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**THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN ENHANCING
COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS: A
CASE OF WENCHI MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY.**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA,
ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC- IJ) IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MA IN
DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

DECEMBER 2025

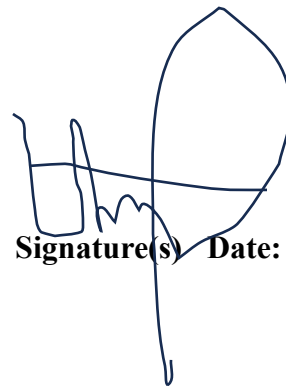
DECLARATIONS

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

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

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

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

PROF. MODESTUS FOSU



Supervisor

Signature

Date: 15th December 2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the Almighty God for His protection, guidance, and abundant grace throughout my academic journey; to my uncle, Mr. Umar Shuaib (Sansiibu), for his invaluable sponsorship, mentorship, and unwavering support; and to the Domba family for their enduring love, unity, and encouragement. This work stands as a testament to their contributions to my success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Modestus Fosu, for his invaluable guidance, scholarly insight, constructive feedback, and consistent encouragement throughout the conduct of this research. His mentorship greatly contributed to the successful completion of this dissertation. I am deeply grateful to my uncle, Mr. Umar Shuaib (Sansiibu), for his unwavering support, mentorship, and sponsorship of my academic journey. I also extend my appreciation to the lecturers of my department for their dedication, guidance, and the knowledge imparted throughout my Programme of study. Finally, I acknowledge with heartfelt thanks my family members for their prayers, love, patience, and encouragement, which sustained me throughout this academic journey.

ABSTRACT

Participatory communication has increasingly been recognized as a vital component of inclusive development and effective local governance, particularly within decentralised systems where community participation is central to development planning and implementation. In Ghana, the decentralization framework mandates Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) under the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) to actively involve citizens in development processes. Despite this policy commitment, concerns remain regarding the extent to which communication practices at the municipal level are participatory and how they influence community ownership of developmental projects.

This study examined the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects, using the Wenchi Municipal Assembly in the Bono Region of Ghana as a case study. The study was guided by three research questions that explored the nature of communication between the Assembly and community members, the extent to which existing communication practices reflect the principles of participatory communication, and the implications of these practices for community ownership and sustainability of development projects.

Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of communication processes and stakeholder experiences within the municipal governance context. Data was collected through two open-ended questionnaires administered via Google Forms to Assembly-level stakeholders, including Municipal Chief Executives, Presiding Members, Communication Department staff, and Assembly Members, as well as community members and opinion leaders. A total of thirty (30) respondents were purposively selected for the study. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data.

The findings revealed that although the Wenchi Municipal Assembly utilizes multiple communication channels such as community durbars, radio announcements, and Assembly Members, communication practices remain largely top-down and informational. Opportunities for dialogue, feedback, and meaningful community involvement in project planning and decision-making were found to be limited. Weak feedback mechanisms, inconsistent engagement, and socio-cultural and institutional barriers negatively affected community ownership of development projects. However, evidence from both Assembly and community respondents indicated that projects characterized by early and sustained participatory communication recorded stronger community support, commitment, and collective responsibility.

The study concludes that participatory communication is fundamental to fostering community ownership and ensuring the sustainability of developmental projects. It recommends the institutionalization of inclusive communication mechanisms, strengthening of feedback systems, and the integration of traditional and digital communication platforms to enhance participatory governance and sustainable development outcomes within the Wenchi Municipality.

Keywords: Participatory communication; Community ownership; Decentralised governance; Developmental projects; Wenchi Municipal Assembly; Ghana.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Study

Participatory communication has become a central concept in development discourse due to its emphasis on dialogue, inclusion, and shared decision-making in development processes. Unlike traditional top-down communication models, which treat communities as passive recipients of information, participatory communication recognizes communities as active partners whose knowledge, experiences, and perspectives are essential to sustainable development (Freire, 1973; Mefalopulos, 2008). Through interactive communication, communities are empowered to contribute to the identification of problems, design of solutions, implementation of projects, and evaluation of development outcomes.

Globally, development scholars argue that projects that incorporate participatory communication are more likely to be accepted, sustained, and protected by beneficiary communities (Servaes & Malikhao, 2020). Participation fosters trust, transparency, and a sense of responsibility among stakeholders. In contrast, development projects that are imposed without adequate communication and consultation often face resistance, apathy, or eventual failure (Molale, 2019).

In Ghana, decentralization was introduced to promote grassroots participation and enhance community ownership of development initiatives. The Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) mandates Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to involve citizens in development planning, budgeting, and implementation processes. Communication, therefore,

plays a critical role in ensuring that citizens are informed, consulted, and actively engaged in governance and development activities.

The Wenchi Municipal Assembly, located in the Bono Region, is responsible for initiating and implementing developmental projects aimed at improving the socio-economic wellbeing of residents. These projects include the construction of roads, schools, markets, water facilities, and sanitation infrastructure. To facilitate community engagement, the Assembly employs communication strategies such as community durbars, public announcements, radio programs, information service vans, social media platforms, and interactions through Assembly Members.

Despite the existence of these communication channels, concerns have been raised regarding the extent to which communication practices within the municipality are participatory and how they influence communities' sense of ownership of development projects. Reports of limited consultation, inadequate feedback mechanisms, and uneven participation across communities suggest potential weaknesses in participatory communication practices. This situation raises questions about the effectiveness of communication strategies in fostering community ownership and ensuring the sustainability of development projects.

It is against this background that this study examines the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although participatory communication is widely acknowledged as a critical component of effective development practice, its application within local governance structures in Ghana remains inconsistent. While the Wenchi Municipal Assembly is legally mandated to promote

citizen participation, evidence suggests that communication between the Assembly and community members is often inadequate, irregular, or insufficiently participatory.

Several studies have shown that many MMDAs rely heavily on top-down communication approaches that prioritize information dissemination over dialogue and consultation (Kasapa, 2017; Larbi, 2018). Such approaches limit community involvement in decision-making and weaken community ownership of development projects. In Wenchi, anecdotal observations indicate that some community members are informed about development projects only after key decisions have already been made, leaving little room for meaningful participation.

The absence of effective participatory communication can result in mistrust between the Assembly and communities, low commitment to project implementation, and poor maintenance of completed projects. Without empirical evidence on how communication practices operate within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and how they affect community ownership, efforts to improve development outcomes may remain ineffective.

This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by investigating the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 Main Objective:

To examine the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the nature of communication between the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and community members in relation to developmental projects.
2. To assess the extent to which the Assembly's communication practices reflect the principles of participatory communication.
3. To analyze the implications of the Assembly's communication strategies on community ownership of developmental projects.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the nature of communication between the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and community members in relation to developmental projects?
2. To what extent do the communication practices of the Wenchi Municipal Assembly reflect the principles of participatory communication?
3. What are the implications of the Assembly's communication strategies on community ownership of developmental projects?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to academic literature on development communication by providing empirical evidence on participatory communication within a municipal governance context in Ghana. Practically, findings from the study will guide the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and other MMDAs in improving communication strategies to enhance community ownership and sustainability of development projects. The study also informs policymakers and development practitioners on effective participatory communication approaches.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focused on participatory communication practices related to developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. It involved selected Assembly officials, opinion leaders, and community members. As a qualitative study, findings may not be generalizable beyond the study area. However, they provide valuable insights into communication and community ownership dynamics.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction. Chapter Two reviews related literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three outlines the methodology. Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings. Chapter Five provides the summary, conclusions, and recommendations

1.8 Summary of the chapter

This chapter introduced the study on the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects, using the Wenchi Municipal Assembly as a case study. It provided the background to the study by situating participatory communication within the broader context of decentralised governance and development planning in Ghana. The chapter highlighted the growing importance of inclusive communication processes in promoting community participation, ownership, and sustainability of development initiatives at the local government level.

