

UNIVERSITY FOR MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

School of Graduate Studies



**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION
IN ENHANCING COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED MARINE
PROTECTED AREA AT GREATER CAPE THREE POINTS, GHANA**

A THESIS

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Master of Arts Degree in Development Communication

By

BONA-MENSAH DOE
Student ID: MADC24011

Supervised by:
Prof. ETSE SIKANKU

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the product of my own investigation on primary and secondary resource basis and that no aspect of this has been submitted for Master's degree in University of Media, Arts and Communications or any other tertiary institution for that matter.

Candidate's Name: Bona-Mensah Doe

Signature:



Date: 12-12-2025

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this dissertation were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by University of Media, Arts and Communications.

Supervisor's Name: Prof. Etse Sikanku

Signature:



Date: 15-12-2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of participatory development communication in strengthening community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points in Ghana's Western Region. The study aimed to assess how participatory communication influences community awareness, trust, perceived legitimacy, and overall support for the proposed MPA. Using a convergent parallel mixed methods approach, the study combined survey data with interviews and focus group discussions to capture both breadth and depth of community perspectives. Data were gathered from about 150 community members in selected coastal communities, alongside qualitative inputs from fishers, women fish processors, youth, elders, and institutional stakeholders. Findings show that general awareness of the proposed MPA is relatively high, but levels of understanding vary widely across communities. Radio broadcasts, community meetings, NGO outreach, and traditional leaders were the main information sources; however, inconsistent follow-up communication limited deeper understanding of the MPA's objectives and implications. Participation in sensitization activities was moderate, indicating that awareness alone does not guarantee meaningful engagement. Results further demonstrate that participatory communication strongly shapes trust in decision-making processes. Quantitative analysis indicates that meeting participation, communication frequency, transparency, and inclusion of community views positively influence trust. Nevertheless, qualitative findings reveal concerns about limited influence in decision-making and perceptions of tokenistic consultation. Participatory communication was also found to significantly predict perceived legitimacy, with active involvement, regular updates, and transparent processes enhancing acceptance of the proposed MPA. Trust and perceived legitimacy emerged as the strongest drivers of community support, alongside awareness and effective communication channels. While communities recognized potential long-term ecological and livelihood benefits, concerns about fishing restrictions and income loss persisted. The study concludes that sustained, inclusive, and culturally appropriate participatory communication is essential for building trust, legitimacy, and durable community support for marine conservation initiatives at Greater Cape Three Points.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, the Bona-Mensah Family, whose unwavering love, encouragement, and sacrifices have been a constant source of strength throughout my academic journey. I also dedicate this study to Ms. Faustina Martin-Daniels and Eric Kojo Adjei for their guidance, motivation, and belief in my abilities. Special dedication goes to Hen Mpoano, whose commitment to environmental conservation and community engagement inspired the focus of this research and reinforced my passion for participatory development communication.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MPA: Marine Protected Area

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature (cited as source for MPA definition)

UNEP-WCMC: United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (co-cited in MPA coverage statistic)

WWF: World Wide Fund for Nature (cited regarding "30x30" framework)

USAID: United States Agency for International Development (mentioned as a development partner)

GFRA: Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity (USAID-funded project)

PDC: Participatory Development Communication

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

FoN: Friends of the Nation (a local conservation NGO in Ghana)

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (data analysis software)

KII: Key Informant Interview

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The decline of viable marine ecosystems has emerged as a pressing global concern, necessitating integrated strategies to conserve marine biodiversity while ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), a conservational tool for marine ecosystems that regulates seeks to regulate access to critical habitats to allow ecosystems to rejuvenate. An MPA is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (IUCN, 2008). These areas may restrict certain human activities such as fishing, mining, or tourism to promote ecosystem recovery and resilience. Globally, MPAs have contributed to the protection of over 8% of the ocean surface as of 2023 (UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2023), with the global community aiming to protect 30% of oceans by 2030 under the “30x30” framework (WWF, 2023). However, beyond their ecological intentions, MPAs often bring socio-political challenges, particularly when they are perceived by coastal communities as top-down interventions that threaten access to marine resources (Jones, Qiu, & De Santo, 2013).

In Ghana, the government here in the ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, in collaboration with development partners such as the recently disbanded USAID and local conservation organizations has introduced a proposal to establish the country’s first official MPA around the Greater Cape Three Points area in the Western Region. The area identified for this is initiative per research has found it to be very ecologically rich and socially complex because it is a host to over 21 coastal communities whose livelihoods largely depend on artisanal fishing (Hen

Mpoano, 2024). According to Hen Mpoano (2024), participatory mapping exercises and a series of stakeholder engagements under the Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity (GFRA) funded by the USAID were carried out to identify ecologically critical zones and promote community-driven inputs into the MPA design. This process emphasized community involvement through durbars, focus group discussions, and sensitization forums across all 21 proposed MPA communities. These efforts aimed to foster legitimacy and ownership from the ground up.

Although the MPA has not yet been officially declared, recent public statements by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development suggest that the formal announcement of Ghana's first MPA is anticipated by the first quarter of 2026. This declaration, when made, will mark a significant milestone in Ghana's marine conservation history. Regardless of whether the formal declaration occurs during the research period, the topic remains critically relevant, as the communication processes, levels of participation, and local perceptions established before the official gazettelement will likely influence long-term support and implementation success. Participatory Development Communication (PDC) theory asserts that communication should be a two-way, iterative process where local people actively shape decisions that affect their development (Servaes, 2008). In marine governance contexts, PDC facilitates dialogue between resource users and regulators and serves as a tool to co-create understanding and foster legitimacy. While several NGO-led activities have introduced PDC elements into Ghana's marine governance, empirical assessments of their effectiveness remain limited, especially with regard to how well they resonate across diverse community demographics (Hen Mpoano, 2024).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have been globally promoted as a key strategy for restoring marine ecosystems and sustaining fisheries, yet their successful implementation is frequently hindered by

socio-political resistance especially in developing countries where livelihoods are directly tied to marine resources. In Ghana, the proposal to declare the country's first official MPA in the Greater Cape Three Points area brings to the fore longstanding tensions between conservation imperatives and community livelihoods. Although several sensitization activities have been undertaken, significant uncertainty persists among local residents about what the MPA entails, who it benefits, and how it will affect their access to fishing grounds (Pomeroy et al., 2007). Early evidence suggests that many stakeholders, particularly artisanal fishers, feel excluded from decision-making processes. This sense of marginalization is compounded by communication challenges, including limited feedback channels, language barriers, and inconsistent messaging. While participatory development communication has been introduced in parts of the MPA consultation process, there is insufficient empirical assessment of whether these efforts have genuinely fostered dialogue, trust, or support across diverse community groups. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of current communication strategies in building local ownership (Bessette, 2004).

Hen Mpoano's (2024) community engagement documentation under the GFRA project indicates mixed responses some communities demonstrated willingness and optimism, while others expressed fears of exclusion and economic uncertainty. The absence of systematic analysis of how these participatory strategies are being received and understood by different stakeholders limits the potential for refining communication efforts. Moreover, there remains a lack of clarity around whether communities interpret these engagements as genuine inclusion or as formalities. Furthermore, the MPA has not yet been formally declared, but the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development has publicly indicated that the official announcement is anticipated by August 2025. This pending status provides a unique opportunity to explore community perceptions and reactions during the critical pre-declaration phase. Regardless of the timing of formal

declaration, the research topic "Exploring the Role of Participatory Development Communication in Enhancing Community Support for the Proposed Marine Protected Area at Greater Cape Three Points, Ghana" remains highly relevant. This is because communication practices and perceptions established before the official gazettelement will play a defining role in the MPA's long-term legitimacy, enforcement, and community buy-in. The absence of structured evaluations on the effectiveness of participatory communication in this context presents a knowledge gap with significant policy implications. A deeper understanding of how these communication strategies influence community attitudes and legitimacy perceptions is essential not only for Ghana's emerging marine governance model but also for broader application in similar socio-ecological settings. This study seeks to bridge that gap by exploring the link between participatory communication and community support for the proposed MPA in Greater Cape Three Points

1.3 Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine the role of participatory development communication in influencing community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area at Greater Cape Three Points in Ghana.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the level of community awareness and understanding of the proposed MPA.
2. To examine how participatory communication strategies affect community trust in MPA decision-making processes.
3. To evaluate the relationship between participatory communication and community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed MPA.

4. To identify the communication channels and approaches most effective in promoting community support for the MPA.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between community awareness and their level of support for the proposed MPA?
2. How does the use of participatory communication influence trust in MPA governance?
3. To what extent does community perception of legitimacy affect their willingness to support the proposed MPA?
4. Which participatory communication channels are most effective in enhancing support for the MPA among local communities?

1.5 Justification of the Study

The relevance of this study lies in its ability to contribute to participatory marine governance, a crucial component of sustainable development. As Ghana moves closer to declaring its first MPA, this research will provide timely insights into how communication strategies can continue to build trust and legitimacy two fundamental factors for ensuring compliance and long-term sustainability (Figueroa et al., 2002; Pomeroy & Rivera-Guieb, 2006). The study also extends theoretical knowledge in development communication by applying participatory approaches to marine conservation policy, an area underexplored in Sub-Saharan Africa. Practically, it will guide policymakers, NGOs, and local leaders in designing culturally responsive and inclusive communication frameworks.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is geographically confined to selected communities within the proposed Greater Cape Three Points MPA zone in Ghana. Thematically, it focuses on participatory development communication and its influence on community trust, awareness, perceptions of legitimacy, and support. The research will not evaluate ecological or economic outcomes of MPAs. The communities involved are a total of twenty one (21) from the Ahanta West and Nzema East District combined ; Domunli, Akonu, Agyan, Egyambra, Miemia, Awona Beach, Princess Town, Aketakyi, Cape Three Points, Akwidaa, Achonwa, Upper, Dixcove, Lower Dixcove, Busua, Butre, Awona Beach, Asemko, Ampatano but we would take a 5 of these communities to conduct the research in.

