research focuses on the purposeful selection of participants capable of providing rich and relevant insight into the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, qualitative sampling prioritises depth, experience, and contextual knowledge (Robinson, 2014).

This study adopted a purposive sampling strategy to identify practitioners directly involved in sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector. Participants were selected based on their professional engagement with sustainability reporting, stakeholder communication, or corporate sustainability initiatives. A minimum criterion of three years of professional experience was applied to ensure informed and reflective contributions.

Purposive sampling was complemented by limited snowball sampling, whereby initial participants recommended other practitioners who met the inclusion criteria. This approach

facilitated access to experienced professionals embedded within specialised organisational and industry networks (Guetterman, 2015).

The final sample comprised 20 participants. This sample size was guided by the principle of thematic saturation, which suggests that qualitative studies often reach sufficient depth within a relatively small number of interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The selected sample size allowed for exploration of diverse perspectives while maintaining analytical depth.

3.5 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method well suited to exploring participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections on sustainability communication practices. Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between consistency and flexibility, allowing the study to pursue key thematic areas while remaining responsive to participants' insights (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

An interview guide was developed to support data collection and was structured around themes aligned with the study's research objectives. These themes included participants' understanding of sustainability, current communication practices, stakeholder engagement processes, cultural considerations, and perceptions of communication effectiveness within Ghana's extractive sector. Initial questions focused on participants' professional roles and experience, followed by more focused questions addressing sustainability communication practices and challenges.

Probing questions were used to encourage elaboration and clarify meanings, enabling deeper exploration of context-specific practices and interpretations. Interviews were conducted in a manner that allowed participants to articulate their experiences in their own words, supporting

the interpretivist orientation of the study and ensuring that data reflected participants' lived realities.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a combination of thematic analysis and narrative techniques. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the qualitative data, allowing systematic exploration of participants' views on sustainability communication practices, challenges, and cultural influences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process included familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, and refinement of these themes through iterative review.

Narrative techniques complement thematic analysis by exploring how participants construct and share their experiences related to sustainability communication, capturing both broader patterns and unique, context-specific experiences (Rotondi et al., 2024). This combined approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of sustainability communication practices in Ghana's extractive sector.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed to ensure protection of participants' rights and confidentiality throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their rights as participants (O'Sullivan et al., 2021). Participants' identities were protected through anonymization techniques, assigning unique codes rather than using names. This measure was particularly important given the sensitivity of sustainability communication within the extractive sector (Pascale et al., 2022). The study adhered to ethical guidelines established by

relevant institutional review bodies, ensuring respect, integrity, and accountability (Akinsola, 2025).

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach that guided the study's investigation of sustainability communication practices in Ghana's extractive sector. The purposive sampling strategy, semi-structured interviews, and combined thematic-narrative analysis provided a rigorous methodological framework. Ethical considerations ensured participant protection while enabling meaningful data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from interviews with 20 sustainability professionals in Ghana's extractive sector, organized around four research objectives examining conceptualizations of sustainability communication, current practices, challenges and gaps, and evaluation approaches. The chapter follows a structured approach presenting findings first, followed by interpretation, synthesis, and development of the Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework.

4.2 Overview of Research Participants

Twenty participants were interviewed across Ghana's oil, gas, and mining sectors. The sample included sustainability managers, CSR directors and officers, public affairs officers, environmental consultants, and communication strategists. Fourteen participants were male and six female, with professional experience ranging from three to over ten years. Twelve worked for multinational companies and eight for local organizations. Eleven represented mining organizations and nine oil and gas companies. Participants were based in both Accra headquarters and regional offices near operational sites, providing diverse perspectives across organizational levels and geographic locations.

Table 4.1*Summary of participants' demographic characteristics.*

Characteristics	Category	Number
Gender	Male	14
	Female	6
Professional Role	Sustainability Manager	6
	CSR Directors/Officers	5
	Public Affairs Officers	4
	Environmental Consultants	3
	Communication Strategists	2
Company Type	Multinational	12
	Local/Regional	8
Sector	Mining	11
	Oil/Gas	9
Experience	3-5Years	8
	6-10Years	7
	Over 10Years	5
Geographic Base	Accra (HQ)	8
	Regional Offices	12

4.3 Findings

This section presents the core empirical results generated from the interviews conducted with twenty sustainability practitioners across Ghana's extractive sector. The analysis followed the four research objectives that guided the study. For each objective, the data were coded, grouped, and organised into thematic categories that capture the dominant patterns expressed by participants. The themes identified reflect shared perceptions, recurring issues, and sector-wide practices that shape sustainability communication. In the subsections that follow, each

research objective is discussed through the themes that emerged from the analysis, supported by illustrative quotations and linked to relevant literature.

4.3.1 Objective One: Conceptualizations of Sustainability and Sustainability Communication

The first theme revealed the Triple Bottom Line conceptualisation. Participants consistently framed sustainability through environmental, social, and economic dimensions, reflecting the triple bottom line framework, though emphasis varied significantly by professional role. Environmental professionals prioritized ecological protection as fundamental, with Participant 1, a compliance officer, stating,

We ensure our activities will not harm the land or contaminate the water, and stretch further to safeguard neighbouring farms, rivers, and wildlife. We care about the environment because without the environment, everything else does not exist.

Twelve (12) out of the twenty participants, including CSR managers and community relations officers, emphasized social development as their primary sustainability focus. Participant 10, a community relations officer, explained,

We support schools, clinics, and other community initiatives because this is how people see sustainability in their daily lives. When they notice genuine improvements in education, healthcare, or infrastructure, that's when they start believing our operations bring real, lasting benefits to society.

Finance managers and operations staff highlighted economic sustainability as foundational, with Participant 6, a director, stating, "If the business fails, there's no sustainability to talk about. Economic success keeps the other two pillars alive and meaningful." However, eighteen participants acknowledged practical tensions in balancing these dimensions, with Participant 9, a sustainability coordinator, explaining,

The three pillars sound good in theory, but in practice, we are constantly forced to make difficult choices. Spending on community development may delay environmental investments, and strict environmental protection sometimes limits economic targets.

This finding reflects the triple bottom line model (Elkington, 1997) but also highlights the difficulty of balancing its three pillars in practice. As Jansen et al. (2023) argue, organisations often prioritise one dimension over others, leading to fragmented conceptualisations. Similarly, Lah (2025) found that professional silos reinforce selective emphases in sustainability implementation.

A second theme revealed evolution from traditional CSR approaches toward strategic integration, though this transition remained uneven. Multinational firms consistently described sustainability as embedded in strategic planning, with Participant 2, a sustainability manager, noting,

It's no longer just about donations. We now align with the SDGs in our planning, and every major project decision has to consider environmental and social impact from the beginning, not as an afterthought.

Six (6) participants from locally owned companies acknowledged resource constraints limiting systematic approaches. Participant 4, a local company representative, explained,

We prefer to be more systematic in our sustainability work, but we don't have as much resources available as the larger multinationals. We focus on particular community projects and direct aid when necessary.

Local companies emphasized cultural authenticity as their strength. Participant 14 stated,

We may not have glossy brochures or detailed reports, but our strength lies in understanding the local context. When we support traditional festivals, work through chiefs, or provide direct community aid, people know it is genuine.