The chapter also clearly outlined the research problem, demonstrating how limited community involvement and predominantly top-down communication approaches continue to undermine community ownership of development projects in many municipal assemblies. The research

objectives and questions were presented to guide the investigation, alongside a justification for the study that underscored its academic and practical relevance to development communication and local governance.

In addition, the chapter described the scope of the study, clarified key concepts, and discussed the significance of the research to policymakers, practitioners, and scholars. By outlining the organisation of the dissertation, the chapter established a clear roadmap for the subsequent chapters. Overall, this introductory chapter laid a strong conceptual and contextual foundation for examining participatory communication practices and their implications for community ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipality

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature relevant to the study on the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. The chapter examines key concepts such as participatory communication, communication in local governance, community ownership, and developmental projects. It also reviews theoretical perspectives that underpin participatory communication and analyses empirical studies related to communication and community participation in development. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in existing literature that justify the present study.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Participatory Communication and Development Outcomes

Empirical studies demonstrate that participatory communication positively influences development outcomes. Servaes and Servaes (2021) argue that communication shapes participation, understanding, and ownership. Molale (2019) found that community-driven communication initiatives improved project sustainability and reduced conflict.

Mmutle (2018) also observed that participatory approaches enhance community trust and commitment to development projects.

2.2.2 Communication Practices in Ghanaian Municipal Assemblies

Kasapa (2017) found that many Ghanaian Assemblies struggle to implement participatory communication effectively, relying instead on top-down information dissemination. Larbi (2018) noted that community involvement often occurs late in the project cycle, limiting influence.

Agyeiwaa (2023) revealed that inadequate feedback mechanisms undermine trust and participation in local governance.

2.2.3 Community Ownership and Project Sustainability

Anani-Bossman and Blankson (2023) demonstrated that participatory communication enhances community ownership and reduces project failure. However, Okocha and Ola-Akuma (2022) identified barriers such as power imbalances, literacy levels, and limited access to communication platforms.

2.3 Conceptual Review

2.3.1 Participatory Communication

Participatory communication is a development communication approach that prioritises dialogue, mutual understanding, and the active involvement of stakeholders in development processes. Unlike traditional communication models that emphasise one-way dissemination of information from authorities to communities, participatory communication facilitates two-way interaction where communities are given opportunities to express their needs, concerns, and expectations (Freire, 1973).

Mefalopulos (2008) describes participatory communication as a social process that enables individuals and groups to influence decisions that affect their lives. This approach recognises that communities possess indigenous knowledge, lived experiences, and contextual insights that are

essential for designing relevant and sustainable development interventions. By creating platforms for dialogue, participatory communication promotes collective problem-solving and shared ownership of development outcomes.

Servaes and Malikhao (2020) further argue that participatory communication is grounded in the principles of empowerment and inclusiveness. It seeks to reduce power imbalances between authorities and citizens by ensuring that marginalized voices are heard. In the context of local governance, participatory communication enhances transparency and accountability by allowing citizens to engage directly with decision-makers.

In municipal development, participatory communication manifests through mechanisms such as community durbars, town hall meetings, stakeholder consultations, participatory planning sessions, and interactive radio programs. When these mechanisms are effectively utilized, they foster trust between local authorities and communities and strengthen community ownership of development projects.

2.3.2 Communication in Local Governance

Communication plays a critical role in decentralised governance systems, where decision-making authority is devolved to local institutions. Effective communication enables local governments to mobilize community support, disseminate information about policies and projects, and facilitate citizen participation (Kasapa, 2017).

In Ghana, the decentralization policy mandates Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to involve citizens in development planning and implementation. Communication channels commonly used by Assemblies include community durbars, Assembly Members'

engagements, Information Services Department announcements, local radio programs, and digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

Despite the availability of these channels, studies indicate that communication within local governance structures often remains largely top-down (Larbi, 2018). Information is frequently disseminated to communities without adequate opportunities for feedback or dialogue. This limits community influence over development decisions and undermines participatory governance.

Dzisah, Diedong, and Naaikuur (2022) note that weak feedback mechanisms and bureaucratic constraints hinder effective communication between Assemblies and communities. As a result, communication becomes symbolic rather than transformative, reducing its impact on community participation and ownership.

2.3.3 Community Ownership of Developmental Projects

Community ownership refers to the extent to which community members feel responsible for, committed to, and emotionally attached to development projects implemented in their locality. Ownership goes beyond mere acceptance of projects; it involves active participation in decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance (Anani-Bossman & Blankson, 2023).

Ownership is influenced by several factors, including the relevance of projects to community needs, transparency in decision-making, and the quality of communication between authorities and citizens. When communities are consulted and their inputs incorporated into project design, they are more likely to support and protect the projects.

Molale (2019) argues that community ownership enhances sustainability by encouraging collective responsibility and reducing dependency on external actors. Conversely, projects implemented without community involvement often face resistance, neglect, or vandalism. Poor

communication has been identified as a major factor contributing to low community ownership in many development contexts (Gbadago, 2020).

In municipal development, community ownership is critical because local projects rely heavily on community cooperation for maintenance and monitoring. Effective participatory communication therefore plays a central role in fostering ownership.

2.3.4 Developmental Projects and Participation

Developmental projects are structured interventions aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of communities. At the municipal level, such projects typically include infrastructure development, water and sanitation facilities, education and health infrastructure, and livelihood support programs.

Participation is a key determinant of the success of developmental projects. Oduro-Ofori (2020) notes that projects designed and implemented with community participation are more likely to reflect local priorities and achieve intended outcomes. Participatory communication facilitates this process by enabling communities to contribute to needs assessment, planning, and evaluation.

In contrast, projects imposed without adequate consultation may fail to address community priorities, leading to dissatisfaction and low ownership. Effective communication ensures that communities understand project objectives, roles, and benefits, thereby enhancing commitment and sustainability.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Participatory Communication Theory (Paulo Freire)

Paulo Freire's Participatory Communication Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding communication as a tool for empowerment, dialogue, and social transformation. Central to Freire's work is the argument that communication should not be conceived as a one-way transfer of information from an authority to passive recipients. In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/1973) strongly criticizes what he describes as the "banking model" of communication, where knowledge is "deposited" into individuals who are expected to receive, store, and reproduce it without question. According to Freire, this model reinforces existing power hierarchies and perpetuates dependency, exclusion, and marginalization.

In contrast, Freire proposes a dialogic model of communication, which is grounded in mutual respect, shared learning, and critical engagement. In this model, communication is a two-way, interactive process in which all participants are both learners and contributors. Dialogue, in Freire's view, is not merely conversation but a collective process of reflection and action (praxis) through which individuals critically examine their social realities and work together to transform them. This dialogic process fosters what Freire terms conscientizations, the development of critical consciousness that enables individuals and communities to recognize structural inequalities and assert their agency in shaping development outcomes.

Within the field of development communication, Freire's theory has been instrumental in shifting approaches away from top-down, expert-driven models toward people-centred and participatory frameworks. Freire argues that meaningful development can only occur when communities are actively involved in identifying their own needs, articulating their priorities, and participating in

decisions that affect their lives. Communication, therefore, becomes a platform for empowerment rather than persuasion, enabling communities to move from passive recipients of development interventions to active co-creators of development processes.