1.7 Organization of the study

The study is structured into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the background, problem, objectives, and scope. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three outlines the methodology. Chapter Four will present the findings and discussion, while Chapter Five will conclude with recommendations and implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of scholarly works and research relevant to participatory development communication and marine conservation, specifically in the context of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). It aims to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing the influence of communication processes on community support for the proposed MPA at Greater Cape Three Points, Ghana. The review is structured under seven major thematic subtopics.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Participatory Development Communication

Participatory Development Communication (PDC) is grounded in the belief that people must be active participants in shaping the decisions and policies that affect their lives. It evolved as a response to the deficiencies of top-down models of communication which viewed development as the mere transmission of technical knowledge from experts to passive audiences (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). The PDC model encourages horizontal dialogue, critical reflection, and empowerment, largely inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed. Freire emphasized dialogue as a process of mutual learning between people and facilitators, where communication becomes a transformative and liberating process rather than a didactic tool. Within PDC, the goal is not only to inform but also to engage communities in identifying issues,

generating solutions, and implementing actions (Servaes, 2008). It shifts the role of communication from persuasion to facilitation, where the media and communication practitioners act as mediators who connect local knowledge with institutional frameworks. This aligns with the broader objectives of development communication which promote participation, equity, and sustainability (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006).

When applied to natural resource management and marine governance, PDC helps resolve socio-ecological conflicts, rebuild trust, and encourage local stewardship. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which often place restrictions on access to fishing grounds and impose new regulations, can generate resistance if introduced without adequate dialogue (Mascia & Claus, 2009). Communities may perceive MPAs as external impositions that threaten their livelihoods, especially in contexts where past interventions were exclusionary or poorly communicated.

Evidence from Southeast Asia, East Africa, and the Pacific shows that PDC significantly increases the legitimacy of MPAs by enabling communities to co-define conservation objectives and enforcement mechanisms (Pomeroy et al., 2007; Christie et al., 2009). For instance, co-management arrangements where communities participate in rule-making have yielded better ecological and social outcomes than centrally administered MPAs. In Ghana, participatory communication practices have gained prominence through the work of organizations like Unicef, Hen Mpoano, Environmental Justice Foundation and Friends of the Nation (FoN). In the Greater Cape Three Points area, community durbars, use of participatory rural appraisal tools, radio dialogues in Fante and Nzema, Participatory Action Media to discuss communication goals have been used to discuss the goals and implications of the proposed MPA. Sagoe et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of these local language-based platforms in bridging the knowledge gap between conservationists and fishers.

Nonetheless, critical scholars caution against romanticizing participation. White (1996) distinguishes between nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative participation, stressing that only the latter ensures true empowerment. If communication only invites input without shifting decision-making power, it risks becoming a white elephant. Thus, assessing the quality of participation becomes as important as its occurrence. In sum, this theoretical grounding informs the present study's investigation of how participatory communication strategies have been employed in the Greater Cape Three Points context, and to what extent they align with the principles of genuine PDC. By analyzing the structures, channels, and processes of communication used in the MPA rollout, the study will determine whether they foster dialogue, trust, and support or reinforce hierarchical governance practices.

2.2.1 Community Engagement and Support in Marine Protected Areas

Community engagement is widely recognized as a cornerstone of successful Marine Protected Area (MPA) implementation. Studies have consistently shown that the long-term viability of MPAs depends significantly on the extent to which local populations are involved in the planning, decision-making, and management processes (Bennett & Dearden, 2014). Engagement efforts can take many forms, including consultation meetings, participatory mapping, co-management agreements, and local monitoring programs. Each of these mechanisms aim to build trust, foster ownership, and reduce resistance to marine conservation policies. Research in various global contexts, including Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Latin America, have highlighted that communities engaged early in the process are more likely to support conservation goals and exhibit higher levels of compliance (Pollnac et al., 2010). For instance, in the Philippines, a study by Pomeroy et al. (2007) demonstrated that local stewardship and involvement in rule-setting significantly reduced illegal fishing practices and improved ecological outcomes. Similarly,

Gurney et al. (2014) found that perceptions of fairness and influence over MPA rules were critical predictors of community support.

In Ghana, efforts to promote community engagement have gained traction in recent years. Projects led by organizations such as Hen Mpoano under the GFRA project have introduced participatory strategies in areas targeted for MPA designation. Community durbars, MPA educational campaigns, video screening session and participatory problem tree analyses have been utilized to surface concerns, solicit ideas, and improve communication between stakeholders and state institutions (Sagoe et al., 2021). However, engagement is not without its challenges. ceremonial participation, language barriers, and lack of feedback mechanisms can undermine trust and fuel perceptions of exclusion (Bennett et al., 2017). Moreover, socio-economic disparities and power dynamics within communities may limit the representation of marginalized groups such as women and youth. This study situates itself within this broader discourse by exploring how community engagement mediated through participatory communication shapes support for the proposed MPA at Greater Cape Three Points. It critically assesses the quality, depth, and inclusiveness of engagement processes, moving beyond mere participation counts to analyze how communication fosters or hinders genuine community buy-in.

2.2.2 Influence of Communication Channels on Understanding and Legitimacy

The choice and effectiveness of communication channels play a critical role in shaping how local communities understand and perceive the legitimacy of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). In participatory development communication, channels serve not merely as tools for disseminating information, but as mediums for dialogue, negotiation, and mutual learning (Servaes, 2008). The use of culturally appropriate, locally accessible, and interactive channels enhances comprehension, fosters engagement, and strengthens trust in conservation interventions. Scholars such as Bessette

(2004) argue that participatory communication is most effective when it leverages a mix of traditional and modern communication platforms. These include community durbars, radio programs in local dialects, posters and illustrations, and face-to-face discussions facilitated by trusted local intermediaries. The integration of interpersonal communication especially through opinion leaders, community-based organizations, and traditional authorities has been shown to influence behavior change and policy legitimacy more than mass media alone (Figueroa et al., 2002).

In marine conservation, understanding the purpose and benefits of an MPA is crucial to garnering local support. A lack of clear and accessible information often leads to confusion, misinformation, and resistance (Mascia & Claus, 2009). For instance, studies from Madagascar, Indonesia, and Mozambique reveal that communities exposed to sustained, interactive communication are more likely to internalize conservation goals and view MPAs as legitimate governance tools (Bennett et al., 2017). The Ghanaian context presents similar dynamics. In the Greater Cape Three Points area, several community-based organizations and NGOs would have to employ the use of local FM radio stations, community information centers, and sensitization workshops to explain the objectives of the proposed MPA. According to Sagoe et al. (2021), these channels are instrumental in reaching a wide range of stakeholders, including women, youth, and marginalized fishers. However, inconsistencies in message content, infrequent engagement, and lack of translation into local languages can continue to pose barriers to understanding. This study investigates how the selection and use of communication channels influence not just awareness levels, but also perceptions of legitimacy. It explores whether communities feel that they are part of a two-way communication process and whether they see the MPA as a collaborative initiative rather than a

top-down imposition. The findings will contribute to improving the design of communication strategies that prioritize clarity, relevance, and trust-building.

2.2.3 Inclusiveness and Cultural Relevance of Messaging

In the context of Marine Protected Area (MPA) governance, inclusiveness and cultural relevance in communication are essential to securing community legitimacy and support. Participatory development communication theory emphasizes the importance of recognizing and integrating local languages, customs, symbols, and norms into conservation messaging to ensure resonance and acceptance (Servaes, 2008). Messages that reflect community realities and are disseminated through culturally trusted channels are more likely to elicit engagement and cooperation than externally framed narratives. Inclusiveness ensures that all groups that would be affected by this initiative which include men, women, youth, elders, and marginalized individuals have equitable access to information and the ability to contribute to dialogue. In many coastal communities, women play a vital role in fish processing, trade, and household food security, yet are often excluded from decision-making processes (Bennett, 2005). Similarly, youth and minority ethnic groups may face systemic exclusion due to power hierarchies and traditional leadership structures. Failure to address these disparities might undermine the credibility of MPA initiatives and perpetuates resistance.

The cultural relevance of messaging also affects how communities interpret and act on conservation goals. Research by Figueroa et al. (2002) shows that using metaphors, idioms, and storytelling grounded in local cosmologies enhances message comprehension and ownership. In the Pacific Islands, for example, traditional ecological knowledge and community rituals were incorporated into MPA planning to bridge scientific and cultural perspectives, resulting in stronger community compliance (Aswani et al., 2015). Conversely, messages that employ unfamiliar

technical jargon or ignore local histories often alienate audiences. In Ghana's Greater Cape Three Points area, the cultural landscape includes Fante, Nzema, and Ahanta communities with distinct linguistic and traditional structures. Recent MPA outreach efforts led by Hen Mpoano and partners have employed radio jingles in local dialects, community drama performances, and participatory mural painting to make conservation messages more accessible and relatable (Sagoe et al., 2021). However, evaluations reveal that such efforts are sometimes one off, are short-term, or fail to reach female audiences and youth effectively.

Moreover, language remains a persistent barrier. Many MPA-related consultations are conducted in English or centralized Akan, which excludes community members with limited literacy or fluency. Sagoe (2021) notes that meaningful engagement requires not only translation but also simplification and contextual adaptation of scientific information. This section underscores that for communication to be truly participatory and transformative; it must be inclusive of all community voices and culturally rooted. The present study would investigate the extent to which the MPA communication strategies in Greater Cape Three Points achieve this inclusiveness. It further examines whether the formats, languages, and facilitators employed resonate with different subgroups and foster a shared understanding of conservation goals.