These insights confirm Saiia and Schwartz (2022) view of CSR's evolution from philanthropy to strategy. Yet, the unevenness between multinationals and local firms reflects Harrison (2023) argument about sustainability being embedded in global value chains, while Selmier II

(2021) highlight how African firms adopt pragmatic, culturally grounded strategies. Chen and Lee (2021) further notes that cultural authenticity can strengthen legitimacy despite resource constraints.

The third theme revealed persistent tensions between compliance-driven and transformational approaches. Nine (9) participants acknowledged that sustainability reports were produced largely as compliance tools. Participant 9, a sustainability officer explained,

We do the reports because we have to. It's about meeting regulations and satisfying auditors. The community doesn't really read our annual sustainability reports; they're written for regulators and investors

Another admitted,

To be honest, we publish these sustainability documents because it's required. The board wants to see them, our stakeholders expect them, and it keeps us compliant. But ask any villager near our operations if they've seen our 80-page sustainability report – they haven't.

Despite this compliance orientation, some participants expressed aspirations for transformation. A community relations officer remarked,

If we included community feedback and local knowledge in our reports, they would guide future projects, not just end up on a shelf. But right now, reporting is separate from operations.

This confirms Troshani and Rowbottom (2024) critique that sustainability reporting often remains instrumental, prioritising compliance over learning. Malhotra et al. (2021) similarly argue that compliance and transformation represent conflicting logics. Brock et al. (2023) stresses that meaningful transformation requires embedding indigenous knowledge and community voices into corporate reporting and decision-making. These findings show that Ghana's extractive sector is caught between global compliance frameworks and local legitimacy demands. Unless companies shift from reporting as a regulatory obligation to communication as a participatory process, sustainability will remain fragmented and externally

driven. What emerges is a paradox: communication intended to build legitimacy risks eroding it when it excludes community voices and reinforces organisational silos.

4.3.2 Objective Two: Current Sustainability Communication Practices

For the second research objective, the first theme revealed that stakeholder segmentation was often reactive rather than systematic. Participant 1 explained:

We usually identify key stakeholders when there's a crisis or when someone complains loudly. It's not ideal, but that's when we realise we need to engage differently with different groups.

Smaller, locally owned firms were particularly constrained. Participant 19 remarked:

Most of our segmentation happens when there's a problem. The squeaky wheel gets the grease... we know we should be more systematic, but limited resources push us to prioritise crises.

Some differentiation in communication styles was observed. Participant 7 noted:

We can't send a glossy report to the community and expect them to understand. For investors, it's PowerPoints and data; for communities, it's face-to-face conversations."

This finding reflects Freeman et al.'s (2010) stakeholder theory, which stresses systematic mapping, but also supports Rahman et al. (2025) critique that organisations often default to reactive engagement. Mulder (2023) further cautions that such practices replicate top-down logics, limiting participation.

The second theme revealed Channel Selection and Message Design. It established clear differences in how communication channels were used for different audiences. Formal reports remained dominant for regulators and investors. Participant 12 remarked:

Our sustainability reports are the main way we communicate with regulators and investors. They expect detail and numbers, so every year we dedicate significant resources to producing them.

For communities, oral and interpersonal communication was prioritised. Participant 6 explained:

When we wish to reach out to the people, then we have to be present amongst them, sit and speak their language. That is what instils trust, not shiny brochures or long press releases.

Radio was another influential medium. Participant 13 observed: *“Radio is very effective as it crosses literacy levels. When we sponsor programs or give interviews, both rural and urban communities listen.”*

These findings confirm Herbert and Graham (2022) argument that sustainability reporting functions as a legitimacy tool, while Hilson (2012) and Guan and Gordonas (2025) highlight the importance of culturally embedded oral communication. Essien (2023) further show radio’s enduring role in African development contexts.

The third theme revealed persistent tensions between one-way and dialogic communication. Most participants described communication as primarily informational. Participant 7 admitted:

Most of our communication is us telling people what we have done—projects completed, money spent, or compliance achieved. It’s more of giving information than asking for views

Some situational dialogue occurred, particularly through community forums. Participant 9 shared:

We hold durbars and community meetings where people can voice concerns, and sometimes we adjust plans. For instance, we delayed a project after they raised issues about water sources.

However, dialogue often remained symbolic. Participant 15 reflected:

We invite feedback, but many times it doesn’t influence decisions. At best, it gets noted in the minutes. Management usually has its mind made up already.

This supports Dawodu et al. (2021) critique that participation in sustainability is often inadequate. Donkor (2025) argue that genuine dialogue can reshape corporate practice, though this remains aspirational in Ghana's extractive sector. These findings suggest that communication practices are more about maintaining control than fostering collaboration. While companies recognise the value of dialogue, they lack the institutional structures to make it routine, leaving communities engaged only when convenient. The result is a widening gap between rhetoric and lived experience, where dialogue is promised but rarely practiced in a transformative way.

4.3.3 Objective Three: Challenges and Gaps in Communication Strategies

The third research objective explored the obstacles organisations face in communicating sustainability within Ghana's extractive sector. Three themes emerged: limited organisational resources and capacity, trust deficits and credibility issues, and cultural and linguistic barriers.

The first theme under the third objective revealed limited organisational resources and capacity. It suggests that sustainability communication was often undermined by inadequate budgets and human capacity. Participant 4, a CSR officer, noted: *"Our budget is always limited. The priority is production. Communication is something we do when we have extra funds, not a core part of the operation"*.

Ten (10) participants described communication responsibilities being added to existing roles rather than managed by dedicated staff. Participant 19 explained:

We don't have a dedicated communication team for sustainability. Sometimes it's added to someone's role, so it doesn't get the attention it deserves."

These gaps meant that communication was often reactive instead of strategic. Participant 11 observed:

We only make communication a priority when there's conflict or when regulators demand it. Otherwise, production always comes first.

This finding supports Abe (2022), who argue that African extractive firms frequently underfund communication, prioritising technical and production targets. Aidoo (2024) similarly highlights weak expertise and ad hoc execution. Overall, the results confirm that in Ghana's extractive sector, sustainability communication is viewed as secondary, echoing Baines and Hager (2024) critique that structural pressures privilege profit over relational investment.

The second theme established trust deficits and credibility issues. It revealed widespread mistrust between companies and host communities. Participant 10, a community relations officer, explained:

"The biggest challenge is credibility. People don't believe us when we say we will do something, because in the past, companies have promised and not delivered."

Participants also acknowledged that communities often viewed communication as reputation management rather than genuine engagement. Participant 7, a sustainability manager, remarked:

"Sometimes it looks like we are only communicating to defend ourselves, not to actually involve the community in decisions. That creates suspicion."

Credibility was seen to hinge on follow-through. Participant 6, a regulatory officer, warned:

"You can hold as many community meetings as you like, but if the school you promised is never built, people will stop attending. The damage to trust becomes almost irreversible."

These accounts align with Pesa (2023) and Donkor (2025), who emphasise historical legacies of mistrust in African extractive contexts. They also reflect Panigyraki and Polyportis (2024), who argue that defensive communication fosters suspicion. Voci and Karmasin (2024) further note that gaps between rhetoric and reality, rather than communication methods, undermine credibility.