In the context of municipal governance and decentralised development, Freire's Participatory Communication Theory underscores the importance of inclusive and dialogic engagement between local authorities and community members. Municipal assemblies, as frontline development institutions, are expected to create spaces for open dialogue where community voices are valued and integrated into planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Through such participatory communication practices, communities gain a clearer understanding of development challenges, resource constraints, and project objectives, while local authorities benefit from local knowledge and community insights.

Freire's theory is particularly relevant to community ownership of developmental projects. When communities are engaged through dialogic communication, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility, commitment, and emotional attachment to development initiatives. This sense of ownership arises because community members are not merely informed about projects but are involved in shaping them. As Freire (1973) contends, participation in dialogue enables individuals to see themselves as agents of change rather than beneficiaries of externally imposed solutions.

Furthermore, Freire's emphasis on power relations is critical in understanding communication dynamics within local governance structures. Participatory communication challenges asymmetrical power relations by recognizing the experiential knowledge of community members and legitimizing their perspectives in decision-making processes. This approach aligns with contemporary development thinking, which views participation as both a means and an end of development.

In relation to this study, Freire's Participatory Communication Theory provides a lens for analyzing the extent to which communication practices within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly promote dialogue, inclusiveness, and shared decision-making. The theory also helps to explain how limitations in participatory communication can weaken community ownership of development projects. By applying Freire's theoretical insights, the study assesses whether communication practices move beyond information dissemination toward empowerment-oriented engagement, thereby enhancing sustainable and community-driven development.

2.4.2 The Multiplicity Paradigm (Jan Servaes 1999)

The Multiplicity Paradigm, advanced by Jan Servaes (1999), represents a significant shift in development thinking and communication practice. The paradigm emerged as a critique of dominant modernization and dependency theories, which tended to promote universal, linear, and externally driven models of development. Servaes argues that such approaches overlook the complexity of social realities and fail to account for the cultural, historical, political, and economic diversity that characterizes societies, particularly in the Global South (Servaes & Malikhao, 2020).

At the core of the multiplicity paradigm is the assertion that there is no single path to development. Instead, development should be understood as a pluralistic and context-dependent process, shaped by local values, belief systems, power relations, and social structures. The paradigm emphasizes that communities are not homogeneous entities but are composed of diverse groups with varying interests, identities, and capacities. Consequently, development communication must be flexible, inclusive, and sensitive to local contexts rather than imposing standardized solutions.

Within the field of development communication, the multiplicity paradigm places strong emphasis on participatory, horizontal, and dialogic communication processes. It advocates for

communication approaches that recognize and integrate indigenous knowledge systems, local languages, and culturally embedded practices into development initiatives. Rather than viewing communities as passive recipients of information, the paradigm positions them as active agents whose experiences and perspectives are essential to meaningful and sustainable development.

The multiplicity paradigm also foregrounds the importance of power relations and social diversity in shaping development outcomes. Servaes highlights that communication processes are influenced by existing hierarchies related to leadership, gender, age, education, and socio-economic status. Effective development communication must therefore address these dynamics by creating inclusive spaces that allow marginalized voices to be heard. In this sense, participation is not merely about presence but about equitable influence in decision-making processes.

In the context of decentralised governance and local development, the multiplicity paradigm aligns closely with the principles underpinning Ghana's local government system. Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) are expected to design and implement development initiatives that reflect the needs and priorities of their local populations. The paradigm supports governance practices that are locally driven, culturally grounded, and responsive to community diversity, rather than dictated solely by centralized or external development agendas.

The relevance of the multiplicity paradigm to the Wenchi Municipal Assembly is particularly significant. The municipality comprises diverse communities with distinct cultural traditions, social norms, and leadership structures, all of which influence communication patterns and participation in development processes. Power relations involving traditional authorities, Assembly Members, opinion leaders, and ordinary community members further shape how information is shared and how decisions are made. By adopting communication strategies

informed by the multiplicity paradigm, the Assembly can better navigate these complexities and design engagement processes that resonate with local realities.

Furthermore, the multiplicity paradigm provides a useful framework for understanding community ownership of development projects. When communication strategies are aligned with local contexts and respect cultural diversity, community members are more likely to identify with development initiatives and perceive them as relevant to their lived experiences. This sense of relevance fosters commitment, accountability, and collective responsibility, which are critical for project sustainability.

In relation to this study, the multiplicity paradigm offers an analytical lens for assessing whether communication practices within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly are sufficiently context-sensitive, inclusive, and participatory. It complements Freire's Participatory Communication Theory by emphasizing the need for development communication strategies that are not only dialogic but also adapted to the socio-cultural and institutional realities of the municipality. Together, these theoretical perspectives strengthen the study's examination of how participatory communication can enhance community ownership of developmental projects.

2.5 Summary of Literature

The reviewed literature demonstrates a broad scholarly consensus that participatory communication is fundamental to achieving effective and sustainable development outcomes, particularly in relation to enhancing community ownership of developmental projects. Conceptual analyses emphasise that participatory communication facilitates dialogue, inclusiveness, empowerment, and mutual understanding between development actors and community members. Communication approaches that move beyond one-way information dissemination toward

interactive and dialogic engagement are widely recognized as critical for building trust, accountability, and collective responsibility in development processes.

The theoretical perspectives examined in this chapter, especially Paulo Freire's Participatory Communication Theory and Servaes' Multiplicity Paradigm, offer strong analytical foundations for understanding communication as a transformative and empowering process. Freire's emphasis on dialogue and critical consciousness highlights the role of communication in enabling communities to actively engage in decision-making, while Servaes' multiplicity paradigm underscores the importance of context-specific, culturally grounded, and inclusive communication strategies. Together, these theories reinforce the view that community ownership emerges when communication practices are responsive to local realities and sensitive to power relations.

Empirical studies reviewed further support the positive relationship between participatory communication and development outcomes. Research indicates that participatory approaches enhance community involvement, strengthen project sustainability, and reduce resistance to development interventions. However, studies conducted within Ghanaian municipal contexts reveal persistent challenges. Despite decentralization policies that promote citizen participation, communication practices within many Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies continue to be largely top-down and symbolic, limiting meaningful community influence. Barriers such as bureaucratic constraints, weak feedback mechanisms, power imbalances, and literacy challenges continue to undermine effective participatory engagement.

2.6 Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on participatory communication and community ownership, notable gaps remain. First, there is a lack of context-specific empirical studies that examine how participatory communication practices operate within individual municipal assemblies in Ghana. Many existing studies adopt broad or comparative approaches that generalize findings across multiple municipalities, thereby overlooking the unique socio-cultural, institutional, and communication dynamics that shape participation at the local level.

In particular, there is a paucity of research focusing on the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. Limited scholarly attention has been given to how communication practices within this specific municipal context influence community participation, perceptions, and ownership of developmental projects. This gap is significant, given the diverse cultural composition and development challenges of the municipality.

Additionally, while several studies acknowledge the importance of community ownership for project sustainability, fewer provide in-depth qualitative insights into the communication processes through which ownership is cultivated or undermined. There is also limited integration of institutional perspectives and community-level experiences within the same study, making it difficult to fully understand discrepancies between policy intentions and lived realities.