2.2.4 Trust and Perceived Legitimacy in Conservation Governance

Trust and perceived legitimacy are central to conservation governance, particularly in initiatives like Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that regulate access to natural resources. These concepts are intricately tied to how stakeholders experience communication whether they feel heard, respected, and informed and how they perceive the intent and fairness of those implementing the MPA because this area already feels restrictions from the drilling company oil rigs that restrict them from coming 50 meters close these oil rigs (Lockwood, 2010). Participatory development

communication (PDC) plays a pivotal role in shaping both trust and legitimacy by fostering dialogue, transparency, and accountability. Legitimacy in this context is both procedural and outcome-based. Procedural legitimacy relates to whether the processes of communication and decision-making are inclusive, transparent, and representative, while outcome legitimacy is concerned with whether the perceived results align with community values and expectations (Suchman, 1995). Without legitimacy, communities are less likely to comply voluntarily with the MPA regulations, and enforcement becomes contentious and very resource-intensive if it is not community centered and the understanding is not watered down very well. (Kooiman et al., 2005).

Trust in the institutions behind MPAs government agencies like the Fisheries Commission and the Ministry, NGOs, researchers can be fragile, particularly in regions where historical development projects were exclusionary or perceived as externally driven. Research from Tanzania and Indonesia shows that when communities perceive MPA managers as trustworthy, they are more inclined to follow rules, participate in monitoring, and defend marine boundaries against outsiders (Pollnac et al., 2010; Cinner et al., 2012). In the Ghanaian context, past marine resource interventions have sometimes been top-down, contributing to a deficit of institutional trust among fishers and processors (Mensah et al., 2014). The proposed MPA at Greater Cape Three Points has seen efforts to reverse this trend through participatory mapping, village-level meetings, and storytelling forums. According to Sagoe et al. (2021), these processes have increased transparency but remain limited in depth and frequency.

Moreover, community perceptions are shaped not just by what is communicated but by how it is communicated and who is delivering the message. Studies by Ostrom (1990) and Pomeroy et al. (2007) emphasize the importance of local intermediaries and traditional authorities in building trust. In many coastal Ghanaian communities, trust is often placed in chiefs/ the chief fisherman (

apofohene), queen mothers/ chief fish monger (konkohemaa), and respected elders. Their endorsement or opposition can significantly influence attitudes toward conservation. This study explores the relationship between participatory communication and the development of trust and legitimacy in the Greater Cape Three Points MPA. It seeks to assess whether communication has created a sense of procedural justice and mutual respect, or whether lingering skepticism and exclusion continue to erode support. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for informing adaptive and socially just conservation strategies.

2.2.5 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Participatory Communication Strategies

The effectiveness of participatory communication strategies in the context of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) hinges on the extent to which these strategies foster genuine dialogue, improve understanding, enhance trust, and generate community support. Participatory communication, unlike top-down dissemination models, focuses on engaging local populations in two-way communication that allows for feedback, reflection, and decision-making (Bessette, 2004). Evaluating its effectiveness, therefore, involves measuring more than awareness it requires assessing whether communities feel heard, represented, and empowered. Scholars have emphasized the need for multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks that incorporate both process and outcome indicators (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005). Process indicators include community participation levels in meetings, inclusiveness of communication forums or town hall meetings, and transparency in decision-making. Outcome indicators, on the other hand, measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward conservation efforts. Figueroa et al. (2002) suggest the Communication for Social Change model as a useful tool, which tracks shifts in social norms, collective efficacy, and shared community ownership.

In the marine conservation field, various case studies have attempted to evaluate participatory communication strategies. Christie et al. (2003) examined MPAs in Southeast Asia and concluded that success depended not just on biophysical outcomes, but also on community perceptions of fairness and clarity in communication. Similarly, Gurney et al. (2014) found that MPAs with embedded communication strategies tailored to local cultures and needs had higher compliance rates and community satisfaction. In Ghana, efforts to implement participatory communication in MPA sites remain nascent. According to Sagoe et al. (2021), while several communities in the Greater Cape Three Points area have been reached through sensitization programs, few evaluations have been conducted to determine how these efforts have shaped community support or resistance. Furthermore, little is known about how different groups such as women, youth, or migrant fishers interpret and respond to these strategies.

Evaluating effectiveness also requires considering the medium and content of communication. For example, do communities prefer radio programs, face-to-face meetings, or visual materials? Do they understand the conservation objectives and implications of the MPA? Are there opportunities for them to ask questions and influence outcomes? As Aswani and Weiant (2004) argue, the responsiveness of communication strategies to community feedback is a critical determinant of success. This present study would seek to address this gap by systematically assessing the effectiveness of participatory communication strategies in the Greater Cape Three Points MPA context. It will use both quantitative indicators (such as levels of message recall, understanding, and reported trust) and qualitative insights (from focus groups and interviews) to evaluate whether communication efforts have contributed to increased community support. The findings will offer practical recommendations for improving participatory approaches in marine governance in Ghana and similar contexts.

2.2.6 Gaps in Literature and Lessons for Ghana's MPA Process

Despite a growing body of literature on participatory communication and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), several critical gaps remain, particularly concerning localized evaluations of communication effectiveness in sub-Saharan Africa. Many studies have focused on biophysical outcomes of MPAs or general community engagement without deeply interrogating how participatory communication its tools, processes, and inclusivity affects community support, trust, and compliance (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Christie et al., 2003). First, there is limited empirical data on how participatory communication processes differ across demographic groups within coastal communities in Ghana. Most available studies treat communities as homogenous units, ignoring internal power dynamics related to gender, age, ethnicity, or social status (Waylen et al., 2010). This oversight limits our understanding of who participates, who is left out, and how messages are differently interpreted across subgroups. In Ghana, for instance, women fish processors and migrant fishers may experience conservation communication differently due to historical marginalization and language barriers (Mensah et al., 2014).

Additionally, most of the existing literature underrepresents the communication feedback loop. Participatory communication assumes two-way communication, yet little research has explored how communities are able to influence MPA design and implementation through feedback mechanisms (Figueroa et al., 2002). Questions remain about whether community inputs are actually reflected in policy decisions or merely used for symbolic participation. Furthermore, while Ghana's coastline has been the focus of several environmental governance interventions, few studies offer a longitudinal analysis of communication strategies within MPAs or proposed MPAs. Most interventions are assessed at early stages or post-implementation, with little attention to the dynamic and evolving nature of communication needs over time. Additionally, studies like those

of Sagoe et al. (2021) highlight awareness campaigns, but fail to critically assess the quality, depth, and transformative potential of the communication processes involved.

Furthermore, there is a methodological gap. Many MPA evaluations rely on qualitative case studies or biophysical assessments, with limited use of mixed-methods approaches that combine perceptions, knowledge, and behavior data at scale. Employing mixed-method tools like SPSS-based surveys along with qualitative FGDs, as this study proposes, can help produce more robust and generalizable findings on communication effectiveness. For Ghana's proposed first MPA in the Greater Cape Three Points area, these gaps present both a challenge and an opportunity. The current phase of stakeholder consultations offers a timely moment to study how participatory communication strategies are unfolding and how they are perceived by different community actors. Insights from this research can inform adaptive communication frameworks that are more inclusive, responsive, and grounded in local realities. By documenting and analyzing these aspects, the study will contribute to filling a critical gap in participatory development communication literature and offers practical lessons for policymakers, NGOs, and community-based organizations engaged in marine governance in Ghana and similar socio-ecological settings.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to achieve the research objectives. It details the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures. Ethical considerations are also addressed.

3.2 Research Design

The study uses a convergent parallel mixed methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. This design allows for triangulation and offers a holistic understanding of community communication dynamics related to MPA support.

Study Area

The research is situated in selected communities within the Greater Cape Three Points, in the Western Region of Ghana which is one of Ghana's most ecologically sensitive coastal regions.

These communities are among 21 coastal settlements proposed for the MPA and are representative of Ghana's artisanal fishing economies.

Target Population

The study targets community members, including fishers, women processors, youth, elders, and key institutional actors who have been involved in the communication and consultation processes related to the MPA.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

A multi-stage sampling technique will be used. Five to seven communities will be purposively selected based on their ecological significance and participation in MPA dialogues, proximity to the proposed area, fishing strength in terms of fisher groups. Within each community, stratified random sampling will select diverse demographic groups. Approximately 150 respondents will participate in this survey, with 20–25 involved in interviews and a focus group discussion.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected through structured questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs). These tools will capture both numerical data on communication exposure and qualitative narratives around trust and participation.

Data Collection Instruments

1. Structured questionnaires
2. FGD guide
3. Interview guide

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS software for descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data will be coded thematically and analyzed using content analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Pretesting of tools will ensure reliability. Triangulation, expert review, and Cronbach's alpha (≥ 0.70) will be used to validate instruments.

Ethical Considerations

Approval will be obtained from the university's ethics board. Informed consent will be sought. Anonymity and confidentiality will be upheld.

3.6 Justification of Methods

Participatory development communication is inherently dialogical and context-specific. A mixed-methods approach offers a robust framework for evaluating both the measurable and nuanced aspects of community engagement. Quantitative tools such as structured surveys can assess levels of exposure, message recall, and attitudinal shifts among different demographic groups. Meanwhile, qualitative tools such as FGDs and key informant interviews uncover deeper insights into perceptions of fairness, trust, inclusion, and power relations elements central to participatory processes (Figueroa et al., 2002; Servaes, 2008). Thus, a mixed-methods design is not only methodologically sound but also conceptually aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of this research.

