

EXPLORING THE PROCESS AND IMPACT OF PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION TOOLS IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AMONG WOMEN: THE DOGARAWA EXPERIENCE.

Millicent AHUPA (PhD)

Department of Theatre and Performing Arts
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
millicentahupa@gmail.com
+2348068640222

Chukwuma Peace OSUJI

Department of Public Administration
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
chukwumapeaceosuji@gmail.com
+2347033393018

Abstract

This study explores the process and impact of facilitating Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools in development communication among women in Dogarawa community. Although numerous development initiatives target women in semi-urban communities in Nigeria, many still adopt top-down approaches that limit participation and sustainability. PLA tools, which emphasize collective analysis, dialogue, and action, has emerged as vital methods for promoting inclusivity and empowering marginalized groups. However, their practical facilitation and outcomes among women remain insufficiently documented. This study hinges on the participatory communication theory. Using a qualitative field-based approach, this research examines how PLA tools are implemented, how women engage in the participatory process, and what measurable effects these interactions have on communication practices and empowerment. Data was collected through focus group discussions, interviews, and participatory deployment of the PLA tools and observation. The study reveals the extent to which PLA enhances women's capacity to articulate needs, influence decisions, and drive community development initiatives. By linking participatory communication theory with field realities, the research contributes to understanding how locally grounded communication strategies can foster gender-responsive and sustainable development in peri-urban Nigeria.

Keywords: Participatory Communication, Development Communication, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Women's Empowerment, Dogarawa Community

Introduction

Development communication has evolved from being a mere conduit for transmitting expert-driven messages to a participatory process that enables dialogue, learning, and empowerment. Early modernization models privileged top-down information flows, positioning people and communities as passive recipients of knowledge. However, decades of uneven development outcomes have revealed the inadequacy of such linear approaches, prompting a shift toward participatory frameworks that view communication as a process of co-creation and collective agency (Servaes, 2008; Melkote&Steeves, 2015).

Participatory communication draws on the Freirean ideal of dialogue, emphasizing mutual learning, problem-solving, and social transformation through engagement with local realities (Freire, 1970; Manyozo, 2020). Within this paradigm, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools have gained

prominence for their capacity to facilitate inclusive analysis, reflection, and action at the community level. Techniques such as mapping, ranking, and seasonal calendars enable participants especially women and other marginalized groups articulate priorities and co-develop locally relevant solutions (Chambers, 1997; Tacchi, Lennie, & Wilmore, 2021). Despite women's central roles in household welfare and community organization in many urban and rural communities, structural and cultural barriers often limit their access to decision-making and resources (Cornwall, 2016; Ojebode&Akinwale, 2019). Participatory communication offers a transformative approach for overcoming these exclusions by creating dialogic spaces where women's voices are heard and valued.

Dogarawa, a semi-urban community in SabonGari Local Government Area of Zaria, Kaduna State, provides a revealing context for exploring this dynamic. Examining how PLA tools can facilitate participatory learning and communication among women provides valuable insight into how dialogue, reflection, and collective action can contribute to inclusive local development. This study therefore explores the facilitation and impact of participatory learning and action tools among women in Dogarawa. It seeks to understand how participatory communication processes can enhance engagement, empowerment, and sustainable development outcomes at the grassroots.



Plate 1: Some of the Dogarawa community women

Statement of the Research Problem

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools were designed to reverse the conventional, top-down communication models which often neglect the knowledge, voices, and experiences of the very group that it aimed to empower. However, the extent to which PLA tools have been effectively facilitated and their actual impact on women's participation and empowerment in specific local contexts such as Dogarawa remains underexplored. While PLA methods have been introduced in some grassroots development projects, there is little empirical documentation of how these tools are facilitated, how women

engage with them, and what tangible impacts they produce on women's development communication practices and empowerment outcomes.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the process and impact of facilitating Participatory Learning and Action tools in development communication among women in Dogarawa community. It aims to fill the gap between theory and practice by examining the participatory process in real community settings, evaluating its effectiveness, and identifying factors that enhance or hinder women's active involvement and empowerment through participatory communication.