This study addresses these gaps by conducting an in-depth qualitative case study of the Wenchi Municipal Assembly, examining participatory communication practices from both institutional and community perspectives. By linking theoretical insights with empirical evidence, the study contributes to development communication scholarship and provides practical recommendations

for strengthening participatory governance and community ownership of developmental projects at the municipal level.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed account of the methodological framework adopted to investigate the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. The chapter explains and justifies the philosophical orientation, research approach, and design employed in the study. It further describes the study area, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The methodological decisions were guided by the nature of the research problem and the exploratory character of the research questions, which required an in-depth understanding of communication processes and stakeholder experiences within a municipal governance context.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The study was guided by an interpretivist philosophical orientation, which assumes that social reality is subjective and constructed through human interaction. Interpretivism holds that individuals attach meanings to their experiences based on social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Creswell, 2014). In the context of this study, communication practices and perceptions of ownership are shaped by the interactions between the Municipal Assembly and community members.

This orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand how different stakeholders interpret communication processes and how these interpretations influence their sense of

ownership of developmental projects. Rather than seeking objective truths, the study focused on capturing participants lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings.

3.3 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted to allow for an in-depth exploration of participatory communication practices within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. Qualitative research is particularly useful for studying processes, relationships, and meanings that cannot be easily quantified (Holloway, 2012).

The qualitative approach enabled respondents to articulate their views freely, providing rich narratives on how communication is conducted, the extent of participation, and the perceived impact on community ownership. This approach was suitable for addressing the research questions, which focused on understanding the nature, extent, and implications of communication practices rather than measuring frequencies or statistical relationships.

3.4 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design, with the Wenchi Municipal Assembly serving as the case. Case study designs allow for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). This design was appropriate because the study focused on a specific municipal assembly and sought to explore communication practices as they naturally occur.

By adopting a case study design, the research was able to capture contextual factors such as institutional structures, power relations, cultural norms, and administrative processes that influence participatory communication and community ownership. The design also facilitated the integration of multiple perspectives from both Assembly officials and community members.

3.5 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Wenchi Municipality, located in the Bono Region of Ghana. The Wenchi Municipal Assembly is one of the 261 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) established under Ghana's decentralized governance system. The Assembly was originally created as a district in 1989 through Legislative Instrument (L.I.) 1471 and was later elevated to municipal status in 2007 under Legislative Instrument 1876, reflecting its increasing administrative responsibilities and developmental relevance within the region (GhanaRegions.com, 2022).

Geographically, the Wenchi Municipality lies between latitudes 7°30' and 8°05' North and longitudes 2°15' West and 1°55' East. The municipality covers a total land area of approximately 1,067 square kilometers. It shares boundaries with Techiman Municipal Assembly to the west, Kintampo South District to the northwest, Tain District to the east, and Sunyani Municipal Assembly to the south. Wenchi, the municipal capital, is located about 29 kilometers from Techiman, positioning the municipality strategically within the Bono Region's transport, commercial, and economic corridor (Wenchi Municipal Assembly, 2025).

Administratively, the Wenchi Municipal Assembly is mandated to oversee local governance, development planning, and public service delivery in accordance with Ghana's decentralization policy. The Assembly's mission focuses on improving the living standards of residents through effective resource mobilization, participatory governance, and sustainable development initiatives. In fulfilling this mandate, the Assembly supervises and coordinates activities across several key sectors, including agriculture, education, health, infrastructure development, water and sanitation, and environmental management.

The Assembly also collaborates with national development programs such as the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) initiative and the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme, which are aimed at enhancing food security, employment, and social protection at the local level (NDPC, 2020). These collaborations require continuous interaction between the Assembly, community leaders, and residents, thereby making communication a central component of local development governance.

Demographically, the Wenchi Municipality recorded a population of 124,758 according to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, comprising 60,960 males and 63,798 females. The population distribution reflects a relatively balanced gender composition, with settlements ranging from urban centers to predominantly rural communities. The local economy is largely driven by agriculture, particularly crop farming, alongside small-scale trading, agro-processing, and public sector employment (GhanaRegions.com, 2022).

In recent years, the Wenchi Municipal Assembly has implemented several developmental projects, including road rehabilitation works, market infrastructure upgrades, construction of educational facilities, and the commissioning of mechanized boreholes to improve access to potable water. These projects are intended to enhance socio-economic development and improve the overall quality of life within the municipality (Wenchi Municipal Assembly, 2025).

The Wenchi Municipality was selected as the study area because of its active engagement in development planning and implementation, coupled with the increasing emphasis on community participation and stakeholder engagement in local governance. Despite these efforts, variations in community involvement and ownership of development projects have been observed across different communities. This makes the municipality a suitable context for examining how participatory communication practices influence community ownership of developmental projects.

Furthermore, the diverse demographic composition, mix of urban and rural settlements, and the presence of both traditional and modern governance structures provide a rich context for analyzing communication processes between the Assembly and community members. These characteristics align directly with the objectives of the study and support its focus on participatory communication within municipal development.

3.6 Target Population

The target population comprised stakeholders involved in or affected by communication processes related to developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipality. These stakeholders were selected because they occupy strategic positions within the communication and governance framework of the Assembly.

The inclusion of both Assembly-level and community-level participants ensured a holistic understanding of communication dynamics. While Assembly officials provided insights into institutional communication strategies, community members and opinion leaders offered perspectives on how these strategies are experienced at the grassroots level.

3.7 Sample Size Determination

The study involved a total of thirty (30) respondents, which was considered sufficient for achieving data saturation in qualitative research. Data saturation occurs when additional data no longer yield new insights or themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

The distribution of respondents ensured representation across key stakeholder groups:

- Municipal leadership
- Administrative communication personnel

- Political representatives
- Traditional and community leadership
- Ordinary community members

This diversity enhanced the depth and credibility of the findings.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Category

Respondent Category	Description	Number
Municipal Chief Executives	Current and former MCEs	4
Presiding Members	Current and former Presiding Members	2
Communication Department Staff	Communication Unit Staff	2
Assembly Members	Elected Assembly Members	4
Opinion Leaders	Community influencers	6
Community Members	Ordinary residents	12
Total		30

3.8 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their relevance to the research objectives. This technique is suitable for qualitative studies where the focus is on information-rich cases (Patton, 2015).

Participants were selected based on:

- Their direct involvement in development communication
- Their leadership or representative roles
- Their experience with municipal development projects

This ensured that respondents could provide informed and reflective responses on participatory communication and community ownership.

3.9 Data Collection Instruments

The study employed two structured qualitative questionnaires administered via Google Forms; each tailored to a specific category of respondents.

3.9.1 Rationale for Using Google Forms

Google Forms was chosen because it:

- Facilitated access to respondents across different locations
- Allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire at their convenience
- Ensured consistency in questions across respondents
- Enhanced data management and organisation

Additionally, the platform provided a level of anonymity that encouraged honest and detailed responses.

3.9.2 Structure of the Questionnaires

Both questionnaires were organized into thematic sections aligned with the research questions:

- Nature of communication practices
- Level of participation and feedback
- Decision-making processes
- Perceived ownership of development projects
- Challenges and suggestions for improvement

The open-ended nature of the questions allowed respondents to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions.

Table 2: Data Collection Instruments and Target Groups

Instrument	Target Group	Purpose
Google Form A	Assembly-level stakeholders	Assess internal communication practices
Google Form B	Community members & opinion leaders	Assess community perceptions

3.10 Pre-testing of the Instrument

Prior to data collection, the questionnaires were pre-tested with a small group of respondents who were not part of the final sample. The pre-test helped to:

- Assess clarity of questions
- Identify ambiguous wording
- Ensure alignment with research objectives

Feedback from the pre-test was used to refine the questionnaires, enhancing their effectiveness

3.11 Data Collection Procedure

Following the approval of the research proposal and the granting of ethical clearance, data collection was systematically undertaken in accordance with established ethical and methodological standards for qualitative research. The data collection process was carefully planned to ensure transparency, voluntary participation, and the protection of respondents' rights.