The third theme is Cultural and Linguistic Barriers. The third theme revealed the difficulty of communicating effectively across Ghana's diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Participant 14, a sustainability coordinator, observed:

"We prepare documents in English, but most community members cannot read them. Even when we translate, the tone is very corporate, not how people naturally speak."

Face-to-face and oral approaches were widely seen as more effective. Participant 8, a CSR manager, stated:

"The community does not care about glossy reports. They want us to sit with them, speak in their language, and show that we understand their realities."

Participants also highlighted the limits of translation. Participant 16 explained:

"Some concepts don't exist in the local language. Words like biodiversity or sustainability don't always make sense to people, so messages get misunderstood."

These findings support Saboro (2022), who stresses the importance of oral traditions in African communication, Jindřichovská and Eckert, (2021), who document how mining companies fail when relying on corporate English. Banwo et al. (2022) and Payne et al. (2023) further argue for culturally sensitive engagement as a basis for trust. As Ghazala, (2025) cautions, Western sustainability terms often lack cultural equivalence, creating misinterpretations. These results highlight that communication barriers are relational and cultural, not simply technical. This

suggests that sustainable engagement in Ghana's extractive sector requires moving beyond translation to embed communication in community worldviews. It also underscores that without recognising cultural logics, corporate strategies risk reinforcing distance rather than building legitimacy.

4.3.4 Objective Four: Evaluation of Sustainability Communication

The fourth research objective examined how organisations assess the effectiveness of their sustainability communication strategies. Three themes emerged: reliance on compliance and regulatory reporting, use of stakeholder feedback mechanisms, and absence of structured evaluation frameworks.

The first theme revealed reliance on compliance and regulatory reporting. The findings suggest that evaluation was largely equated with demonstrating compliance to regulators and investors rather than measuring trust or relationship-building. Eleven (11) of the 20 participants admitted that success was defined in technical terms, such as timely report submission or adherence to templates. Participant 11, a sustainability officer, remarked:

“If we submit our quarterly and annual reports on time, that is considered success. Nobody really asks whether the communication changed perceptions or improved relationships.”

Some organisations reduced effectiveness to conflict avoidance rather than dialogue. Participant 2, a public affairs officer, explained:

If there are no major complaints from the community or the regulator, we assume our communication is working. The measure of success is peace, not whether communities feel included or better informed.

Others confirmed that paperwork often stood in for actual engagement. Participant 17 stated: *“Success is defined by ticking the reporting boxes. As long as the regulator is satisfied, no one asks if the community even received or understood the information.”*

This finding supports Franken and Schütte (2022) claim that evaluation in extractive industries often amounts to regulatory compliance, and Dasila’s (2025) observation that learning potential is underutilised. While Carreno (2024) notes that reporting can create learning loops, in Ghana this impact was minimal. As Aslaksen et al. (2021) argue, CSR performance is too often judged by stability rather than transformation.

The second theme revealed use of stakeholder feedback mechanisms. It suggests that many organisations relied on feedback during durbars, hearings, and grievance mechanisms as informal assessments of communication. Twelve (12) participants described using feedback to gauge effectiveness. Participant 8, a CSR manager, explained:

“When we hold community meetings, we pay close attention to the questions and complaints raised. If people stop raising the same issues, we assume they have understood our message.”

However, eight (8) participants admitted that feedback was often informal and undocumented.

Participant 14, a communications officer, noted:

Most of the time, feedback is informal. People speak during meetings, or chiefs send messages through our liaison. But we don’t have a structured way of recording and analysing this feedback.

Participants also observed that formal channels were often distrusted. Three (3) participants highlighted that communities preferred to voice concerns through chiefs or radio rather than corporate grievance boxes. Participant 19, a liaison officer, explained:

“People are more comfortable complaining through chiefs or on the radio than using our grievance boxes. They don’t believe the formal system gets results.”

This finding reflects Adjei's (2021) argument that feedback is vital but must be institutionalised to have impact. It also echoes Rovolis and Habibipour's (2024) concern that participation is often overstated and Banerjee's (2022) critique of superficial consultation. Hilson et al. (2025) further emphasises that traditional authority remains a stronger mediator than corporate mechanisms in Ghana.

The third theme established absence of structured evaluation frameworks. It revealed that most organisations lacked formal systems to assess communication effectiveness. Ten (10) of the 20 participants admitted that evaluation was based on impressions or compliance submissions rather than structured frameworks. Participant 2, a public affairs officer, acknowledged: *"We don't have a standard framework for assessing communication. Most of the time, if there are no complaints, we assume we are doing well."*

Seven (7) participants emphasised the lack of clear indicators. Participant 14, a sustainability officer, explained:

"We measure production in tonnes and revenue in dollars, but there are no indicators for communication impact. It's left to judgment."

Five (5) participants expressed frustration at the absence of tools to link communication with tangible outcomes. Participant 6, a CSR coordinator, noted:

"We don't know if people are actually understanding our messages or if their perceptions are changing. There is no system for measuring that."

This supports Manjengwa's (2024) finding that evaluation in extractive CSR is weak and Walzberg et al.'s (2021) critique that outputs dominate over outcomes. Amoah et al. (2022) similarly observe that African firms struggle to institutionalise sustainability evaluation. The Ghanaian case illustrates Haywood's (2022) concern that assessment is primarily risk

management, not transformation. Overall, the evaluation of sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector remains compliance-driven, informal, and underdeveloped. Reports are assessed for regulatory compliance, feedback is largely undocumented and symbolic, and structured frameworks are absent. Effectiveness is thus measured in terms of compliance and conflict avoidance rather than trust, inclusion, or learning.

4.4 Synthesis of Findings

The findings reveal four critical patterns across Ghana's extractive sector that demonstrates persistent misalignment between sustainability communication rhetoric and practice. First, sustainability conceptualizations remain fragmented along professional and organizational lines, with different stakeholders emphasizing different pillars of the triple bottom line, reflecting Milne and Grey's (2013) observation that sustainability becomes a language of compromise rather than an integrated strategy. Second, communication practices are predominantly one-way and compliance-focused despite rhetorical commitments to stakeholder engagement, confirming Freeman et al.'s (2010) critique that stakeholder theory remains poorly operationalized. Third, systemic barriers including resource constraints, trust deficits, and cultural disconnection undermine communication effectiveness, aligning with Idemudia's (2022) identification of structural challenges in African extractive industries and Osei-Tutu's (2023) emphasis on cultural adaptation to oral traditions. Fourth, evaluation practices are informal and output-focused rather than outcome-oriented, limiting organizational learning and reinforcing what Manjengwa (2024) describes as absent monitoring frameworks.

These patterns reflect broader tensions between global frameworks and local realities, where Western-derived sustainability models encounter African cultural contexts and resource limitations. The dominance of compliance-driven approaches satisfies international stakeholder expectations but fails to build meaningful relationships with local communities

most directly affected by extractive operations. This disconnect creates a self-reinforcing cycle where poor communication perpetuates mistrust, which in turn makes future engagement more difficult, illustrating Malhotra et al. (2021) account of conflicting organizational logics between transformation and compliance.