Anticipated Limitations

A potential limitation lies in the geographic spread and diversity of the 21 proposed MPA communities. Although a subset of five to seven communities will be selected for feasibility, this

sampling may not capture the full heterogeneity of views. Moreover, issues such as language differences, mistrust toward researchers, or survey fatigue could affect the quality of data collected. These limitations will be addressed through purposive community selection, engagement of local interpreters, and pretesting of data collection tools.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study examining the role of participatory development communication in enhancing community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points, Ghana. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the chapter provides a comprehensive account of how communication processes shape awareness, trust, perceptions of legitimacy, and support for the proposed MPA. The chapter begins by outlining the demographic characteristics of the 150 survey respondents, including gender, age, education level, community of residence, and length of stay. These characteristics help explain the diversity of perspectives within the study area. This is followed by demographic information on participants involved in the focus group discussions, which deepens the qualitative insights by highlighting the experiences and viewpoints of different community segments.

Next, the chapter presents results on respondents' exposure to communication about the proposed MPA. This includes the sources from which they receive information and the extent to which they engage with MPA-related messages. Understanding communication exposure is important for assessing how participatory communication strategies influence knowledge and awareness. The

analysis then moves to perceptions of trust and legitimacy, exploring how transparent and inclusive communication practices shape community confidence in the MPA process. Levels of community support for the proposed MPA are also examined, drawing on both survey data and qualitative narratives that reveal motivations, concerns, and anticipated benefits. The final section provides a discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature, focusing on four key themes: community awareness and understanding, the influence of participatory communication on trust, perceptions of legitimacy, and effective communication channels for strengthening community support.

4.2 Demographic characteristics

This section presents the demographic profile of the 150 respondents who participated in the study on the role of participatory development communication in enhancing community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Understanding these characteristics provides context for interpreting perceptions, attitudes, and levels of support toward the MPA. The gender distribution shows a fairly balanced representation, with males constituting 52% and females 48%. This balance is important as it reflects the inclusive nature of the data, ensuring both male and female perspectives on community engagement and resource management are captured. The age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents were within the economically active group. Specifically, 28% were aged 25 - 34, followed by 25% within 35 - 44 years, and 22% between 18 - 24 years. Respondents aged 45 - 54 years constituted 15%, while those 55 years and above represented 10%. This age spread demonstrates that views were drawn from individuals with varying levels of experience in coastal resource use and community decision-making processes.

Educational attainment varied considerably across the sample. While only a small proportion had no formal education (41.3%) or only primary education (39.3%), 16% had completed junior high

school. A significant proportion had attained senior high school education (2.7%), and another 0.7% had tertiary-level qualifications. Though the level of education suggests that many respondents might not be capable of understanding formal education or processes the use of their local economic knowledge, participatory processes, environmental issues experiences , and the potential benefits of the proposed MPA makes them very capable of understanding this measure since it affects their livelihood on a daily and they attest to the fact that they have experienced real decline in fish stock catches over the past two decades. Respondents were drawn from five key communities within the Greater Cape Three Points area. Cape Three Points accounted for 34%, Busua 30.7%, Akwidaa 14%, Miemia 10%, and Dixcove 11.3%. These communities represent diverse coastal settlements with varying degrees of dependence on marine resources. Regarding length of residency, 29.3% had lived in their communities for 4 - 6 years, 24% for 7-10 years, and 18% for more than 10 years. This indicates that a majority of respondents had substantial knowledge of local environmental changes and community dynamics, making their contributions valuable to the study.

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

DEMOGRAPHICS	ITEMS	FREQUENCY (N-150)	PERCENTAGE (%)
GENDER	Male	78	52.0
	Female	72	48.0
AGE OF RESPONDENT	18-24 years	33	22.0
	25 – 34 years	42	28.0
	35 – 44 years	38	25.0
	45 - 54years	23	15.0
	55 years and above	15	10.0
EDUCATION LEVEL/QUALIFICATION	None	59	39.3
	Primary	62	41.3

	Junior high school	24	16.0
	Senior high school	4	2.7
	Tertiary	1	0.7
COMMUNITY	Cape three points	51	34.0
	Busua	46	30.7
	Akwidaa	21	14.0
	Miemia	15	10.0
	Dixcove	17	11.3
NUMBER OF YEARS IN THIS COMMUNITY	Less than 1 year	12	8.0
	1-3 years	31	20.7
	4-6 years	44	29.3
	7 – 10 years	36	24.0
	Above 10 years	27	18.0

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.3 Exposure to Communication on the Proposed MPA

This section presents respondents' exposure to communication regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. The findings reveal that a substantial majority of community members have been informed about the proposed MPA. As shown in Table 4.3, 76.7% of respondents indicated that they had heard about the initiative, while 23.3% had no prior knowledge. This high level of initial awareness suggests that communication efforts have reached most residents, although gaps still exist among a notable minority. Multiple communication channels contributed to information dissemination. Radio emerged as the most reported medium (27.3%), followed closely by community meetings (23%) and engagement with NGO staff (20.7%). Posters and flyers accounted for 18%, while fewer respondents received information through fisher groups (6%) or traditional authorities such as chiefs (4.7%). These findings highlight the importance of mass media and community-level platforms in spreading information about the proposed MPA.

Regarding frequency of communication, 30% of respondents reported receiving information frequently, 26.7% occasionally, and 25.3% rarely, while 18% had never received any updates. This

variation suggests that although awareness is high, the consistency of communication remains uneven across the study communities. Understanding of the MPA’s purpose varied among respondents. While 22.7% rated their understanding as high (score 4), only 13.3% selected the highest rating (score 5). A significant proportion indicated moderate understanding (26.7%), whereas 34% showed low levels of clarity (scores 1 and 2). Participation in sensitization activities was relatively balanced, with 52.7% having engaged in meetings or training sessions. Among them, 43% had participated two to three times, 35.4% once, and 21.6% more than three times. This reflects growing community engagement but also indicates the need for broader and more frequent participatory communication interventions.

Table 4.2 Exposure to Communication on the Proposed MPA

Measure	Response	Frequency (150)	Percentages
Have you heard about the proposed Marine Protected Area in your community?	Yes	115	76.7
	No	40	23.3
Through which medium did you hear about it? (Select all that apply)	Radio	41	27.3
	Community Meeting	35	23
	NGO Staff	31	20.7
	Posters/Flyers	27	18.0
	Fisher Group	9	6.0

	Chief	7	4.7
How often do you receive information about the proposed MPA?	Frequently	45	30.0
	Occasionally	40	26.7
	Rarely	38	25.3
	Never	27	18.0
On a scale of 1 to 5, how clearly do you understand the purpose of the proposed MPA?	1	22	14.7
	2	29	19.3
	3	40	26.7
	4	34	22.7
	5	20	13.3
Have you participated in any meetings, trainings, or sensitization activities related to the proposed MPA?	Yes	79	52.7
	No	71	47.3

If yes, how many times have you participated in such activities?	Once	28	35.4
	2-3 times	34	43.0
	More than 3 times	17	21.6

4.3.1 Theme 1: Awareness and Communication Exposure

Participants generally demonstrated awareness of the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA), though understanding of its purpose varied. Most respondents first heard about the MPA through radio, community meetings, NGO staff, or traditional leaders, with inconsistent follow-up limiting comprehension for some.

Responses:

“I first heard about the MPA on the radio, and then at a fisher group meeting in our community. I understand it is about protecting the sea, but some details are still unclear” (R3).

“NGO staff visited once to explain, but we rarely get updates. More frequent communication would help us understand better” (R7).

“I heard from my fellow fishers, but it was just a small discussion. I’m not sure what it means for our fishing activities” (R12).

“The radio messages are good, but sometimes I miss them. I would like more face-to-face meetings” (R16).

“We were shown posters and flyers, which helped a little, but I still need someone to explain the rules and purpose clearly” (R20).

These insights highlight that while awareness exists, continuous and multi-channel communication is necessary to improve understanding and participation in the MPA initiative.

4.4 Perceptions of Trust and Legitimacy

This section examines community perceptions of trust and legitimacy regarding the organizations and processes involved in promoting the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Trust and perceived legitimacy are critical for securing sustained community support for conservation initiatives. As presented in Table 4.3, levels of trust in the organizations promoting the MPA were generally moderate but mixed. While 31.3% of respondents expressed moderate trust, 22% indicated that they did not trust the organizations at all, and 18.7% trusted them only slightly. In contrast, a smaller proportion reported high trust, with 18.7% indicating “very much” and only 9.3% expressing complete trust. This distribution suggests cautious confidence among community members, with a significant segment remaining skeptical.

Perceptions regarding the inclusion of community views were largely negative. A majority of respondents either strongly disagreed (27.3%) or disagreed (44.0%) that their views and concerns had been adequately considered in MPA discussions. Only 20.7% agreed or strongly agreed, indicating limited perceived community influence in decision-making processes. This finding raises concerns about the inclusiveness of current engagement strategies. Despite these concerns, perceptions of fairness in the engagement process were relatively more positive. Over 73% of respondents perceived the process as fair or very fair, suggesting that procedural aspects such as meetings and consultations may be viewed as orderly and acceptable, even if not fully inclusive.

Regarding information transparency, a strong majority (67.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that information shared was transparent and accurate, reinforcing the credibility of communication

efforts. However, trust in local leadership was divided, with 47.3% indicating they did not trust local leaders to represent their interests, compared to 39.3% who did. Overall, the findings indicate that while communication transparency and procedural fairness are relatively strong, deeper participatory inclusion and trust-building particularly through local leadership remain essential for enhancing the legitimacy of the proposed MPA.