Participatory Learning and Action Tools in Development: A Review of Paradigms, Practices and Gendered Impacts in Nigeria

Over the past five decades, the field of development communication has shifted significantly from the top-down, modernization approach to more participatory, people-centered paradigms. Traditional approaches that viewed audiences as passive recipients of expert-driven information have been criticized for failing to achieve sustainable development outcomes (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Participatory communication, which emphasizes dialogue, mutual learning, and local ownership, emerged as a response to these limitations, reflecting the ideals of inclusivity and empowerment that underpin contemporary development discourse (Servaes, 2008). Within this context, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools have become a central method for operationalizing participatory communication in practice. This literature review synthesizes scholarship on participatory communication, PLA methodologies, and gendered participation to situate the Dogarawa experience within broader African development communication scholarship.

The early modernization paradigm, represented by theorists such as Lerner (1958) and Rogers (1962), conceptualized communication as a tool for transferring innovations from developed to developing societies. Critics argue that this "diffusion of innovations" model ignored local culture, agency, and power relations (Servaes, 2008). Paulo Freire's (1970) seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* transformed thinking about communication by emphasizing dialogue, conscientization, and collective empowerment. This participatory turn reframed development communication as a dialogic, horizontal process that privileges the voices and experiences of local communities (Manyozo, 2020).

By the 1980s, participatory communication gained recognition as a foundation for sustainable development (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Servaes (2008) and Manyozo (2020) emphasized that participation involves not merely consultation but genuine inclusion in decision-making and ownership of communication processes. In Nigeria, scholars such as Ojebode and Akinwale (2019) note that participatory approaches have achieved higher local acceptance and more context-specific outcomes compared to top-down communication models.

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) as a Communication Framework

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) extends these theoretical principles into practical, community-based action. Originating from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), PLA emphasizes iterative learning, local analysis, and empowerment (Chambers, 1997). Its methods; community mapping, ranking, timelines, and seasonal calendars etc. facilitate dialogue and collective planning (Mefalopulos, 2018). PLA assumes that development communication should emerge from within communities rather than being externally directed.

Empirical research supports PLA's potential for improving both communicative engagement and developmental outcomes. In public health, meta-analyses demonstrate that women's PLA groups can enhance maternal and newborn care practices, though outcomes vary by context (Tripathy et al., 2017). In Nigeria, participatory communication projects have successfully mobilized rural women for agricultural innovation and environmental awareness (Bassey & Etika, 2019). However, studies also caution that power

hierarchies, facilitator bias, and socio-cultural norms can constrain full participation, particularly for women (Gumucio-Dagron, 2019).

In this light, gender remains central to participatory communication discourse. Women in many Nigerian contexts face barriers to active participation due to cultural restrictions, limited literacy, and gendered divisions of labour (Cornwall, 2016). Participatory communication offers tools for redressing these inequalities by promoting dialogue that recognizes women's experiences as sources of knowledge (Tacchi, Lennie, & Wilmore, 2021). PLA, when applied sensitively, creates spaces for women to articulate needs, challenge norms, and co-create solutions (Ojo&Ojebode, 2023).

Recent empirical evidence reinforces these claims. Studies in Abuja and Cross River State found that women's participation in PLA-based communication increased both knowledge and community engagement on issues such as family planning and environmental management (Oseni, 2024; Bassey&Etika, 2019). Beyond knowledge acquisition, participatory spaces strengthened women's confidence to engage in public dialogue, transforming them from beneficiaries into facilitators of change. However, constraints persist—especially unequal power relations, limited follow-up, and resource scarcity—that may undermine long-term empowerment.

Despite notable progress, several gaps remain in existing literature. First, there is limited qualitative documentation of the *process* through which participatory tools function in communities where they were applied. Second, most studies measure behavioral or health outcomes but neglect communication and empowerment indicators such as self-efficacy, negotiation capacity, and decision-making influence (Manyozo, 2020). Third, few projects track long-term impacts after initial implementation. These gaps justify a field-based study like the Dogarawa experiment which not only documents participatory communication processes among women but also evaluates the tangible and intangible impacts of PLA engagement.