4.5 Developing the Proposed Framework

Building from Existing Sustainability Communication Models

The Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework developed here builds on existing sustainability communication models while addressing specific gaps identified in Ghana's extractive sector context. Anani-Bossman and Doe's (2025) framework emphasized strategic alignment, message clarity, and corporate positioning across three dimensions: strategy, engagement, and execution. Their model integrated holistic sustainability integration, alignment with SDGs, and tangible impact reporting, establishing communication as a legitimacy tool aligned with organizational objectives. However, their framework provided limited attention to participatory mechanisms that enable community co-creation, cultural adaptation processes beyond surface translation, and collaborative evaluation that measures relationship-building rather than compliance outputs, elements essential for African extractive environments where communities bear direct operational impacts.

Scandellius and Cohen's (2016) sustainability communication model focused on stakeholder integration, transparency, and accountability mechanisms, emphasizing systematic engagement as central to corporate sustainability performance. While valuable, their framework assumed institutional contexts with established trust, adequate resources, and stable governance structures conditions that findings demonstrate do not obtain in Ghana's extractive sector where historical mistrust, resource constraints, and weak institutional capacity fundamentally shape communication possibilities.

Bagdare's (2021) framework emphasized dialogue and co-creation as central to sustainability communication, advocating participatory processes where stakeholders actively shape sustainability initiatives. Though theoretically compelling, this model was developed for consumer contexts characterized by transactional relationships rather than extractive industries facing complex community relationships, historical legacies of exploitation, and stringent regulatory requirements that create unique communication challenges.

The framework developed here extends these models by integrating participatory elements derived directly from participant experiences in Ghana's extractive sector. Where Anani-Bossman and Doe (2025) focused on strategic corporate positioning, Scandellius and Cohen (2016) emphasized transparency under assumptions of institutional stability, and Bagdare (2018) advocated dialogue in consumer contexts, this framework centers on five interdependent dimensions—purpose clarification, stakeholder integration, cultural responsiveness, participatory engagement, and collaborative evaluation—that acknowledge resource constraints, historical trust deficits, and cultural specificities while maintaining accountability standards.

Step-by-Step Development from Findings

The framework emerged systematically from three core insights revealed across the four research objectives. First, findings on conceptualizations (Objective 1) demonstrated that communication effectiveness depends fundamentally on clarifying purpose beyond compliance requirements. Participants repeatedly noted communication was treated as regulatory obligation satisfying auditors and investors rather than enabling transformation and building social license with affected communities. This insight informed the Strategic Communication Purpose dimension, recognizing that without explicit purpose clarity, organizations default to compliance-driven approaches that perpetuate rather than resolve communication failures.

Second, findings on current practices (Objective 2) and challenges (Objective 3) revealed that stakeholder relationships are central to both opportunities and obstacles, with reactive crisis-response approaches creating cultural misalignments and undermining trust. The dominance of technical English reports for external stakeholders contrasted sharply with community preferences for oral engagement through durbars and radio, while one-way informational flows contradicted rhetorical commitments to dialogue. These findings informed three interdependent dimensions: Stakeholder Integration and Mapping addresses reactive segmentation by establishing systematic inclusive processes; Culturally Responsive Message Design addresses linguistic and cultural barriers by centering indigenous communication practices; and Participatory Engagement Processes addresses symbolic dialogue by embedding structured mechanisms that demonstrably influence decisions.

Third, findings on evaluation (Objective 4) demonstrated that assessment practices focused on compliance metrics and conflict avoidance rather than relationship outcomes, with informal undocumented feedback scattered across departments without systematic analysis or organizational learning. This insight informed the Collaborative Evaluation and Learning dimension, recognizing that without outcome-based assessment measuring trust, understanding, and participation, organizations cannot adapt communication strategies or demonstrate genuine accountability to communities.

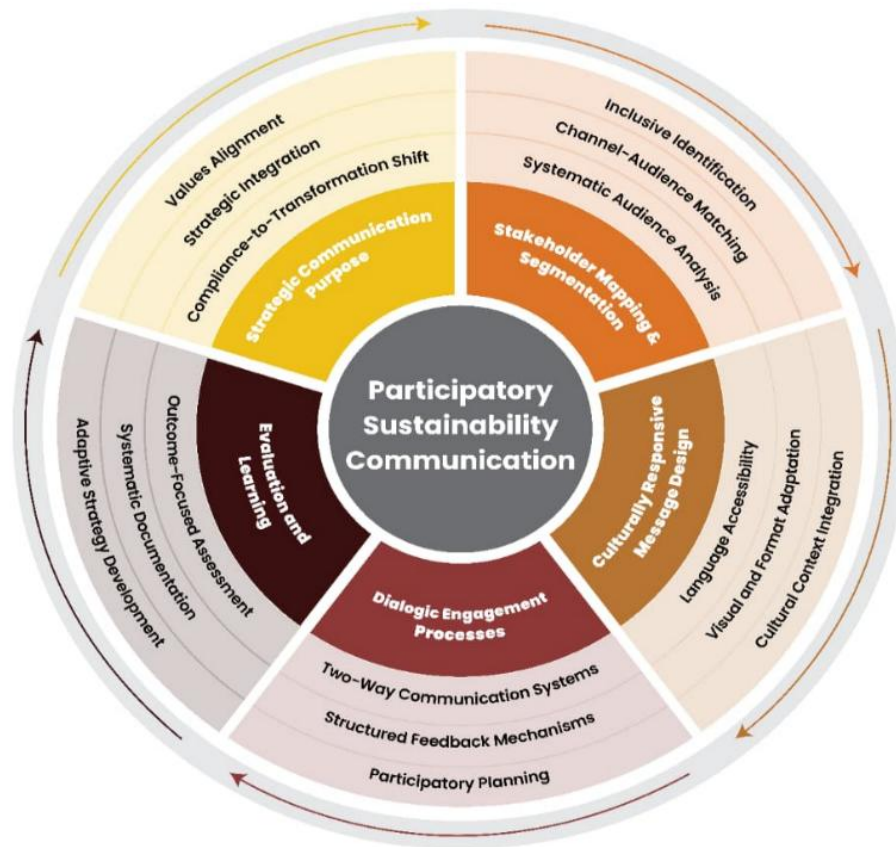


Figure 1: A Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework

The proposed framework comprises five interdependent dimensions that operate through circular rather than linear interaction. *Strategic Communication Purpose* clarifies sustainability communication as a transformational process aimed at building social licence, rather than a procedural activity focused on regulatory compliance. The findings showed that sustainability reporting was widely perceived by participants as serving regulatory and institutional requirements rather than facilitating meaningful engagement with host communities. This dimension distinguishes the framework from Anani-Bossman and Doe’s (2025) strategic alignment approach by positioning communicative purpose as preceding organisational objectives, ensuring that communication actively enables sustainability goals rather than merely supporting them after the fact.