Two open-ended questionnaires were designed using the Google Forms platform, one targeted at Assembly-level stakeholders and the other directed at community members and opinion leaders. Prior to distribution, the questionnaires were reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance to the research questions, and alignment with the study's objectives. The electronic format was selected to enhance accessibility, facilitate efficient data management, and allow respondents to participate at their convenience.

The questionnaires were distributed electronically through email and WhatsApp platforms, which are widely used communication channels within the Wenchi Municipality. Each questionnaire was accompanied by an introductory message that clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the nature

of participation, the expected time required to complete the questionnaire, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents were informed that the study was conducted solely for academic purposes and that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained electronically through a consent statement included at the beginning of each Google Form. Respondents were required to indicate their consent before proceeding to answer the questions. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

To enhance the response rate, follow-up reminders were sent to potential respondents who had not completed the questionnaire within the initial response period. These reminders were courteous and non-coercive, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation while encouraging timely completion. The data collection process was conducted over a defined period, ensuring adequate time for participation while maintaining consistency across respondent groups.

Overall, the data collection procedure adhered to ethical research principles of respect for persons, informed consent, and confidentiality. This approach ensured the credibility and integrity of the data collected and supported the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

3.12 Data Analysis procedure

The qualitative data generated from the two Google Forms were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate for this study because it provides a flexible yet rigorous analytical framework for examining participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of participatory communication and community ownership within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed a systematic and iterative process consistent with the phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher engaged in data familiarization by reading and re-reading all responses multiple times. This initial stage enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the content, context, and nuances of participants' responses, while also identifying preliminary ideas relevant to the research objectives and questions.

Secondly, initial coding of the data was conducted, whereby meaningful segments of the data were systematically identified and labelled. Coding was carried out manually and involved assigning concise codes to phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that captured key ideas related to communication practices, participation, feedback mechanisms, power relations, and perceptions of ownership. This stage allowed for the organisation of large volumes of qualitative data into manageable analytical units.

Third, related codes were examined and grouped into broader themes that reflected recurring patterns across the dataset. These themes were developed through constant comparison, ensuring that they accurately represent shared meanings and variations within the data. The researcher reviewed and refined the themes to ensure internal coherence and clear distinction between themes, thereby enhancing analytical clarity.

Finally, the identified themes were interpreted and analysed in relation to the research questions, objectives, and existing literature. This interpretive stage involved linking empirical findings to the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, namely Freire's Participatory Communication Theory and the Multiplicity Paradigm, as well as relevant empirical studies reviewed in Chapter Two. Direct quotations from respondents were used to support the analysis and enhance credibility, while anonymised respondent codes ensure confidentiality.

Overall, the thematic analysis procedure enabled a comprehensive and nuanced examination of how participatory communication practices influence community ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipality. The systematic approach enhanced the trustworthiness, transparency, and rigor of the qualitative analysis.

Table 3: Alignment of Research Questions, Data Sources and Analysis Technique

Research Question	Data Source	Analysis Technique
RQ1	Assembly & Community Respondents	Thematic Analysis
RQ2	Assembly & Community Respondents	Thematic Analysis
RQ3	Assembly & Community Respondents	Thematic Analysis

3.13 Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

To enhance trustworthiness:

- Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple stakeholder groups.
- Thick description was used to provide contextual depth.
- Audit trails were maintained to document methodological decisions.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was a guiding principle throughout the research process, particularly because the study involved human participants drawn from municipal governance structures and local

communities, who shared personal and professional experiences related to communication practices, participation, and ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. Prior to data collection, all prospective participants were adequately informed about the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study. The researcher clearly explained that participation was entirely voluntary, and that respondents could withdraw at any stage of the study without any negative consequences.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the Google Forms. Given the diverse educational and cultural backgrounds of respondents, both written and implied consent were accepted. Participants who were comfortable provided written consent electronically, while others gave consent by voluntarily submitting the completed questionnaire. This flexible approach ensured respect for participant autonomy and cultural sensitivity, which is particularly important in qualitative research conducted within Ghana's decentralised local governance and community settings (Israel & Hay, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019).

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personal identifiers such as names, official positions, or specific communities were disclosed in the research report. Instead, respondents were assigned coded identifiers (e.g., AR1–AR12 for Assembly respondents and CR1–CR18 for community and opinion leader respondents) during data analysis and presentation. This coding system protected participants from potential social, political, or professional repercussions, especially given the sensitive nature of governance and development-related communication issues. All data, including online responses and downloaded datasets, were securely stored on password-protected digital devices, with backup files encrypted to prevent unauthorized access. Access to raw data was restricted solely to the researcher, in line with international ethical standards on data protection and privacy (Bromley et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2021).

The principle of non-maleficence, the obligation to avoid causing harm, was carefully observed throughout the study. Although the research did not involve physical risk, the researcher was mindful of the potential for psychological, emotional, or professional discomfort, particularly when respondents reflected on governance challenges or perceived shortcomings in communication practices. Participants were therefore informed that they could skip any question they found uncomfortable. Questions were framed in neutral and respectful language to minimise bias and distress, consistent with ethical qualitative research practices (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001)

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant academic authorities of the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) prior to data collection. Additionally, permission was sought from appropriate municipal authorities and community gatekeepers before administering the questionnaires. At the end of the data collection process, participants were informed of the broader aims of the research and assured that the findings would be used strictly for academic purposes and to contribute to improved understanding of participatory communication and community ownership of development projects. This transparent and reflective ethical approach enhanced the credibility, trustworthiness, and integrity of the study, while reinforcing mutual respect between the researcher and participants (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021)

3.15 Limitations of the Methodology

Despite its strengths, the methodology adopted for this study was not without limitations. The reliance on online questionnaires administered through Google Forms may have inadvertently excluded some potential participants, particularly community members with limited access to digital devices, unstable internet connectivity, or low levels of digital literacy. This limitation is

especially relevant in rural and semi-urban settings within the Wenchi Municipality, where disparities in access to digital infrastructure persist.

Additionally, the online nature of data collection reduced opportunities for real-time clarification of questions, which may have affected the depth or clarity of some responses, particularly among respondents who were less familiar with formal research instruments.

To minimise the impact of these limitations, the researcher adopted mitigation measures during the data collection process. Assembly Members and selected opinion leaders assisted in facilitating access to the questionnaires by guiding respondents through the questions where necessary and encouraging participation among individuals who might otherwise have been excluded. In some cases, respondents were supported to complete the questionnaires using shared devices, ensuring inclusivity without compromising confidentiality.

While these measures helped broaden participation, it is acknowledged that the findings may still reflect the perspectives of individuals who were relatively more accessible or engaged. Consequently, the results should be interpreted with an understanding of these constraints. Future studies may consider employing mixed data collection methods, such as in-person interviews or focus group discussions, alongside online tools to enhance inclusiveness and depth of data

3.16 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a detailed account of the methodological framework that guided the study on the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. The adoption of a qualitative case study design provided an in-depth and context-specific understanding of communication practices and participation processes within the municipal governance structure. This approach was particularly

suitable for capturing the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of both Assembly-level stakeholders and community members regarding development communication.