The reviewed scholarship underscores that participatory communication and PLA tools are powerful vehicles for locally driven development and gender empowerment. However, meaningful participation requires dismantling structural and cultural barriers that limit women's voices. The Dogarawa study contributes to this discourse by examining both the facilitation process and its measurable impacts, advancing understanding of how participatory communication fosters sustainable empowerment among women in Nigerian contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Participatory Communication Theory, which provides the philosophical and methodological foundation for understanding how communication can be used as a tool for empowerment, dialogue, and social transformation within development contexts. Participatory Communication Theory, inspired largely by the works of Paulo Freire (1970), emphasizes dialogue, conscientization, and collective action as essential elements of meaningful communication. Freire argued that genuine communication occurs through dialogue among equals, where participants critically reflect on their conditions and take action to change them. This participatory approach views people not as objects of development but as subjects and agents of change. Communication, therefore, becomes a process of empowerment and co-creation rather than transmission and persuasion.

Within this framework, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools embody the principles of participatory communication. They provide structured yet flexible methods through which communities can analyze their situations, express priorities, and design locally appropriate solutions (Chambers, 1997). In practical application, the PLA tools (e.g., transect walk, community mapping, pair wise ranking, focus groups) opened spaces for dialogue among Dogarawa women to discuss needs and solutions, by engaging

women as participants, not beneficiaries. Furthermore, the focus of this study on *process* and *impact* aligns with participatory theory's emphasis on how communication unfolds, not just outcomes and the community itself serves as a culturally specific setting, grounding theory in real-life practices and community norms. Lastly, the study measures how participatory engagement strengthens group initiatives, advocacy, and improved decision-making by women. Thus, PLA operationalizes participatory communication by transforming theory into practice at the community level.

In the context of this study, the Participatory Communication Theory explains both the process and impact of using PLA tools among women in Dogarawa community. It guides the analysis of how women engage in participatory dialogue, how communication flows horizontally among participants, and how such engagement fosters empowerment and collective action. The theory also provides a lens for evaluating how participatory approaches challenge traditional, hierarchical modes of development communication that often exclude women's perspectives. By situating this research within the participatory paradigm, the study contributes to the understanding of communication as a dynamic, inclusive, and transformative process in grassroots development.

The Dogarawa Development Communication Field Experience Community Profile

Dogarawa is a semi-urban community located within SabonGari Local Government Area (LGA) of Kaduna State, north-western Nigeria. Geographically, SabonGari lies between latitudes 10°90' and 11°30' N and longitudes 7°50' and 7°70' E, sharing proximity with the ancient city of Zaria (Department of Geography, Ahmadu Bello University [ABU], 2012). Dogarawa serves as administrative headquarters of the Sabon Gari LGA (ABU, 2012). Major ethnic groups include Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, and minority groups from southern Kaduna and neighboring states. Hausa is the lingua franca, while Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). Social life in Dogarawa is characterized by strong communal ties, market interactions, and cooperative societies, especially among women traders and artisans.

Dogarawa exhibits both rural and urban features, with livelihoods centered on petty trading, poultry farming, subsistence agriculture, and informal services (Journal of Agricultural and Applied Technology [JAAT], 2022). Dogarawa hosts key community institutions such as the Dogarawa Health Clinic and the Sakadadi Model Primary Health Centre, which provide basic healthcare services (The Hospital Book, 2023). Educational facilities include primary and secondary schools managed by the Kaduna State Universal Basic Education Board. Infrastructure such as roads and water systems remain underdeveloped (Radio Nigeria Kaduna, 2023). The community faces challenges related to sanitation, environmental management, and infrastructural neglect.

Given its mixed rural-urban character, Dogarawa provides a suitable environment for participatory learning and communication. These dynamics make Dogarawa a strategic field site for examining how participatory communication processes can translate into empowerment and tangible social change.

The Field Experiment

The Development Communication Project was necessitated as a result of the course Advanced Development Communication (THAP 420) offered by the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Part of the course requirements is for students to be able to experiment development communication initiatives in real life contexts, matching theory with practice for enhanced learning outcomes on the one hand and to be able to engage communities around the University and its environs towards positive change on the other. The project lasted five days, from 24th to 28th September,

2025. This year's Development Communication Project adopted the homestead approach against the migrant approach the Department had implemented in the last five years as a result of insecurity challenges.