Stakeholder Integration and Mapping establish systematic and inclusive processes for identifying and engaging diverse stakeholder groups, including marginalised voices such as women, youth, and traditional leaders. The findings revealed that stakeholder identification practices were often reactive and crisis-driven, with engagement occurring primarily after tensions or conflicts had emerged. Unlike Scandellius and Cohen's (2016) stakeholder integration model, which assumes the presence of established relationships, this dimension recognises that in Ghana's extractive context, stakeholder relationships must be intentionally constructed through culturally appropriate and sustained engagement before transparency and dialogue efforts can be effective

Culturally Responsive Message Design centres indigenous communication practices, including the use of local languages, oral traditions, and culturally embedded modes of meaning-making. Participants consistently described linguistic and cultural barriers that limited community understanding of sustainability information communicated through technical reports. This dimension extends beyond the cultural relevance elements identified by Anani-Bossman and Doe (2025) by positioning cultural responsiveness as foundational rather than supplementary. The findings indicate that without embedding communication within local communicative practices, sustainability messages remain inaccessible regardless of strategic clarity or transparency commitments

Participatory Engagement Processes embed structured mechanisms such as accessible grievance systems, joint planning committees, and formal feedback loops that demonstrably influence organisational decision-making. The findings showed that communication practices were predominantly one-way, with limited opportunities for communities to shape decisions affecting them. This dimension operationalises Hernández's (2025) emphasis on dialogue by specifying concrete participatory structures suited to extractive sector realities. It recognises

that meaningful participation requires institutional mechanisms capable of addressing power imbalances inherent in company–community relationships, rather than reliance on symbolic consultation.

Collaborative Evaluation and Learning introduces outcome-focused assessment approaches that prioritise trust, understanding, and participation over compliance-oriented outputs. The findings revealed the absence of systematic evaluation mechanisms linking sustainability communication activities to relational or behavioural outcomes. This dimension advances existing models by positioning evaluation as a collaborative learning process rather than a purely corporate accountability exercise. It enables adaptive improvement while building community capacity to assess and document organisational performance through evaluation processes accessible to all stakeholders.

Framework Justification

The proposed Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework is important because sustainability communication in Ghana’s extractive sector currently lacks an integrated structure to guide practice beyond compliance-oriented reporting. Existing approaches remain fragmented and reactive, shaped largely by regulatory and investor demands rather than by the need to build trust, inclusion, and accountability with host communities. The findings of this study show that communication practices often function as instruments of disclosure and legitimacy management, with limited capacity to address cultural disconnection, stakeholder exclusion, and weak learning systems. The framework is therefore justified as a response to this gap, providing a coherent structure that repositions sustainability communication as a relational and governance process rather than a technical reporting requirement.

More broadly, the framework is important because it extends sustainability communication theory into a context marked by power asymmetries, historical mistrust, and resource constraints. Much of the existing literature assumes organisational capacities and communication cultures that do not reflect the realities of extractive operations in developing contexts. By grounding the framework in empirical evidence from Ghana, this study demonstrates how participatory principles must be institutionally embedded to be meaningful in practice. The framework thus contributes theoretically by adapting sustainability communication models to Global South contexts, and practically by offering organisations, regulators, and communities a shared reference point for designing and improving communication processes that support long-term relationships and social licence to operate.

Collectively, these dimensions provide prescriptive guidance for moving Ghana's extractive sector from compliance-focused reporting toward genuine sustainability communication. Unlike existing frameworks that emphasise what organisations should communicate, such as strategic messages, transparent data, and stakeholder responses, this framework specifies how communication systems must be restructured by clarifying purpose, systematising inclusion, centring cultural practices, embedding participatory mechanisms, and collaborating on evaluation to overcome the structural barriers documented in the findings. The framework's prescriptive value lies in offering actionable guidance for institutional redesign grounded in Ghanaian realities while maintaining theoretical rigor, enabling organisations to transform communication from legitimacy management toward authentic relationship-building that strengthens social licence through demonstrated accountability to affected communities.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings from interviews with 20 sustainability professionals examining conceptualizations, practices, challenges, and evaluation approaches in Ghana's extractive sector sustainability communication. The findings revealed persistent tensions between compliance-driven and transformational approaches, dominance of one-way communication despite dialogic aspirations, systematic barriers including resource constraints and trust deficits, and informal evaluation practices focused on conflict avoidance rather than relationship building. These findings informed development of a Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework comprising five interdependent dimensions addressing systemic gaps in current practice while building on existing sustainability communication models. Chapter Five will discuss implications for theory, policy, and practice, and outline study contributions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the research's key findings, drawing conclusions about their theoretical and practical significance, and offering recommendations for strengthening sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector. The chapter presents implications for theory, policy, and practice, followed by recommendations organized by stakeholder level. It concludes with reflections on study limitations and future research directions that can build upon this work's contributions to sustainability communication scholarship and practice.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study examined how sustainability communication is conceptualized, practiced, and evaluated in Ghana's extractive sector, with the aim of developing a context-specific participatory framework. The first research objective explored how sustainability and sustainability communication are conceptualised within Ghana's extractive sector. The findings show that sustainability is understood in fragmented ways across professional roles. Environmental practitioners tended to prioritise ecological protection, CSR practitioners emphasised social development, while finance and operations staff foregrounded economic viability. Participants widely acknowledged practical tensions in balancing these dimensions, describing sustainability less as an integrated strategy and more as a negotiated compromise among competing priorities. Although there was evidence of a shift from philanthropic CSR toward more strategic integration, this transition remained uneven. Multinational firms were often described as technically sophisticated but culturally distant, while local firms

demonstrated stronger cultural alignment but weaker formal systems. Importantly, sustainability reporting was frequently perceived as serving regulatory and investor requirements rather than facilitating meaningful engagement with host communities, highlighting an ongoing tension between compliance-driven and transformational communication approaches.

The second research objective examined current sustainability communication practices. The findings indicate that stakeholder identification was largely reactive, often triggered by complaints, disputes, or project-related crises rather than systematic, proactive engagement. Communication channels reflected a clear segmentation of audiences, with formal reports and digital platforms primarily targeting regulators and investors, while community engagement relied on face-to-face interactions such as durbars and local radio. While some differentiation in communication modes was evident, participants noted that adaptations were often superficial, with core messages remaining oriented toward institutional audiences even when translated into local languages. Communication practices were commonly described as one-way and informational, with limited opportunities for dialogue, despite organisational rhetoric emphasising stakeholder engagement.

The third research objective focused on challenges and gaps in existing communication strategies. Resource constraints emerged as a recurring concern, with participants highlighting limited budgets and insufficient human capacity as factors that positioned communication as peripheral to core operational priorities. Trust deficits were also widely identified, rooted in historical experiences of unfulfilled promises and defensive communication practices that foster scepticism rather than collaboration. Cultural and linguistic barriers further constrained communication effectiveness. Participants described technical, English-language documents as poorly aligned with local communication norms, noting that translation alone did not address

differences in tone, symbolism, and meaning embedded in indigenous languages and oral traditions. These challenges reflect systemic issues spanning organisational priorities, historical relationships, and cultural contexts, indicating the need for more comprehensive adaptation of communication approaches.