The use of purposive sampling ensured that participants with relevant knowledge and experience, such as municipal officials, Assembly Members, communication officers, opinion leaders, and community members, were deliberately selected to provide rich and meaningful insights into the research problem. Furthermore, the deployment of two distinct Google Forms, one targeting Assembly respondents and the other targeting community members and opinion leaders, allowed for a comparative analysis of institutional and grassroots perspectives on participatory communication practices.

Overall, the methodological choices enabled a nuanced and systematic exploration of how communication strategies influence community participation and ownership of development projects within the Wenchi Municipality. By aligning the research design, sampling strategy, and data collection instruments with the study's objectives and research questions, this chapter established a strong foundation for the presentation and analysis of findings in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis and discussion of qualitative data collected for the study on the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. Data were gathered through two open-ended Google Forms administered to Assembly-level stakeholders and community-level respondents, including opinion leaders and ordinary community members.

The chapter is organized according to the three research questions that guided the study. A thematic analytical approach was adopted, and findings are presented with direct quotations from respondents to illustrate emerging themes. The discussion integrates empirical evidence with relevant theories and literature reviewed in Chapter Two, particularly participatory communication theory and the multiplicity paradigm. This approach enhances analytical depth and strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Table 4: Summary of Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Research Question	Main Theme	Sub-Themes
RQ1	Nature of Communication	Top-down flow; Channels; Feedback gaps
RQ2	Participatory Communication Practices	Consultation; Barriers; Power dynamics

RQ3	Community Ownership	Weak ownership; Sustainability
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4.2 Overview of Respondent Perspectives

The analysis revealed notable differences and similarities between Assembly-level and community-level perspectives. While Assembly respondents generally described communication practices as structured and adequate, community respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of engagement and opportunities for participation. These contrasting views highlight the complexity of participatory communication within decentralised governance structures and underscore the importance of examining both institutional intent and lived community experiences.

4.3 Research Question One:

What is the nature of communication between the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and community members in relation to development projects?

4.3.1 Predominance of Top-Down and Informational Communication

A dominant theme emerging from the data is the prevalence of top-down communication. Community respondents consistently indicated that communication from the Assembly is largely informational, focusing on announcing projects rather than engaging communities in dialogue.

One community respondent stated:

“Most of the time, we hear about projects when they have already started. Nobody comes to ask us what we think before the work begins.” (CR4)

Another respondent reinforced this view:

“I only got to know about the project when I saw workers on the site. There was no meeting to explain anything to us.” (CR9)

These statements suggest that communication occurs mainly at the implementation stage, which limits opportunities for meaningful participation. Such practices align with what Freire (1973) describes as the “banking model” of communication, where information is deposited into passive recipients without encouraging dialogue.

Assembly respondents, however, perceived communication differently. One Assembly official explained:

“Before projects start, we usually inform the communities through durbars and Assembly Members.” (AR2)

The discrepancy between these perspectives indicates that while communication may be initiated at the institutional level, it does not always translate into effective community engagement.

4.3.2 Communication Channels and Their Effectiveness

The study found that the Assembly relies on multiple communication channels, including community durbars, Assembly Members, radio announcements, and Information Services Department activities. While these channels are widely recognized, their effectiveness in fostering participation appears limited.

A community respondent noted:

“Even if announcements are made on radio, not everyone listens at that time, and there is no chance to ask questions.” (CR5)

Another respondent emphasized the lack of follow-up:

“They announce, but there is no further engagement to explain details or listen to our concerns.”

(CR11)

These findings suggest that the issue is not the absence of communication channels but rather how they are utilized. Communication remains largely one-way, reducing opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding.

4.3.3 Dependence on Assembly Members as Intermediaries

The data show a heavy reliance on Assembly Members as intermediaries between the Assembly and community members. An Assembly respondent stated:

“Assembly Members are the main link. They are expected to relay information to their communities.” (AR5)

However, community respondents questioned the reliability of this arrangement. One respondent explained:

“Our Assembly Member does not always organize meetings, so information does not reach everyone.” (CR6)

This dependence on intermediaries, without adequate monitoring and support, weakens the communication chain and contributes to information gaps at the grassroots level.

4.3.4 Absence of Structured Feedback Mechanisms

Another significant finding is the lack of institutionalized feedback systems. Many community respondents reported uncertainty about how to communicate concerns or suggestions to the Assembly.

One respondent remarked:

“There is no clear way to send our complaints unless you know someone at the Assembly.” (CR11)

Another added:

“Sometimes we go to radio stations to complain because that is the only way our voices are heard.”

(CR2)

Although Assembly respondents acknowledged receiving feedback, this often occurs only when issues escalate publicly. One Assembly official stated:

“Most feedback comes when there is a serious issue or public pressure.” (AR3)

This reactive approach undermines participatory communication, which requires continuous and accessible feedback mechanisms.

4.4 Research Question Two:

To what extent do the communication practices of the Wenchi Municipal Assembly reflect the principles of participatory communication?

4.4.1 Limited Community Involvement in Planning and Decision-Making

Participatory communication emphasizes the early involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes. However, findings indicate that community involvement in planning is minimal.

One community respondent stated:

“Decisions are taken at the Assembly level. We are only informed, not involved.” (CR1)

An opinion leader echoed this concern:

“Consultation hardly happens. They usually come when everything has already been decided.”

(OR2)

Assembly respondents acknowledged these limitations, citing external constraints:

“Some projects come with strict guidelines from central government, so community input is limited.” (AR1)

While these constraints are real, their impact is reduced participatory engagement, contrary to the principles outlined by Servaes and Malikhao (2020).

4.4.2 Barriers to Inclusive Participation

The study identified several barriers to participatory communication, including literacy levels, language barriers, and power relations. A community respondent noted:

“Some people don’t speak during meetings because they are not confident in English.” (CR7)

An Assembly respondent confirmed this challenge:

“Low literacy makes it difficult for some residents to participate effectively.” (AR4)

Additionally, traditional authority structures can inhibit open dialogue. An opinion leader stated:

“When chiefs are present, some community members are afraid to speak openly.” (OR4)

These barriers limit inclusiveness and contradict participatory communication principles that emphasise equality and empowerment.

4.4.3 Limited Integration of Digital Communication Platforms

The findings also reveal inadequate use of digital platforms for community engagement. Younger respondents in particular emphasized the potential of social media.

One respondent stated:

“The Assembly is not active on social media. Using WhatsApp or Facebook would help a lot.”

(CR10)

An Assembly respondent acknowledged this gap:

“We are still relying on traditional methods, but we know digital platforms are important.” (AR6)

This indicates missed opportunities to broaden participation and engage younger populations.

4.5 Research Question Three:

What is the implication of the Assembly’s communication strategies on community ownership of developmental projects?

4.5.1 Weak Sense of Community Ownership

Community ownership was closely linked to participation. Many respondents expressed a weak sense of ownership due to limited engagement.

One respondent explained:

“Because we were not involved, we see the project as government property, not ours.” (CR8)

Another added:

“If you are not consulted, you don’t feel responsible for maintaining the project.” (CR3)

These findings illustrate how communication practices directly influence perceptions of ownership and responsibility.

4.5.2 Positive Ownership Outcomes Where Participation Occurred

Despite these challenges, evidence shows that participatory communication enhances ownership where implemented. An Assembly respondent stated:

“Where communities were engaged early, they supported and protected the projects.” (AR2)

A community respondent corroborated this:

“When we were involved from the beginning, we felt it was our project.” (CR12)

This supports theoretical assertions that participation fosters commitment and sustainability.

4.5.3 Implications for Sustainability and Accountability

Respondents linked ownership to sustainability and accountability. An opinion leader noted:

“If the community is not involved, maintenance becomes a problem.” (OR1)

This finding underscores the importance of participatory communication for long-term project success.