The homestead approach entails practitioners to live within the community. This approach enhances the process of trust building between the community and the facilitators and allows facilitators observe of daily life in the communities. Direct and unobtrusive observation allowed room for the study of people and behaviour thereby providing useful insights into the study beyond asking questions. Since the process of observation does not need to be structured around a hypothesis or what to observe, this helped to gather emergent and accidental data. While the project covered broader issues within Dogawara, this paper. Most of the participants are from the lineage of the king. This community consist of 15 houses, 50 households and a total of 150 children. A group consisting of females only from the student group were assign to work with the community women. This was deliberate, to create "dialogical safe spaces" where women could express themselves freely and feel empowered to take action. 20 women from the community participated and there were eight student facilitators.

The group began with the transect walk around the community from *Gidan Sarki* to *Angwana Daboto* observe assets and challenges with the community. This was an opportunity for the student facilitators to understand the community for themselves, for the women to talk about their community from their perspectives and to invite other women to participate in the project. Ahupa (2021, p.63) observed that this collaborative nature of data gathering, where women encounter women: tell their own stories and experiences, has implication for the transformation of participants from objects to subjects of their own development. After the transect walk, the group returned to 'pictualise' what had been observed from the transect walk through transect mapping. The student facilitators thought it was wise to seat in the open, under a tree in front of the *GidanSarki* but the community women preferred not to, stating that they were shy of their husbands. The group crammed into a room to have the next session.

The perceived interpretation of the women 'feeling shy' is that the women were indirectly saying they needed a space to let their hair down without scrutiny from the men. Major concerns identified during the interrogation of the transect map include poor environmental sanitation and hygiene such as poor refuse disposal and poor drainage systems in households and streets, over grown bushes and water exposure. The implications of these included flooding, disease outbreak such as cholera and malaria, land erosion, and air pollution among others.

At this time, it became important to deploy some games and exercises to incorporate fun and childlike freedom during the session. For example, the game 'Fruit Salad' was adapted to 'Soup Ingredients' to fit the cultural context. This game required the women to name ingredients and condiments necessary to cook their popular soup, describe and demonstrate the shapes of the ingredient or condiment. For example, if a person mentioned 'pepper' the group would describe the shape using their bodies while singing. This was accompanied with a lot of laughter and clapping. Games and exercises allowed the women to break away from the norm, household welfare and domestic work to actually enjoy themselves for a brief moment. Games and exercises do not only help to uplift the spirit, they provide channels through which women can express themselves in the simplest, informal and unplanned manner. Games and exercises are an intricate part of PLA because they deepen the process, allow stakeholders participate on a level playground and solidify the interaction between the women in the community and the facilitators. Adapting the 'Fruit Salad' game into the 'Soup Ingredients' game highlights the ingenuity of PLA facilitators and the flexibility with which games and exercises can be used to suit various contexts, providing an array of lessons and benefits.



Plate2: Community women and facilitators enjoying a games and exercises session

The following day, the group moved into the compound of the *GidanSarki* to have their session. This provided more space and comfort as the women were at home. Here, the women drew their community map. Again, the major concern identified by the community map was the huge refuse dump, pointing to the fact that this was a serious challenge which seemed to get little attention from the community members. Dirty, stagnated water in drainages, some overflowing into the streets, were common sights. One of the participants, HajiyaSafiya Usman, a widow and patron of the orphanage in the community observed that this dump site was right in front of her house. She had complained some years ago but was bullied into silence. She got her son to intervene but he was almost beaten up too. Now she has to live with the ugly sight, stench and mosquitoes. They moved on to the Daily Activity Profile and Seasonal Calendar. What emerged from deploying these tools were that women spent a major part of their day and lives doing domestic chores; cooking, cleaning, taking care of the home and children. Some engaged in petty trade such as selling soup ingredients, vegetables, frying and selling tofu within the confines of their homes and some engaged in household livestock rearing. The women were dissatisfied with this life style. They said they wanted to earn reasonable income for themselves and do other economic and social activities other than domestic chores. However, they were restricted by culture and societal rules and norms. What was obvious

here is that the women in this community do not participate in decision making. The women stated that they required more support and understanding from the men.