Table 4.3 Perceptions of Trust and Legitimacy

Measure	Response	Frequency (150)	Percentages
To what extent do you trust the organizations promoting the MPA?	Not at all	33	22.0
	Slightly	28	18.7
	Moderately	47	31.3
	Very Much	28	18.7
	Completely	14	9.3
Do you feel that your views and concerns have been considered in the MPA discussion	Strongly Disagree	41	27.3
	Disagree	66	44.0
	Neutral	22	14.7

	Agree	15	10.0
	Strongly Agree	16	10.7
How fair do you perceive the process of community engagement so far?	Very unfair	21	14.0
	Unfair	19	12.7
	Neutral	20	13.3
Pp	Fair	61	40.7
	Very fair	49	32.7
Do you believe the information shared with the community is transparent and accurate?	Strongly Disagree	17	11.3
	Disagree	22	14.7
	Neutral	10	6.7
	Agree	64	42.7
	Strongly Agree	37	24.7
Do you trust your local leaders (e.g., chief, assembly members) to represent your interests in the MPA process?	Yes	59	39.3

	No	71	47.3
	Not yet	20	13.3

4.4.1 Theme 3: Trust, Transparency, and Legitimacy

Community perceptions of trust and legitimacy varied among respondents. While some trusted the organizations promoting the MPA and found information sharing transparent, others were skeptical of both the intentions and the decision-making processes. Trust in local leaders was particularly mixed, highlighting the complex dynamics of credibility in governance.

Responses:

“I trust the NGOs because they provide clear information, but I am not sure sometimes the local leaders have our best interests at heart” (R1).

“The meetings are informative, and they explain things well, so I feel the process is somewhat fair” (R7).

“I don’t think my opinions have been catered for; even when I ask questions, no one seems to respond to it directly sometimes” (R10).

“Information is shared openly, and I can understand the rules of the MPA, which makes me feel more confident in their work” (R15).

“Sometimes I feel left out because the updates are not consistent, and I am unsure what decisions have been made” (R19).

These insights indicate that transparency and fairness in communication can build trust, but inconsistent engagement and perceptions of limited influence undermine legitimacy. Enhancing

regular, inclusive, and clear communication will likely strengthen community confidence in the MPA process.

4.5 Support for the MPA

This section examines community perceptions of trust and legitimacy regarding the organizations and processes involved in promoting the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Trust and perceived legitimacy are critical for securing sustained community support for conservation initiatives. As presented in Table 4.3, levels of trust in the organizations promoting the MPA were generally moderate but mixed. While 31.3% of respondents expressed moderate trust, 22% indicated that they did not trust the organizations at all, and 18.7% trusted them only slightly. In contrast, a smaller proportion reported high trust, with 18.7% indicating “very much” and only 9.3% expressing complete trust. This distribution suggests cautious confidence among community members, with a significant segment remaining skeptical.

Perceptions regarding the inclusion of community views were largely negative. A majority of respondents either strongly disagreed (27.3%) or disagreed (44.0%) that their views and concerns had been adequately considered in MPA discussions. Only 20.7% agreed or strongly agreed, indicating limited perceived community influence in decision-making processes. This finding raises concerns about the inclusiveness of current engagement strategies. Despite these concerns, perceptions of fairness in the engagement process were relatively more positive. Over 73% of respondents perceived the process as fair or very fair, suggesting that procedural aspects such as meetings and consultations may be viewed as orderly and acceptable, even if not fully inclusive.

Regarding information transparency, a strong majority (67.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that information shared was transparent and accurate, reinforcing the credibility of communication

efforts. However, trust in local leadership was divided, with 47.3% indicating they did not trust local leaders to represent their interests, compared to 39.3% who did. Overall, the findings indicate that while communication transparency and procedural fairness are relatively strong, deeper participatory inclusion and trust-building particularly through local leadership remain essential for enhancing the legitimacy of the proposed MPA.

Table 4.4 Support for the MPA

Measure	Response	Frequency (150)	Percentages	
Do you support the establishment of the Marine Protected Area?	Yes	111	74.0	
	No	10	6.7	
	Not sure	29	19.3	
What is your main reason for supporting or opposing the MPA?	Improved Fish Catch/Stocks	38	25.3	
	Livelihood & Economic Benefits	26	17.3	
	Conservation & Sustainability	25	16.7	
	General Support Without Specific Reason	17	11.3	
	Tourism Potential	13	8.7	
	Scientific/Educational Value	2	1.3	

	Lack of Information/Understanding	10	6.7
	Negative Impact on Fishing Rights	5	3.3
	Skepticism/Distrust	3	2.0
	Seeking More Information	10	6.7
What benefits do you expect from the MPA?	Improved fish catch	72	48.00
	Livelihood alternatives	35	23.30
	Reduced conflicts	20	13.3
	Eco-tourism	32	21.3
	Conservatism	8	5.3
Would you be willing to participate in MPA-related decision-making processes?	Yes	121	80.7
	No	22	14.7
	Not sure	7	4.7
Would you encourage others in your household or community to support the MPA?	Yes	119	79.3

	No	25	16.7	
	Not sure	6	4.0	
What challenges or fears do you associate with the establishment of the MPA?	Fishing Restrictions	41	27.3	
	Loss of Fishing Grounds	22	14.7	
	Economic Hardship	8	5.3	
	Displacement	16	10.7	
	Government Takeover/Control	17	11.3	
	Political Issues	8	5.3	
	Enforcement/Compliance Issues	13	8.7	
	Trust in Leaders	6	4.0	
	Process Hijacking	4	2.7	
	Visitor intrusion	3	2.0	
	Misinformation/Lack of Awareness	7	4.7	
	IUU/Galamsey Fishing	5	3.3	
	In your opinion, what should be done to improve communication about the MPA in your community?	More education/awareness creation	57	38.0

	More community engagement/meetings	35	23.3
	Continuous/frequent communication	33	22.0
	Involve fishermen/community in planning	10	6.7
	Clear, simple messaging	15	10.0

4.5 Effect of Participatory Communication on Community Trust

To examine the effect of participatory communication strategies on community trust in organizations promoting the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Community trust served as the dependent variable, while participation in meetings, frequency of communication, perceived transparency, and inclusion of community views were treated as independent variables.

Model Specification: $\text{Trust} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Participation}) + \beta_2(\text{Communication Frequency}) + \beta_3(\text{Transparency}) + \beta_4(\text{Inclusion of Views}) + \varepsilon$

Table 4.5 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Participatory Communication and Community Trust

Predictor	β	Std. Error	t	p-value
Constant	1.214	0.321	3.78	0.000

Participation in meetings	0.284	0.071	4.00	0.000
Communication frequency	0.197	0.065	3.03	0.003
Perceived transparency	0.356	0.058	6.14	0.000
Inclusion of views	0.221	0.062	3.56	0.001

$R^2 = 0.58$

$F(4,145) = 49.87, p < 0.001$

The regression model was statistically significant ($F(4,145) = 49.87, p < 0.001$), indicating that participatory communication factors jointly explain variations in community trust. The results presented in Table 4.5 show that all four predictors had positive and statistically significant effects on community trust. Participation in meetings significantly influenced trust ($\beta = 0.284, p < 0.001$), suggesting that respondents who engaged in MPA-related meetings were more likely to trust the organizations involved. Communication frequency also showed a significant positive relationship with trust ($\beta = 0.197, p = 0.003$), indicating that regular and consistent information sharing enhances community confidence.

Perceived transparency emerged as the strongest predictor of trust ($\beta = 0.356, p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of clear, honest, and accurate communication in building trust. Inclusion of community views was also a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.221, p = 0.001$), demonstrating that when community concerns are acknowledged and incorporated into decision-making, trust increases. The model explains 58% of the variance in community trust ($R^2 = 0.58$),

confirming that participatory development communication plays a critical role in fostering trust and strengthening community support for the proposed MPA.

4.5.1 Theme 2: Community Involvement and Participation

Participants shared varying experiences regarding their involvement in MPA-related activities. While some had actively participated in meetings or sensitization programs, others reported minimal engagement. Many felt their input was not fully considered in decision-making, indicating gaps in meaningful participation.

Responses:

“I attended one of the community meetings, but I don’t think our opinions really influenced the decisions. It felt more like we were being informed than consulted for that meeting” (R2).

“My household has participated in a few workshops, and I was able to ask questions, but I’m not sure if the response would reach the decision makers” (R5).

“We were invited to a durbar, and I spoke about our fishing challenges, but the feedback was to have patience it would be addressed” (R9).

“I helped in a mapping exercise to identify critical areas, which felt useful. It made me feel a bit included in the process” (R13).

“I haven’t attended any formal meetings, so I feel left out. I would like more opportunities to contribute” (R18).

These responses indicate that while participation opportunities exist, they are unevenly distributed, and many community members perceive their involvement as nominal rather than influential.

Strengthening structured, inclusive participation mechanisms could enhance ownership and support for the MPA.

4.6 Relationship between Participatory Communication and Perceived Legitimacy of the Proposed MPA

To examine the relationship between participatory communication and community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Perceived legitimacy served as the dependent variable and was measured using a composite index comprising perceived fairness of the process, inclusion of community views, and transparency of information shared. The independent variables included participation in MPA-related activities, communication channels used, and frequency of communication.