Table 5: Effects of Communication Practices on Community Ownership

Communication Practice	Observed Effect	Respondent Perspective
One-way information dissemination	Low sense of ownership	Community respondents
Early community consultation	Increased trust and commitment	Assembly & Community respondents

Weak mechanisms	feedback	Poor maintenance of projects	Opinion leaders
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4.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide important insights into the nature, extent, and implications of participatory communication practices within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. By drawing on empirical data from both Assembly-level and community-level respondents, this discussion situates the findings within the broader theoretical and empirical literature on participatory communication, decentralised governance, and community ownership of development projects.

4.6.1 Nature of Communication and Institutional–Community Disconnect

The analysis revealed that communication between the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and community members is predominantly top-down and informational, with limited opportunities for dialogue, consultation, and feedback. Although the Assembly utilizes recognized communication platforms such as community durbars, Assembly Members, radio announcements, and Information Services Department engagements, these channels largely function as mechanisms for disseminating information rather than facilitating meaningful participation.

This finding is consistent with earlier studies on local governance in Ghana, which indicate that communication within MMDAs often remains symbolic rather than transformative (Kasapa, 2017; Larbi, 2018). The divergence between Assembly officials’ perceptions of communication effectiveness and community members’ lived experiences highlights an institutional–community disconnect. While Assembly respondents believed that communication efforts were adequate,

community respondents perceived these efforts as insufficient and exclusionary, particularly at the planning and decision-making stages of development projects.

From a theoretical perspective, this pattern reflects Freire's (1973) critique of the "banking model" of communication, where information is transmitted to passive recipients without encouraging critical dialogue. In the Wenchi context, communication that occurs primarily at the implementation stage limits community agency and undermines the principles of participatory governance envisioned under Ghana's decentralization framework.

4.6.2 Extent of Participatory Communication Practices

The findings further demonstrate that the communication practices of the Wenchi Municipal Assembly only partially reflect the principles of participatory communication. While formal mechanisms for engagement exist, genuine participation, characterized by shared decision-making, mutual learning, and empowerment, remains limited. Community involvement in project planning and prioritization was found to be minimal, with most respondents indicating that decisions are largely made at the Assembly level before being communicated to communities.

This limited participation contradicts the foundational assumptions of participatory communication theory, which emphasizes early and continuous engagement of stakeholders throughout the development process (Freire, 1973; Mefalopulos, 2008). The findings also resonate with Servaes and Malikhao's (2020) multiplicity paradigm, which underscores the importance of context-sensitive and inclusive communication practices that account for social diversity and power relations.

Barriers such as low literacy levels, language differences, and entrenched power structures further constrain inclusive participation. The influence of traditional authority and socio-cultural

hierarchies was found to inhibit open dialogue, particularly for marginalized groups. These challenges align with empirical studies that identify power imbalances and communication inequalities as key obstacles to participatory governance in local development contexts (Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2022; Dzisah et al., 2022).

4.6.3 Communication Strategies and Community Ownership

A central contribution of this study lies in its examination of how communication practices influence community ownership of developmental projects. The findings clearly demonstrate that limited participation correlates with weak ownership, as community members tend to perceive projects as externally imposed or government-owned when they are excluded from decision-making processes. This perception reduces commitment to project maintenance and accountability, thereby threatening sustainability.

Conversely, instances where communities were engaged early and meaningfully were associated with stronger feelings of ownership, responsibility, and support. These findings support Molale's (2019) assertion that participatory communication enhances project sustainability by fostering collective responsibility. They also reinforce Anani-Bossman and Blankson's (2023) argument that ownership emerges when communities perceive development initiatives as reflecting their needs, priorities, and contributions.

From a theoretical standpoint, Freire's concept of conscientization is particularly relevant. When communities are engaged through dialogue, they develop a critical understanding of development processes and recognise their role as co-creators rather than beneficiaries. Similarly, the multiplicity paradigm helps explain why ownership is stronger when communication strategies align with local cultural norms, leadership structures, and communication preferences.

4.6.4 Implications for Sustainability, Accountability, and Local Governance

The study's findings have broader implications for sustainable development and local governance within the Wenchi Municipality. Weak participatory communication undermines not only community ownership but also accountability and trust between citizens and local authorities. Without accessible and structured feedback mechanisms, grievances are often expressed through informal or adversarial channels, such as radio complaints, rather than constructive dialogue.

This reactive communication approach limits learning, collaboration, and long-term institutional responsiveness. Strengthening participatory communication—through structured feedback systems, inclusive planning processes, and expanded use of digital platforms—could enhance transparency, deepen citizen engagement, and improve project sustainability. These measures align with Ghana's decentralization policy objectives and contemporary development communication scholarship, which view participation as both a democratic right and a practical necessity for effective development

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive analysis and discussion of qualitative data on the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. Guided by the study's three research questions, the chapter examined the nature of communication between the Assembly and community members, assessed the extent to which existing communication practices reflect participatory communication principles, and analysed the implications of these practices for community ownership and project sustainability.

The findings revealed that communication between the Assembly and communities is predominantly top-down and informational, with limited opportunities for dialogue, consultation, and feedback. Although the Assembly employs multiple communication channels, these mechanisms are largely used for information dissemination rather than participatory engagement. Significant discrepancies were identified between institutional perceptions of communication effectiveness and community members lived experiences, highlighting an institutional–community disconnect within the decentralised governance framework.

The chapter further demonstrated that participatory communication practices within the municipality remain constrained by structural, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers, including limited community involvement in planning, literacy and language challenges, power dynamics, and inadequate utilisation of digital communication platforms. These limitations undermine the principles of inclusiveness, empowerment, and shared decision-making central to participatory communication theory.

Importantly, the analysis established a clear relationship between communication practices and community ownership of developmental projects. Limited participation was associated with weak ownership, reduced responsibility, and challenges in project maintenance, while instances of meaningful engagement fostered stronger commitment, accountability, and support for development initiatives. Overall, the chapter underscores the critical role of dialogic, inclusive, and context-sensitive communication in strengthening community ownership and enhancing the sustainability of municipal development projects.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study on the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. The chapter draws directly from the empirical findings discussed in Chapter Four and links them to the research objectives and questions. It also outlines the practical, policy, and academic implications of the study and provides suggestions for future research.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The study examined the role of participatory communication in enhancing community ownership of developmental projects within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly. The research was guided by three research questions focusing on the nature of communication between the Assembly and community members, the extent to which communication practices reflect participatory communication principles, and the implications of these practices for community ownership of development projects.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm and employed a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through two open-ended Google Forms administered to Assembly-level stakeholders (including Municipal Chief Executives, Presiding Members, Communication Department staff, and Assembly Members) and community-level

respondents (including opinion leaders and community members). A total of thirty (30) respondents participated in the study.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, and findings were presented with direct quotations from respondents to ensure credibility and transparency. The study was anchored in participatory communication theory and the multiplicity paradigm, which emphasise dialogue, inclusiveness, and context-sensitive development communication.

5.3 Summary of Key Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized according to the research questions.

5.3.1 Nature of Communication Between the Assembly and Community Members

The study found that communication between the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and community members is predominantly top-down and informational. Although the Assembly employs multiple communication channels such as community durbars, Assembly Members, radio announcements, and Information Services Department outreach, these channels are largely used for one-way dissemination of information rather than dialogue.