The fourth research objective examined how organisations evaluate sustainability communication effectiveness. The findings show that communication success was commonly equated with regulatory compliance and conflict avoidance rather than stakeholder understanding, trust, or participation. Evaluation practices relied heavily on informal feedback obtained through community meetings and interactions with traditional leaders. However, participants acknowledged that such feedback was rarely documented, analysed, or integrated into organisational learning processes. The absence of formal evaluation frameworks and clear indicators of communication effectiveness limited organisations' ability to assess whether sustainability messages were understood or whether perceptions were changing over time. As a result, communication practices remained static, with limited capacity for reflection and adaptive improvement.

Taken together, the findings reveal a legitimacy paradox within Ghana's extractive sector. Communication practices intended to build trust and legitimacy often undermined these objectives due to their compliance orientation, reactive engagement patterns, cultural misalignment, and lack of systematic evaluation. The findings highlight a significant implementation gap between universal sustainability communication models and Ghana's extractive industry context, where global frameworks intersect with local cultural practices, resource constraints, and historical legacies of mistrust. These dynamics underscore the need for a participatory, context-responsive sustainability communication framework grounded in Ghanaian realities.

5.3 Conclusions

This study concludes that sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector is compliance-driven, fragmented, and culturally misaligned, operating within a paradigm that prioritizes external accountability over genuine stakeholder relationships. While organizations recognize communication's role in achieving legitimacy and demonstrating responsibility, practice remains constrained by regulatory imperatives, reactive crisis-response patterns, and disconnection from local cultural contexts. The persistent gap between aspirational rhetoric about strategic sustainability integration and compliance-focused implementation reveals deeper contradictions where organizations articulate sustainability as strategically important yet enact it through narrow reporting obligations and defensive messaging.

The research demonstrates that compliance structures fundamentally constrain sustainability communication's transformative potential. Rather than facilitating mutual learning, collaboration, and trust-building, communication functions primarily as a technical exercise promoting stability and minimizing conflict. This orientation undermines communication's capacity to serve as a platform for co-creating solutions, building genuine accountability, and embedding sustainability principles within organizational culture. The dominance of one-way informational flows over dialogic engagement, formal reports over culturally appropriate channels, and compliance metrics over relationship outcomes reflects systemic prioritization of external legitimacy management over authentic stakeholder participation.

Simultaneously, the research reveals persistent strength in indigenous participatory practices including *durbars*, oral communication traditions, and traditional authority structures that shape how Ghanaian communities understand and engage with sustainability issues. These practices represent untapped potential for culturally embedded and relationally oriented strategies that could render sustainability communication more participatory, trusted, and impactful. By

recognizing and centering these local legitimacy forms rather than treating them as supplementary to Western communication models, organizations can transcend symbolic participation and leverage communication as genuine collaborative instrument.

The absence of systematic evaluation mechanisms reinforces communication's symbolic rather than substantive character, perpetuating approaches that satisfy compliance requirements while failing to build relationships or enable learning. Without structured indicators, feedback loops, and collaborative assessment processes, sustainability communication cannot demonstrate effectiveness in building trust, fostering understanding, or enabling behavior change. This evaluation gap prevents organizations from distinguishing between communication that achieves regulatory approval and communication that strengthens social license through demonstrated accountability to affected communities.

The study's theoretical significance lies in demonstrating the limitations of exporting universal sustainability communication models without contextual adaptation. While global frameworks emphasize transparency, systematic reporting, and stakeholder dialogue, Ghana's extractive sector reveals how compliance demands, resource constraints, cultural norms, and historical mistrust shape communication possibilities in fundamentally different ways. The Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework developed here extends existing models by positioning cultural responsiveness, participatory engagement, and collaborative evaluation as foundational rather than supplementary dimensions, arguing that sustainability communication theory must become more explicitly attentive to contextual specificity and participatory paradigms, particularly within Global South settings where power dynamics, resource limitations, and cultural practices diverge significantly from Western assumptions embedded in dominant frameworks.

5.4 Implications and Recommendations

The findings carry several implications for theory, practice, and policy, with corresponding recommendations organized by stakeholder level to guide practical implementation.

For sustainability communication theory, this research demonstrates that contextual adaptation cannot be treated as mere translation or superficial customization of universal models. The Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework contributes to scholarship by showing how compliance pressures, cultural practices, and resource constraints fundamentally reshape communication possibilities, requiring theoretical frameworks that acknowledge rather than abstract from these conditions. Future theoretical development should prioritize participatory paradigms that position communities as co-creators rather than recipients of sustainability messages, recognize indigenous communication practices as legitimate rather than supplementary forms, and conceptualize evaluation as collaborative learning rather than corporate accountability exercise. This suggests that sustainability communication scholarship must develop more explicitly Southern theoretical perspectives that center rather than peripheralize non-Western contexts, moving beyond universal principles toward contextually grounded frameworks that maintain theoretical rigor while acknowledging diverse implementation realities.

For practitioners in extractive organizations, the findings reveal significant risks in treating communication as compliance tool rather than relational process. Current approaches undermine rather than build trust because they remain narrowly focused on regulatory reporting and symbolic messaging that communities perceive as defensive reputation management rather than genuine engagement. Organizations seeking to strengthen communication effectiveness should clarify sustainability communication's purpose explicitly as relationship-building and accountability demonstration rather than merely compliance satisfaction, ensuring this purpose

guides resource allocation, capacity development, and strategic planning. Communication should be reoriented toward culturally embedded forms including community durbars, oral dialogue, local radio programming, and traditional authority engagement that communities value over written technical reports. This requires systematically documenting feedback through structured rather than anecdotal systems, ensuring community input demonstrably influences organizational decisions rather than being noted symbolically. Organizations must also develop outcome-oriented assessment tools measuring trust levels, inclusion perceptions, and mutual understanding rather than relying on report submission timeliness or conflict absence as success proxies. Building internal capacity by assigning clear sustainability communication responsibilities, even within existing roles initially, can reduce fragmentation while developing expertise over time. Institutionalizing stakeholder mapping processes that proactively identify marginalized voices including women, youth, and traditional leaders moves engagement beyond crisis-driven reactions toward strategic relationship-building. Most fundamentally, organizations must shift from compliance to transformation by aligning communication strategies with values of inclusivity, responsiveness, and genuine accountability that position communities as partners rather than audiences.

For policymakers and regulators in Ghana, the research emphasizes needs extending beyond current compliance-based standards. Existing regulatory frameworks incentivize reporting but fail to promote participatory or culturally responsive approaches, creating conditions where organizations satisfy requirements through technical submissions while failing to build community relationships. Policy instruments should be developed that explicitly require organizations to engage communities through two-way communication mechanisms, documenting how feedback influences decisions and reporting relational alongside technical outcomes. The Environmental Protection Agency, Petroleum Commission, and other regulatory bodies should mandate participatory communication elements within reporting

guidelines, specifying minimum standards for community consultation, feedback integration, and outcome-based evaluation that move beyond disclosure toward genuine dialogue. Strengthening coordination among regulatory organizations can advance transitions from compliance-focused reporting toward engagement standards aligned with Sustainable Development Goals. Regulators should also support industry-wide framework development by promoting sector standards for participatory communication co-designed by industry actors, regulatory bodies, and community representatives, ensuring consistency while allowing contextual adaptation. Creating multi-stakeholder platforms where companies, regulators, and communities jointly review communication practices and outcomes enables collaborative evaluation that builds capacity across all parties while fostering shared accountability. Policy frameworks should integrate sustainability communication with Ghana's broader development priorities, positioning participatory engagement as driver of sustainable extractive governance rather than regulatory burden to minimize.