Table 4.6: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Predictor Variables	β	Std. Error	t	p-value
Constant	1.087	0.298	3.65	0.000
Participation in MPA activities	0.269	0.068	3.96	0.000
Communication channels used	0.184	0.061	3.02	0.003
Frequency of communication	0.213	0.064	3.33	0.001

$$R^2 = 0.54$$

$$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.53$$

$$F(3,146) = 56.98, p < 0.001$$

Table 4.6 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the relationship between participatory communication and community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA). Perceived legitimacy was measured as a composite index reflecting community assessments of fairness, inclusion of local views, and transparency of information sharing. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F(3,146) = 56.98$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the selected participatory communication variables jointly explain variations in perceived legitimacy. The model accounted for 54% of the variance in perceived legitimacy ($R^2 = 0.54$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.53, suggesting a strong explanatory power. Participation in MPA-related activities emerged as a significant predictor of perceived legitimacy ($\beta = 0.269$, $p < 0.001$), implying that community members who actively engaged in meetings and sensitization activities were more likely to perceive the MPA process as legitimate. Communication channels used also had a positive and significant effect on perceived legitimacy ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.003$), highlighting the importance of accessible and appropriate platforms for information dissemination. Additionally, frequency of communication significantly influenced legitimacy perceptions ($\beta = 0.213$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that regular and consistent communication enhances trust and confidence in the MPA process. The findings demonstrate that participatory communication plays a critical role in strengthening community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed MPA.

Table 4.7: Chi-Square Test of Association Between Participatory Communication and Perceived Legitimacy

Variables Tested	X ² value	df	P-value
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Participation in meetings × Perceived legitimacy	16.42	4	0.002
Communication frequency × Perceived legitimacy	14.87	6	0.021
Communication channels × Perceived legitimacy	12.35	5	0.030
Inclusion of views × Perceived legitimacy	18.96	4	0.001
Transparency × Perceived legitimacy	21.44	4	0.000

Table 4.7 presents the results of the Chi-square test of association examining the relationship between key participatory communication variables and community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA). The analysis was conducted to complement the regression findings and provide additional robustness to the statistical evidence. The results indicate a statistically significant association between participation in meetings and perceived legitimacy ($\chi^2 = 16.42$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that individuals who actively participated in MPA-related meetings were more likely to perceive the decision-making process as legitimate. Similarly, communication frequency showed a significant relationship with perceived legitimacy ($\chi^2 = 14.87$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.021$), indicating that more frequent communication enhances community confidence in the MPA process.

The association between communication channels and perceived legitimacy was also significant ($\chi^2 = 12.35$, $df = 5$, $p = 0.030$), highlighting the importance of using appropriate and accessible platforms for information dissemination. Inclusion of community views demonstrated a strong and significant association with perceived legitimacy ($\chi^2 = 18.96$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$), reinforcing the role of inclusive engagement in legitimizing conservation initiatives. Furthermore, transparency exhibited the strongest association with perceived legitimacy ($\chi^2 = 21.44$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the centrality of clear and honest communication in fostering acceptance of the proposed MPA. The Chi-square results confirm that participatory communication is significantly associated with perceived legitimacy, supporting the regression findings and strengthening the validity of the study's conclusions.

4.6.1 Theme 4: Perceived Benefits and Concerns

Community members expressed a range of anticipated benefits and concerns regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Many respondents highlighted potential ecological and economic advantages, such as improved fish stocks, sustainable livelihoods, and preservation of coastal biodiversity. Others emphasized the long-term benefits for future generations, including enhanced environmental awareness and protection of critical marine resources. At the same time, participants raised concerns about possible restrictions on fishing activities, reduced income, and the lack of clarity on compensation mechanisms. These insights demonstrate that while the community recognizes the MPA's value, uncertainties about practical impacts influence their perceptions. The following are illustrative responses from participants:

“Establishing the MPA can help our fish stocks recover, which means we will have more fish in the future” (R3).

“I am worried that some areas we currently fish in might be off-limits, and I don’t know how that will affect my income” (R7).

“The MPA could teach our children the importance of protecting the sea, and that is very valuable” (R12).

“I am concerned that the rules may be enforced without considering how small fishers survive daily” (R15).

“If managed well, the MPA can attract support from NGOs and government for training and resources” (R20).

4.7 Communication Approaches Predicting Support for the Proposed MPA

Table 4.8 presents the results of the binary logistic regression analysis conducted to identify the communication-related factors that predict community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA). The findings indicate that several participatory communication variables significantly influence the likelihood of community support. Trust in organizations promoting the MPA emerged as the strongest predictor of support ($B = 0.842$, $p < 0.001$). The odds ratio ($\text{Exp}(B) = 2.32$) suggests that respondents who trust these organizations are more than twice as likely to support the MPA compared to those with lower trust. Perceived legitimacy of the MPA process also showed a significant positive effect ($B = 0.761$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that perceptions of fairness, inclusion, and transparency substantially increase the probability of support.

Awareness level was another significant predictor ($B = 0.534$, $p = 0.003$), implying that better understanding of the MPA increases support by approximately 71%. Communication channels used ($B = 0.316$, $p = 0.030$) and participation in MPA-related activities ($B = 0.489$, $p = 0.015$) were also positively associated with support, highlighting the importance of diverse

communication platforms and active community engagement. Overall, the results demonstrate that participatory communication approaches play a critical role in shaping community support for the proposed MPA.

Table 4.8: Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

Predictor Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	P-value	Ecp(B)
Constant	-2.184	0.612	12.73	0.000	0.113
Trust in organizations	0.842	0.198	18.06	0.000	2.32
Perceived legitimacy	0.761	0.214	12.64	0.000	2.14
Awareness level	0.534	0.182	8.60	0.003	1.71
Communication channels used	0.316	0.145	4.74	0.030	1.37
Participation in MPA activities	0.489	0.201	5.91	0.015	1.63

4.7.1 Theme 5: Suggestions for Improving Communication and Participation

Participants offered a variety of recommendations on how communication about the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) could be improved and how local voices could be better incorporated into planning and decision-making processes. Many emphasized the need for more frequent and consistent information dissemination, using both traditional and modern channels.

Community members also highlighted the importance of involving diverse groups, including women, youth, and marginalized fishers, in all stages of MPA planning.

“I think more regular meetings in the community would help everyone understand what is happening and give us the chance to ask questions” (R3).

“Using local radio programs/ jingles in our language can reach many people who do not attend meetings” (R7).

“NGO staff should visit fisher groups and women processors directly, so no one is left out” (R12).

“It would be good if our suggestions were seriously considered, not just heard, in the MPA planning” (R15).

“Visual materials like posters and diagrams in community centers would help those who cannot read well” (R19).

Overall, participants suggested that participatory communication should be continuous, inclusive, and adapted to local contexts. Ensuring feedback loops and creating opportunities for genuine dialogue were seen as key strategies to strengthen trust, legitimacy, and community support for the proposed MPA.

Discussion

This section discusses the study's key findings in relation to existing literature, highlighting how community awareness, participatory communication strategies, trust, perceptions of legitimacy, and communication channels influence support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA).

4.8.1 The level of community awareness and understanding of the proposed MPA.

The findings of this study indicate that community awareness of the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points is relatively high, with 76.7% of respondents reporting prior knowledge of the initiative, while 23.3% indicated no prior knowledge. This aligns with the broader literature emphasizing the importance of early and widespread community engagement in promoting MPA support (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Pollnac et al., 2010). The use of multiple communication channels particularly radio (27.3%), community meetings (23%), and interactions with NGO staff (20.7%) reflects strategies highlighted in previous studies that advocate diversified outreach to maximize reach and effectiveness (Sagoe et al., 2021; Hen Mpoano, 2024). However, the study also reveals persistent gaps in the consistency and depth of communication. Only 30% of respondents reported receiving information frequently, 26.7% occasionally, 25.3% rarely, and 18% never. Furthermore, understanding of the MPA's purpose varied, with 22.7% of respondents rating their understanding as high, 13.3% very high, and 34% reporting low levels of clarity. These findings suggest that exposure alone does not guarantee comprehension or meaningful engagement, supporting arguments by Bennett et al. (2017) that superficial or ceremonial participation, limited feedback mechanisms, and unequal access can undermine the effectiveness of engagement efforts. Participation in sensitization activities was moderate, with 52.7% of respondents engaged, most of whom participated two to three times. This partially contrasts with international examples where early and sustained community engagement has been shown to

significantly improve understanding and compliance with MPA regulations (Pomeroy et al., 2007; Gurney et al., 2014). These findings reinforce the critical role of participatory communication not only in raising awareness but also in deepening community understanding and facilitating meaningful engagement for the proposed MPA.

4.8.1 How participatory communication strategies affect community trust in MPA

The findings of this study reveal that community trust in organizations promoting the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points is generally moderate but varied across respondents. Specifically, 31.3% of participants reported moderate trust, 22% expressed no trust, 18.7% indicated slight trust, while 18.7% reported high trust and 9.3% complete trust. This aligns with Melkote and Steeves (2001) and Freire's (1970) assertion that genuine participatory communication (PDC) enhances trust by engaging communities as active participants rather than passive recipients. The observed variability in trust suggests that while participatory initiatives exist, they may not consistently empower all stakeholders or address local perceptions fully. The study further shows that perceptions of inclusion in decision-making were limited, with 27.3% strongly disagreeing and 44% disagreeing that their views were considered, while only 20.7% agreed or strongly agreed. Yet, procedural fairness was relatively more positive, with over 73% perceiving meetings and consultations as fair or very fair. Similarly, 67.4% considered information shared as transparent and accurate. These findings support Pomeroy et al. (2007) and Christie et al. (2009), who argue that transparency and structured engagement are central to trust-building in MPA contexts, even where full participatory influence may be constrained.