Community respondents reported that they often become aware of development projects only after implementation has begun, with limited opportunities for prior consultation. The study also revealed heavy reliance on Assembly Members as intermediaries, which sometimes results in communication gaps at the grassroots level. Furthermore, feedback mechanisms were found to be weak, informal, and largely reactive.

5.3.2 Extent to Which Communication Practices Reflect Participatory Communication Principles

The findings indicate that the communication practices of the Wenchi Municipal Assembly reflect participatory communication principles to a limited extent. While Assembly officials acknowledge the importance of community participation, actual practice is constrained by institutional, logistical, and structural factors.

Community involvement in decision-making was found to be minimal, particularly at the planning and design stages of development projects. Participation often occurs through representation rather than direct engagement, which limits inclusiveness. Barriers such as literacy levels, language challenges, power relations, and limited use of digital platforms further restrict effective participation.

5.3.3 Implications of Communication Strategies for Community Ownership

The study established a strong link between participatory communication and community ownership of development projects. Limited engagement and weak communication practices were found to undermine community ownership, leading many residents to perceive projects as government-owned rather than community-driven.

Conversely, projects that involved early consultation and continuous engagement recorded higher levels of community support, protection, and monitoring. These findings demonstrate that participatory communication enhances trust, responsibility, and sustainability of development projects.

5.4 Conclusions

This study concludes that participatory communication plays a pivotal role in fostering community ownership of developmental projects. The findings demonstrate that when communication processes are dialogic, inclusive, and responsive to community perspectives, community members are more likely to develop a strong sense of responsibility, commitment, and emotional attachment to development initiatives. Such engagement enhances trust between the Assembly and community members and encourages active participation in project implementation, monitoring, and maintenance.

However, the study also reveals that communication practices within the Wenchi Municipal Assembly remain predominantly top-down in nature. Although various communication channels exist, they are largely used for information dissemination rather than meaningful dialogue. This approach limits opportunities for community members to influence decision-making processes, thereby undermining the core principles of participatory communication. As a result, many community members perceive development projects as externally imposed rather than collectively owned.

The findings further indicate that weak and informal feedback mechanisms significantly constrain effective participation. Limited opportunities for communities to express concerns, ask questions, or provide input reduce mutual understanding and weaken accountability. This lack of structured dialogue negatively affects community trust and diminishes the sense of ownership necessary for long-term project sustainability.

Additionally, the study concludes that participatory communication outcomes are shaped by a combination of institutional and socio-cultural factors. Constraints such as bureaucratic procedures, limited resources, literacy challenges, language barriers, and entrenched power relations influence who participates, how participation occurs, and whose voices are heard. These factors often marginalize vulnerable groups and limit the inclusiveness of communication processes.

Finally, the study identifies the integration of traditional and digital communication platforms as a critical opportunity for improving participatory engagement. While traditional channels such as community durbars and Assembly Members remain important, the strategic use of digital platforms, including social media and mobile-based communication, has the potential to expand participation, particularly among youth and marginalized populations. Overall, the study concludes that strengthening participatory communication practices is essential for enhancing community ownership and ensuring sustainable development outcomes within the Wenchi Municipality

5.5 Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are derived directly from the empirical findings of the study and are organized at the institutional, policy, and academic levels.

5.5.1 Recommendations for the Wenchi Municipal Assembly

The study found that communication between the Assembly and community members is largely top-down, with limited community involvement at the planning and decision-making stages of development projects. In response, the Assembly should institutionalize participatory

communication mechanisms by ensuring that community consultation is integrated throughout the project cycle, from needs assessment to evaluation.

Findings also revealed weak and informal feedback systems, which limit opportunities for dialogue and responsiveness. The Assembly should therefore establish structured and accessible feedback mechanisms, including designated community engagement desks and digital feedback platforms, to facilitate continuous two-way communication.

Given the heavy reliance on Assembly Members as communication intermediaries and the resulting information gaps at the grassroots level, the Assembly should strengthen the capacity of Assembly Members through regular training in participatory communication and community engagement.

The study further identified limited use of digital platforms and the existence of language and literacy barriers that constrain inclusive participation. To address this, the Assembly should complement traditional communication channels with digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook and ensure that community engagements are conducted in local languages using inclusive facilitation methods.

5.5.2 Policy Recommendations

The findings revealed a gap between decentralization ideals and actual participatory practices at the municipal level. National decentralization policies should therefore explicitly prioritize participatory communication as a core requirement of local governance.

In addition, institutional capacity constraints were found to limit effective participation. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development should provide clear operational guidelines and resources to support participatory communication within MMDAs. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should also incorporate indicators for community participation and ownership to enhance accountability.

5.5.3 Academic and Practical Recommendations

Given that participatory communication outcomes are shaped by local socio-cultural contexts and power relations, development communication practitioners should adopt context-sensitive and inclusive communication strategies.

Furthermore, the study identified the need for stronger practical competencies in participatory communication. Training institutions should therefore integrate participatory communication modules into programs for local government officials and development practitioners.

5.6 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to development communication scholarship by providing empirical evidence on participatory communication practices within a municipal governance context in Ghana. It bridges the gap between theory and practice by demonstrating how communication strategies influence community ownership of development projects.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Shuaib Umar Domba, a student pursuing an M.A. in Development Communication at the University of Media, Arts and Communication, Institute of Journalism (UniMAC-IJ). I am conducting a research study on **“The Role of Participatory Communication in Enhancing Community Ownership of Developmental Projects: The Case of Wenchi Municipal Assembly.”**

As a prominent member of the Wenchi society, you are invited to participate in this study and share valuable insight about communication between the Assembly and community members. Please be assured that this study is purely **for academic purposes** and is not connected to any commercial or political agenda. Your participation is voluntary, and all information you provide will be treated with **strict confidentiality** and used solely for academic purposes. Your insights are highly valuable to the success of this research.

Thank you for taking a few minutes to respond to the questions below

Section A: Preamble

1. What do you do?
2. How long have you worked with the assembly or been in this community?
3. Do you know of any development projects taking place in your community?

4. How did you know or why don't you know?
5. Will you say information flow (communication) is important in your society? Why?

Section B: Communication Situation in the Wenchi Municipal Assembly

1. Will you say that the Assembly exchanges information with the community? How?
2. How does communication occur between the Wenchi Municipal Assembly and the community?
3. How does the assembly communicate with the community about development projects?
4. How does the community communicate with the Assembly about development projects?
5. What communication methods or channels are commonly used in the engagement between the Assembly and community members?
6. Does the community know about every development project in the municipality? How?
7. How would you assess the Assembly's responsiveness to community concerns or feedback about development projects?

Section B: Participatory Nature of Communication Practices

5. In your experience, are community members given the opportunity to contribute to discussions, planning, or decision-making concerning development projects?
6. Do factors such as language, literacy levels, or cultural differences affect the ability of residents to participate in communication processes?

7. In your experience, what issues or factors affect communication between residents and the Assembly positively and negatively?
8. How do leadership structures or power dynamics influence participation in communication within the municipality positively and negatively?

Section C: Influence of Communication Strategies on Community Ownership

9. What do you understand by community members owning development projects in their community?
10. How do the Assembly's communication strategies influence community ownership of development projects?
11. Can you provide examples where communication practices have encouraged community support or ownership of projects (such as roads, clinics, water systems, etc.)?
12. What participatory communication strategies have been effective in strengthening community ownership of development initiatives?
13. Do you think the residents in your community feel they own the development projects in your community? If YES, why? If NO, why?

Section D: Recommendations

12. What recommendations would you propose to improve communication practices in order to enhance community ownership of development projects in the municipality?

Thank you.