For communities and civil society organizations, the findings suggest several opportunities for strengthening voice and influence within extractive industry sustainability communication. Communities should document their own communication experiences and expectations systematically, creating counter-narratives that challenge corporate accounts and provide evidence for advocacy. Building capacity to engage with formal communication channels including grievance mechanisms and consultation processes enables communities to hold organizations accountable while understanding their rights. Strengthening traditional authority structures' roles in mediating company-community relations leverages existing legitimacy forms that findings show shape engagement more effectively than formal corporate systems. Civil society organizations can support communities by facilitating communication skills development, providing technical assistance for interpreting sustainability reports, and amplifying community voices within policy dialogues. Collaborative initiatives between

communities, civil society, and sympathetic organizational actors can pilot innovative communication approaches demonstrating participatory engagement's feasibility and benefits.

For academic researchers, the study highlights several promising directions for deepening sustainability communication understanding and practice within extractive contexts. Future research should prioritize community and local stakeholder perspectives to capture how messages are received, interpreted, and valued, identifying gaps between organizational intentions and lived experiences that provide balanced views of communication effectiveness. Cross-national and cross-sectoral comparative studies could reveal how different regulatory environments, cultural contexts, and institutional settings shape communication practices, while longitudinal research tracking organizations adopting the Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework would provide valuable evidence of practical impact over time. Investigation into digital platforms, social media, and emerging technologies could uncover opportunities and challenges for strengthening participation and transparency. Policy and regulatory analysis examining how frameworks enable or constrain communication practices would inform reforms incentivizing more participatory and accountable approaches. Critical remains developing and testing culturally grounded metrics for assessing communication outcomes in African contexts, creating tools that bridge current evaluation gaps while promoting evidence-based strategies.

5.5 Concluding Reflections

This study began with the premise that sustainability communication could bridge extractive organizations and affected communities, fostering trust, accountability, and more sustainable development outcomes. The research reveals both the promise and persistent boundaries of this vision, demonstrating that while communication holds transformative potential, realizing this

potential requires fundamental shifts in organizational purposes, practices, and evaluation systems.

The evidence shows sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector remains constrained by compliance logics, reactive engagement patterns, cultural disconnections, and weak evaluation systems that perpetuate rather than resolve legitimacy challenges. Organizations operate within paradigm where communication serves primarily to satisfy external accountability requirements rather than build genuine relationships with communities bearing operational impacts. This paradigm proves self-defeating, as compliance-focused approaches undermine rather than establish the trust and social license organizations seek, creating cycles where poor communication perpetuates mistrust that makes future engagement increasingly difficult.

Simultaneously, the research traces pragmatic pathways for change through the Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework that provides roadmap for organizations seeking to transcend compliance toward authentic stakeholder dialogue. The framework's five interdependent dimensions, clarifying strategic purpose, institutionalizing stakeholder integration, designing culturally responsive messages, embedding participatory processes, and developing collaborative evaluation, offer systematic yet flexible approach for navigating the contradictions between compliance demands and relationship-building imperatives. Grounded in empirical experiences from Ghana while potentially transportable to other extractive contexts, the framework demonstrates that transformation requires simultaneously addressing purpose, relationships, culture, participation, and evaluation rather than treating these as sequential concerns or optional enhancements to compliance-based practice.

The study's central contribution lies in revealing the profound challenge of generating authentic dialogue amid power imbalances, cultural diversity, and competing interests that characterize

extractive industry contexts. The framework offered here represents not a catalogue of easy solutions but a structured approach for working through these contradictions by centering participation, cultural competence, and accountability as non-negotiable rather than aspirational dimensions of sustainability communication. This requires recognizing that communication effectiveness cannot be achieved through improved messaging or expanded reporting alone, but demands institutional redesign that redistributes decision-making authority, resources, and evaluation capacity to enable communities' meaningful influence over matters affecting their lives and livelihoods.

The research illustrates that sustainability communication is neither merely technical problem solvable through better tools nor matter of good intentions requiring only attitudinal shifts. Instead, transformation demands structural changes in how organizations conceptualize communication's purpose, allocate resources for engagement, design culturally appropriate practices, embed participatory mechanisms, and collaborate on outcome evaluation. Organizations undertaking such transformation can shift communication from compliance requirement into strategic instrument for legitimacy-building, relationship development, and achievement of long-term sustainable development outcomes that benefit both corporate actors and affected communities.

The path forward requires sustained organizational commitment, enabling policy contexts, and continued research to refine and adapt the framework as implementation reveals new challenges and opportunities. This research provides foundation for that evolution, acknowledging that genuinely transformational sustainability communication represents ongoing process of learning, negotiation, and adaptation rather than destination achievable through one-time interventions or fixed prescriptions. Success will ultimately be measured not by improved compliance ratings or expanded reporting volumes, but by demonstrable

strengthening of trust, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem-solving between extractive organizations and the communities whose lives they profoundly affect.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesized the study's findings into broader conclusions and recommendations for strengthening sustainability communication in Ghana's extractive sector. Four key patterns emerged across research objectives: compliance dominance over transformational integration, reactive and fragmented stakeholder engagement, cultural and linguistic disconnection between corporate communication and community preferences, and weak evaluation systems preventing learning and adaptation. These patterns manifest in a legitimacy paradox where communication practices intended to build trust instead undermine it through compliance focus, symbolic participation, and absent accountability mechanisms.

To address these challenges, the chapter presented the Participatory Sustainability Communication Framework targeting five interdependent dimensions: clarifying strategic communication purpose, institutionalizing systematic stakeholder engagement, designing culturally responsive messages, embedding participatory processes, and developing outcome-oriented evaluation systems. These dimensions provide organizations with practical roadmap for transitioning from symbolic communication toward genuine participation and accountability that centers community voices, respects cultural practices, and enables collaborative learning.

The chapter articulated theoretical, practical, and policy implications showing how the research contributes to sustainability communication scholarship by developing Southern theoretical perspectives, offers practitioners guidance for transforming compliance-focused practices into relational processes, and suggests policy reforms moving beyond reporting mandates toward

participatory engagement standards. Recommendations were organized across organizational, policy, community, and academic levels, providing stakeholder-specific guidance for implementation. The chapter acknowledged study limitations including practitioner-focused sampling and qualitative scope while identifying promising future research directions including community-centered studies, comparative analyses, and development of culturally grounded evaluation tools.

The research makes both theoretical and practical contributions to sustainability communication scholarship by foregrounding African contexts and community realities often marginalized in dominant frameworks, while providing practitioners and policymakers with explicit guidance for building participatory, culturally competent, and accountable communication systems. The findings emphasize that sustainable transformation hinges not on recommendations alone but on firm commitment to participation, cultural sensitivity, and genuine accountability at all organizational and policy levels.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY: A STUDY OF THE GHANAIAN EXTRACTIVE SECTOR

Summary

The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for effective sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector. It focuses on understanding how organisations define, implement, and communicate sustainability practices while identifying existing challenges and gaps. The study aims to provide insights that align environmental, social, and economic priorities, fostering long-term sustainable development and improved stakeholder engagement.