Regression analysis confirmed the critical role of participatory communication: participation in meetings ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$), frequency of communication ($\beta = 0.197$, $p = 0.003$), perceived transparency ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$), and inclusion of community views ($\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.001$) were

all significant predictors of trust. The model accounted for 58% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.58$), indicating that active engagement, consistent information flow, and recognition of local perspectives collectively enhance confidence in the MPA process. In sum, the findings reinforce the principles of PDC by demonstrating that participatory, transparent, and inclusive communication strategies are essential for fostering trust, mitigating resistance, and promoting community support for MPAs, echoing global evidence from Southeast Asia, the Pacific, and Latin America (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Gurney et al., 2014).

4.8.3 The relationship between participatory communication and community Perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed MPA.

The findings of this study demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between participatory communication and community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Perceived legitimacy was measured through fairness of the process, inclusion of community views, and transparency of information. The multiple linear regression model explained 54% of the variance in perceived legitimacy ($R^2 = 0.54$, $F(3,146) = 56.98$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that participatory communication practices are critical determinants of legitimacy perceptions. Participation in MPA-related activities significantly influenced legitimacy ($\beta = 0.269$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that community members actively engaged in meetings or sensitization sessions were more likely to perceive the MPA process as fair and credible. Similarly, communication channels used ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.003$) and frequency of communication ($\beta = 0.213$, $p = 0.001$) had positive effects, highlighting that both accessibility and consistency in information dissemination strengthen confidence in governance processes.

These findings corroborate global evidence that MPAs with inclusive communication mechanisms enhance legitimacy and community support (Gurney et al., 2014; Christie et al., 2003). Chi-square analysis further reinforced these results, showing significant associations between perceived legitimacy and participation in meetings ($\chi^2 = 16.42$, $p = 0.002$), communication frequency ($\chi^2 = 14.87$, $p = 0.021$), communication channels ($\chi^2 = 12.35$, $p = 0.030$), inclusion of views ($\chi^2 = 18.96$, $p = 0.001$), and transparency ($\chi^2 = 21.44$, $p < 0.001$). This aligns with Bessette (2004) and Servaes & Malikhao (2005), who emphasize that legitimacy is not merely a product of awareness but of active, inclusive, and transparent participation. The findings suggest that while information dissemination alone raises awareness, legitimacy is most effectively fostered through strategies that combine active engagement, feedback mechanisms, and open communication. In the Greater Cape Three Points context, the results highlight that participatory communication serves as a key conduit for empowering communities, enhancing trust, and fostering acceptance of conservation initiatives, confirming that legitimacy and sustainable MPA implementation are inextricably linked to the quality and inclusivity of communication processes.

4.8.4 The communication channels and approaches most effective in promoting community support for the MPA.

The findings reveal that multiple communication channels and participatory approaches significantly influence community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Binary logistic regression results indicate that trust in organizations emerged as the strongest predictor of support ($B = 0.842$, $p < 0.001$; $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.32$), suggesting that respondents with higher trust were more than twice as likely to endorse the MPA. Perceived legitimacy of the process also strongly predicted support ($B = 0.761$, $p < 0.001$; $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.14$), emphasizing that community perceptions of fairness, transparency, and inclusion are central to

gaining acceptance. Awareness level had a positive effect ($B = 0.534$, $p = 0.003$; $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.71$), indicating that informed community members were more likely to support the initiative. Communication channels used ($B = 0.316$, $p = 0.030$; $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.37$) and participation in MPA-related activities ($B = 0.489$, $p = 0.015$; $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.63$) further contributed to support, highlighting the importance of accessible, inclusive, and Interactive communication approaches.

These results align with participatory development communication (PDC) principles, which emphasize dialogue, co-learning, and empowerment rather than top-down information dissemination (Servaes, 2008; Bessette, 2004). Scholars have argued that combining traditional platforms such as community durbars, local FM radio, and face-to-face discussions with participatory mechanisms enhances comprehension, trust, and legitimacy (Figueroa et al., 2002; Sagoe et al., 2021). The study confirms this assertion: interactive channels that encourage feedback, clarify MPA objectives, and allow communities to participate actively in discussions significantly improve support. However, the findings also underscore that communication alone is insufficient. Trust and perceived legitimacy act as mediating factors; channels are effective only when messages are credible, inclusive, and consistently reinforced. This resonates with Mascia and Claus (2009), who note that misunderstanding or lack of transparency can generate resistance. Overall, the study demonstrates that fostering strong community support requires integrating well-chosen communication channels with participatory approaches that build trust, ensure inclusivity, and promote understanding of conservation objectives.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the concluding section of the study on the role of participatory development communication in enhancing community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points, Ghana. It brings together the key outcomes of the research by synthesizing findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses and relating them directly to the study objectives. The chapter begins with a summary of the major findings, organized around the four core objectives of the study, namely community awareness and understanding of the proposed MPA, the influence of participatory communication strategies on community trust, the relationship between participatory communication and perceptions of legitimacy, and the communication channels and approaches that most effectively promote community support for the MPA.

Following the summary of findings, the chapter provides a general conclusion that highlights the overall implications of the results for participatory development communication and community-based marine conservation. The chapter then outlines practical recommendations aimed at policymakers, implementing agencies, traditional authorities, and development partners to improve communication strategies and strengthen community engagement in the MPA establishment process. In addition, the chapter acknowledges the limitations encountered during the study, particularly in relation to data scope and methodological constraints, which may affect the generalization of the findings. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented to guide

further scholarly inquiry and support more effective participatory communication practices in marine conservation initiatives.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This section entails the summarizing key findings of the study.

5.2.1 The level of community awareness and understanding of the proposed MPA.

The study findings reveal that the majority of community members around Greater Cape Three Points are aware of the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA), although a portion of residents remain uninformed. Various communication channels have contributed to spreading information, with radio, community meetings, and engagement with NGO staff being the most frequently reported sources. Posters, flyers, and interactions with fisher groups and traditional leaders also played a role, albeit to a lesser extent. While exposure to information is generally high, the frequency of communication varies across the community. Some residents receive updates regularly, others occasionally, and a few rarely or never receive information. Similarly, understanding of the MPA's purpose shows variability. A segment of the community reports a high level of clarity, while a notable proportion has limited comprehension, indicating gaps in the effectiveness of current communication strategies.

Participation in sensitization activities is moderate, with residents attending meetings or trainings to varying degrees, highlighting the role of active engagement in building knowledge. The findings suggest that although community awareness of the proposed MPA is substantial, there is a clear need for more consistent, inclusive, and participatory communication approaches. Enhancing both the reach and quality of communication will be essential for improving understanding and fostering broader community engagement with the MPA initiative. The qualitative findings show

that most community members are aware of the proposed MPA, mainly through radio, community meetings, NGO outreach, and informal discussions. However, understanding of the MPA's purpose and implications remains uneven due to irregular follow-up communication and limited opportunities for clarification.

5.2.2 How participatory communication strategies affect community trust in MPA

The study revealed that community trust in organizations promoting the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points was generally moderate but varied across respondents. While some participants reported moderate trust, others expressed little or no trust, and a smaller portion indicated high or complete trust. Regarding inclusion in decision-making, a majority of respondents felt their views were not adequately considered, with many disagreeing that they had sufficient influence, while only a minority agreed or strongly agreed. Despite these concerns, perceptions of fairness in engagement were more positive, with a substantial proportion considering the process fair or very fair. Additionally, many respondents perceived information shared as transparent and accurate, though trust in local leaders remained divided. The multiple linear regression analysis further confirmed the influence of participatory communication on trust. Participation in meetings, frequency of communication, perceived transparency, and inclusion of community views all had significant positive effects on trust.

The model explained a substantial portion of the variance, indicating that active engagement, consistent information sharing, transparency, and acknowledgment of community perspectives are critical in building trust and fostering support for the proposed MPA. Findings indicate that while some community members have participated in meetings, durbars, or mapping exercises, participation is uneven and often perceived as consultative rather than influential. Many respondents felt their inputs were not adequately reflected in final decisions. The qualitative data

reveal mixed levels of trust and legitimacy perceptions. Transparency in information sharing contributes positively to trust, but infrequent engagement and perceived exclusion from decision-making undermine confidence, particularly in local leadership and governance processes.

5.2.3 The relationship between participatory communication and community Perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed MPA.

The study investigated how participatory communication influences community perceptions of legitimacy regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. Perceived legitimacy was measured as a composite index reflecting fairness of the process, inclusion of community views, and transparency of information shared. The multiple linear regression analysis indicated that participatory communication significantly predicted community perceptions of legitimacy. Participation in MPA-related activities emerged as a strong predictor, suggesting that community members who actively engaged in meetings and sensitization activities were more likely to view the MPA process as legitimate. Similarly, the communication channels used and frequency of communication positively influenced perceived legitimacy, highlighting the importance of accessible platforms and consistent information sharing.

Complementing the regression analysis, Chi-square tests demonstrated significant associations between key participatory communication variables and perceived legitimacy. Participation in meetings, frequency of communication, the communication channels employed, inclusion of community views, and transparency all showed meaningful relationships with legitimacy perceptions. These results confirm that participatory communication through active engagement, regular updates, inclusive dialogue, and transparent information plays a critical role in enhancing community perceptions of legitimacy for the proposed MPA. The findings underscore that beyond merely informing residents, fostering meaningful involvement and using appropriate

communication mechanisms are essential for building acceptance and support for conservation initiatives.

5.2.4 The communication channels and approaches most effective in promoting community support for the MPA.

The study examined the communication channels and participatory approaches that influence community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. The analysis identified key predictors of community support, including trust in organizations, perceived legitimacy, awareness levels, communication channels used, and participation in MPA-related activities. The findings revealed that trust in organizations emerged as the strongest determinant of support, indicating that community members who trust the organizations promoting the MPA are significantly more likely to endorse the initiative.