Interview Guide

General questions

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself? Full name, age (in your 20s, 30s, 40s), current position, years of work experience, highest education.
2. Can you tell us about your organization? What is the nature of its business?
3. What is your role in the organisation? i.e. how do you support the organisation?

Research objective 1: To investigate the current conceptualizations of sustainability and sustainability communication within Ghana's extractive sector.

Conceptualizations of Sustainability and Sustainability Practices

1. How do you define sustainability in the context of your organization's activities within the Ghanaian extractive sector?

2. To what extent is sustainability considered a core part of your organization's business strategy, and how does this influence decision-making?
3. What are the key sustainability practices your organization is currently involved in, and how do they impact the environment and communities where you operate?
4. How do your organization's sustainability initiatives align with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
5. How do stakeholders, including companies, communities, and regulators, perceive and prioritize sustainability within the extractive sector?
6. What specific areas (e.g., climate change, education, health, water management) are prioritized in your organization's sustainability efforts, and why?

Research objective 2: To examine the current sustainability communication practices in Ghana's extractive sector

Current Sustainability Communication Practices

1. What is your understanding of sustainability communication?
2. What are the primary , strategies, and tactics used for sustainability communication in your organization?
3. Why do you find these strategies and tactics effective?
4. Are your sustainability communication activities premised on any specific sustainability communication strategy?
5. If yes, what does it consist of? If not, why not?
6. Who are the key beneficiaries of your sustainability communication initiatives? Why these particular stakeholders?

7. In your view, what are the advantages of communicating your organization's sustainability initiatives?
8. Can you describe a recent example of a successful sustainability communication initiative in your work? What made it successful?
9. How do you ensure that your communication on sustainability is aligned with both internal and external expectations?

Content/messages of sustainability communication

1. What types of content or messages do you typically share about your sustainability initiatives?
(e.g., land reclamation after mining operations, reduction of water usage in extraction processes)
2. Are there specific types of content or messages you deliberately avoid communicating? If so, why? *(e.g., sharing content about practices under regulatory scrutiny or highly technical details about environmental impact assessments)*
3. What kinds of claims do you emphasize in your sustainability messages—product-related, environmental, or social cause-related? *(e.g., environmental claims like "minimizing ecological footprint," social cause-related claims like "supporting education and healthcare in mining communities," or product-related claims like "sustainably sourced raw materials"?)*
4. Are there key terminologies, narratives, or messages that are central to how you communicate sustainability? If yes, can you specify them? *(For instance, do you use terms like "responsible mining practices," "zero harm policy," "biodiversity conservation," or narratives around "community empowerment through sustainable resource extraction"?)*

5. Who typically serves as the source of your organization's sustainability communication messages? (e.g., communication manager, CEO, different sources)
6. Why do you think these sources are effective or appropriate for delivering sustainability messages?

Research objective 3: To explore the challenges and gaps in existing communication strategies

1. What are the most significant challenges you face when communicating sustainability issues within the extractive sector?
2. How do cultural and local contexts in Ghana impact sustainability communication in the extractive sector?
3. What barriers exist between stakeholders (e.g., communities, regulators, corporations) when it comes to effectively communicating sustainability issues?
4. How do you handle situations where certain stakeholders do not receive sustainability messages?

Research objective 4: To understand how organizations measure or evaluate the effectiveness of their sustainability communication efforts within the Ghanaian extractive sector.

1. What methods or tools does your organization use to measure the effectiveness of sustainability communication efforts? *(For example, do you use stakeholder surveys, feedback from community meetings, or social media engagement metrics?)*
 - Are these tools formal (e.g., structured surveys, data analytics) or informal (e.g., unsolicited feedback, casual observations)? Which ones does your organization rely on the most, and why?

2. What specific indicators or metrics do you track to evaluate the success of your sustainability communication? *(For instance, do you monitor changes in community perceptions, levels of stakeholder trust, or increased awareness of your sustainability initiatives?)*
3. Can you provide examples of situations where your evaluation efforts influenced changes in your sustainability communication strategies or tactics? *(For example, did feedback from community leaders or low engagement on a particular communication channel lead to adjustments in your approach?)*
4. What challenges or limitations does your organization face in measuring the effectiveness of your sustainability communication efforts? *(For instance, do you encounter difficulties in collecting reliable data, limited stakeholder feedback, or resource constraints for thorough evaluations?)*

5. Concluding question

1. How do you assess the long-term impact of sustainability communication efforts in the sector? What indicators or benchmarks do you use to track the long-term impact of these efforts? *(For example, do you assess improved community relations, sustained stakeholder engagement, or reduced environmental complaints?)*
2. What improvements, if any, would you recommend for enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability communication in the Ghanaian extractive sector?

Appendix B: Codes and Themes

CODES AND THEMES

CODES

Environmental pillar emphasis
Social development priorities
Economic sustainability focus
Pillar balancing challenges
Role-based fragmented approaches
Strategic CSR integration
SDG alignment in planning
Supply chain sustainability clauses
Resource-limited local approaches
Cultural legitimacy practices
Compliance-driven reporting
Regulatory satisfaction focus
Aspirational transformation goals
Community feedback exclusion
Sectoral regulatory differences
Crisis-reactive stakeholder identification
Resource-constrained mapping;
Audience-differentiated messaging;
Superficial content adaptation;
Systematic approach absence
Annual sustainability reports dominance;
Community oral communication preference;
Radio effectiveness across literacy levels;
Social media branding limitations;
Cultural context specificity
Information-giving communication;
Situational dialogue attempts;
Symbolic feedback mechanisms;
Community preference for tangible outcomes;
Managerial decision pre-determination
Limited communication budgets;
Production priority allocation; Human capacity limitations;
Role-addition communication responsibilities;
Secondary operational positioning
Historical trust deficits;
Unmet promise consequences;
Defensive reputation management;
Follow-through requirement emphasis;
Structural credibility challenges
English language barriers;
Corporate tone inappropriateness;

THEMES

Triple Bottom Line Conceptualisations

Evolution from CSR to Strategic Integration

Compliance versus Transformation Tensions

Stakeholder Segmentation Approaches

Channel Selection and Message Design

One-Way versus Dialogic Communication

Organisational Capacity and Resource Constraints

Trust Deficits and Credibility Issues

Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Face-to-face engagement preference;
Translation concept limitations;
Indigenous perspective misalignment
Compliance indicator reliance;
Timely submission success definition;
Conflict prevention measurement;
Technical term effectiveness;
External accountability orientation
Community durbar feedback;
Informal undocumented responses;
Limited decision-making influence;
Traditional authority mediation;
Symbolic consultation practices
Formal evaluation system absence;
Informal impression reliance; Clear
metrics lacking; Communication impact
uncertainty; Reactive assessment
approaches

Compliance and Regulatory Reporting
Focus

Stakeholder Feedback Mechanisms

Absence of Structured Evaluation
Frameworks