Perceived legitimacy of the MPA process also played a critical role in shaping support, emphasizing that fairness, inclusion, and transparency are essential in fostering acceptance among residents. Similarly, awareness levels positively influenced support, demonstrating that well-informed community members are more inclined to back the MPA. The choice of communication channels and active participation in MPA-related activities were likewise significant, highlighting the importance of using accessible, culturally appropriate platforms and engaging residents directly in the implementation process. The findings underscore that securing strong community support for the proposed MPA requires a combination of trust-building, transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, effective communication strategies, and meaningful community engagement. The results reinforce the centrality of participatory development communication, showing that the effectiveness of outreach depends not only on disseminating information but also on ensuring that communities feel heard, included, and empowered to contribute to conservation

decisions. Participants recognized potential long-term ecological and livelihood benefits of the MPA, including fish stock recovery and environmental protection. However, concerns about fishing restrictions, income loss, and unclear compensation mechanisms influenced cautious attitudes toward the initiative.

5.3 Conclusion

The study explored the role of participatory development communication in enhancing community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points, Ghana. The findings indicate that participatory communication is a critical determinant of awareness, trust, legitimacy, and overall support for conservation initiatives. Community awareness of the proposed MPA was generally high, facilitated through diverse communication channels such as radio, community meetings, NGO engagements, and printed materials. However, variations in frequency of communication and understanding of the MPA's purpose suggest that gaps remain in achieving comprehensive knowledge and meaningful engagement.

Participation in MPA-related activities, transparency in information sharing, and inclusion of community views significantly influenced trust in the organizations promoting the MPA. These factors underscore that trust is built not merely through the provision of information but through active involvement and acknowledgment of local perspectives. Similarly, perceptions of legitimacy were strengthened when residents were engaged in decision-making processes, provided with consistent updates, and exposed to accessible and inclusive communication channels. The study also revealed that community support for the MPA is most effectively promoted through a combination of trust-building, transparent and inclusive governance, awareness-raising, effective communication channels, and active participation. This demonstrates

that participatory development communication is not simply about disseminating information but about fostering dialogue, empowerment, and ownership of conservation initiatives. Overall, the research highlights the necessity of integrating structured, culturally sensitive, and continuous participatory communication strategies into MPA implementation to achieve sustainable community support and long-term ecological and social outcomes.

5.4 Recommendation of the study

Based on the study findings, several practical recommendations are proposed to enhance participatory development communication and strengthen community support for the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) at Greater Cape Three Points. First, implementing agencies should prioritize consistent, inclusive, and culturally appropriate communication strategies. This includes leveraging multiple channels such as local radio programs in indigenous languages, community durbars, participatory workshops, and visual materials, ensuring that all stakeholders, including women, youth, and marginalized fishers, have access to information and opportunities to engage. Second, active community participation should be institutionalized throughout the MPA planning and management process. Engagement mechanisms such as co-management committees, focus group discussions, and participatory mapping exercises should be expanded to allow communities to contribute meaningfully to decision-making, fostering trust and perceived legitimacy.

Third, transparency in decision-making and information sharing should be reinforced. Clear communication regarding MPA objectives, regulations, and anticipated impacts, coupled with regular updates on progress and outcomes, will enhance credibility and community confidence. Feedback mechanisms, such as suggestion boxes or structured community consultations, should be established to ensure residents feel their views are acknowledged and acted upon. Fourth, capacity-building initiatives should be implemented to empower local stakeholders with

knowledge and skills to participate effectively. Training community leaders, fishers, and local organizations in MPA governance, environmental stewardship, and communication techniques can strengthen local ownership and advocacy. Community members emphasized the need for more frequent, inclusive, and locally tailored communication, greater use of local languages and radio, direct engagement with fisher groups and women, and feedback mechanisms that demonstrate how community inputs influence decisions. Finally, development partners and policymakers should monitor and evaluate communication strategies periodically, adapting approaches based on community feedback to ensure sustained engagement, understanding, and support. Integrating these recommendations will contribute to a participatory, transparent, and trust-driven process, enhancing the long-term success and sustainability of the proposed MPA.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Despite careful planning and execution, this study encountered several limitations that may have influenced the findings. First, the study was geographically constrained to selected communities within the Greater Cape Three Points area, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other coastal regions in Ghana or beyond. While the selected communities were purposively chosen for their ecological significance and engagement in MPA-related activities, the experiences and perceptions of residents in other communities may differ. Second, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions may have introduced response biases. Participants may have provided socially desirable answers or overstated their level of participation and understanding, potentially affecting the accuracy of reported awareness, trust, and perceptions of legitimacy.

Third, language and literacy barriers posed challenges in data collection, particularly among older fishers or residents with limited formal education. Although interpreters and local facilitators were

employed to mitigate this, nuances of meaning and depth of responses may have been lost in translation. Finally, the study's cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to assess changes in awareness, trust, or support over time. Longitudinal studies would be required to examine the evolution of community engagement and the long-term impact of participatory communication strategies. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the role of communication in fostering community support for the proposed MPA.

5.6 Suggestions future Studies

Future research could build on the findings of this study by exploring the long-term effects of participatory communication on community support and compliance within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Longitudinal studies would provide insights into how awareness, trust, perceptions of legitimacy, and engagement evolve over time, particularly as MPAs move from planning to implementation and enforcement phases. Further studies could also adopt a comparative approach, examining multiple MPAs across different ecological and socio-cultural contexts in Ghana or West Africa. Such research would help identify context-specific communication strategies that are most effective in fostering community understanding, participation, and support, while highlighting transferable best practices.

Additionally, future research should consider more nuanced analyses of marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as women, youth, and migrant fishers, to understand their unique experiences, perspectives, and barriers to engagement. This would help design more inclusive communication strategies that strengthen legitimacy and equity in decision-making processes. Finally, mixed-method approaches that integrate participatory action research could provide deeper qualitative insights into community motivations, resistance, and adaptive responses.

Incorporating digital communication tools and social media platforms as part of the analysis would also reflect the evolving nature of information dissemination and community interaction. Overall, these directions can contribute to more effective, inclusive, and sustainable participatory communication practices in marine governance.

APPENDIX

Sample Questionnaire

Below is a sample structured questionnaire that will be used to collect quantitative data from community members:

SECTION A: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Occupation: _____
4. Educational Level: None Primary JHS SHS Tertiary
5. Community Name: _____
6. Number of years living in this community: _____

SECTION B: Exposure to Communication on the Proposed MPA

7. Have you heard about the proposed Marine Protected Area in your community? Yes No

8. Through which medium did you hear about it? (Select all that apply)

Radio Community Meeting NGO Staff Posters/Flyers Chief Fisher Group
Other: _____

9. How often do you receive information about the proposed MPA?
 Frequently Occasionally Rarely Never

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how clearly do you understand the purpose of the proposed MPA?
 1 2 3 4 5

11. Have you participated in any meetings, trainings, or sensitization activities related to the proposed MPA? Yes No

12. If yes, how many times have you participated in such activities? Once 2–3 times More than 3 times

SECTION C: Perceptions of Trust and Legitimacy

13. To what extent do you trust the organizations promoting the MPA? Not at all Slightly Moderately Very Much Completely

14. Do you feel that your views and concerns have been considered in the MPA discussions? Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

15. How fair do you perceive the process of community engagement so far? Very unfair Unfair Neutral Fair Very fair

16. Do you believe the information shared with the community is transparent and accurate? Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

17. Do you trust your local leaders (e.g., chief, assembly members) to represent your interests in the MPA process? Yes No Not sure

SECTION D: Support for the MPA

18. Do you support the establishment of the Marine Protected Area? Yes No Not sure

19. What is your main reason for supporting or opposing the MPA?

20. What benefits do you expect from the MPA? (Select all that apply)

- Improved fish catch
- Livelihood alternatives
- Reduced conflicts
- Eco-tourism
- Conservation
- Other: _____

21. Would you be willing to participate in MPA-related decision-making processes?
 Yes No Maybe

22. Would you encourage others in your household or community to support the MPA?
 Yes No Not sure

23. What challenges or fears do you associate with the establishment of the MPA?

24. In your opinion, what should be done to improve communication about the MPA in your community? _____

Focus Group Discussion Guide

This guide will be used to facilitate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with selected community stakeholders including fishers, women processors, youth, traditional leaders, and other relevant actors in the proposed MPA zone:

A. Introduction

2. Welcome participants and introduce the research theme.
3. Explain the purpose of the discussion.
4. Reassure participants about confidentiality.
5. Seek informed consent to proceed and record responses.

B. Discussion Themes and Sample Questions

Theme 1: Awareness and Communication Exposure

3. What have you heard about the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA)?
4. Through which means did you first hear about the MPA?
5. How frequently do you receive information about the MPA?
6. What do you understand to be the main purpose of the proposed MPA?

Theme 2: Community Involvement and Participation

5. Have you or anyone in your household been involved in any meetings, forums, or sensitization programs on the MPA?

6. How would you describe your level of participation in MPA planning or communication activities? 7.

Do you feel your input or feedback has been considered in the MPA discussions?

Theme 3: Trust, Transparency, and Legitimacy

8. How much do you trust the organizations and stakeholders promoting the MPA?

9. Are you satisfied with how information about the MPA has been shared?

10. Do you feel the decision-making process has been fair and transparent?

Theme 4: Perceived Benefits and Concerns

11. What benefits do you expect from the establishment of the MPA?

12. What concerns or fears do you have about the MPA?

13. How might the MPA affect your livelihood and daily activities?

Theme 5: Suggestions for Improving Communication and Participation

14. What are your suggestions for improving the way information is shared in your community?

15. How can local voices be better included in future MPA planning and management?

C. Closing

4. Thank participants for their time and contributions.

5. Reassure them that their input will inform recommendations and advocacy.