Plate 3: The dump site in the community



Plate 4: A clogged drainage,



Plate 5: Stagnated Water

Following the interrogations of the community map and the accounts from the women, a focused group discussion was conducted to understand the varied perspective of the women concerning support from their husbands and men in the community. Some said that their husbands rarely gave them enough funds for food and other household items. Some said that some husbands were struggling to make ends meet but some other husbands were selfish. They provided very little resources at home but ate to their stomach's fill outside. Consuming noodles, tea, eggs, fish and meat which they could not provide at home even for growing children. Some said they still had to rely on their parents for food and other household items. Some said men in the community should not be allowed to marry more wives if he could not cater for his immediate family and some said men without financial stability or any source of income should not be allowed to get married. In the light of this, the women were advocating for the opportunity to be allowed to participate in economic activities to support their families.

Upon deploying the pairwise ranking tool to determine which concerns were most pressing, from four concerns listed (these included hygiene, theft, and diseases) more support for the women from men within the community was identified as the most pressing. Though the community is in dire need of environmental hygiene and sanitation, these were not the most pressing for the women. This further reveals how PLA tools can unpack several layers of conversations. Without the proper tools such as PLA, which allows people bare their hearts, important details in development interventions might be overlooked. As such, what might seem most obvious might not be the most pressing and if women were engaged alongside other community members, important information may be underexploited. The women decided to carry out an advocacy to the men without seeming confrontational or aggressive.

Drama and songs became top choices. Dialogues were created and actions accompanied them. Soon, scenes turned into a full-fledged drama skit. Songs were introduced to support scenes and accompany the action and message. Rehearsals were carried out and the women were ready with their advocacy. They wanted to perform in the arena! The arena in this specific context was the open field in front of the king's palace. This was very unusual. What was common especially in communities like this is that women performed in the confines of the home, maybe the house or compound of the women leader or any agreed upon space, alongside female facilitators because married women were not expected to 'expose' themselves in such a manner. The young, unmarried women, teenagers and children were allowed to do so, in the arena. But these were married women, challenging the norm. Women, who a few days ago were "shy" to discuss in the open, choosing to perform in the open. Husbands and elders granted permission, and the women performed in the arena, and beautifully too, even though they chose not to face the area in the arena where the king, his cabinet members and their husbands sat because they were too shy to look them in the face. This was a huge milestone. Yes, the women had become so empowered to take action.

The Drama Performance

The scene opens with MamanTukunya (Tukunya's mother), faced with financial hardship due to her husband's unemployment. She seeks help from her friend MamanChokali (Chokali's mother), to start a petty trade, to sell boiled groundnuts. MamanChokali refers her to MamanGoruba, who offers her a loan, emphasizing the importance of women supporting one another. She returns home and for the first time, she notices how unkempt her house and its surrounding is. The matter of poor hygiene and sanitation within the community and households is raised and discussed with the community women leader. MamanTukunya starts her business and sends her daughter to hawk boiled groundnuts within the neighbourhood. The young girl is accosted by a man, under the guise of buying groundnut. She flees. On her way home she stumbles upon her father in a tea shop enjoying a meal of noodles, boiled and fried eggs with tea, despite his claims of not having money. Apparently, he has been visiting restaurants and taking good care of himself. Feeling betrayed, MamanTukunya threatens to leave the marriage on the grounds of deceit. The community women visit MamanTukunya, encourage her to be patient but stress the need for men in the community to fulfill their obligations to their families. The performance ends with a sensitization on better hygiene and communal responsibility.

Drama offered them an avenue to humanise their concerns, share their concerns and perspectives with the community and advocate for improved outcomes. The usage of the names such as Tukunya (meaning pot), Chokali (meaning spoon), Goruba (a medicinal fruit and sweetener) elicited laughter among the spectators. This served the purpose of creating a non-judgmental atmosphere upon which the women conveyed salient messages to the men and community at large. The utensils and fruits symbolize different personality traits and skills among the women who must come together to cook a meal, which is the developmental outcome of their collective input. Some of the women also had the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents, by spontaneously creating dialogue, actions, songs and music. A captivating moment during the performance was when a group of women created music by immersing calabashes into water. As they tapped on the calabashes, a variety of sounds were produced. More so, other participatory methods such

as storytelling and drama can and have been built into the Participatory Learning and Action process. This symbiotic relationship makes it possible to deepen the experience.



Plate 6: Some of the community women make music during their performance

Thus, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools play a vital role in community development by empowering the women to discuss their own development in a non-threatening manner and develop skills which they can apply to analyse concerns and carryout advocacies. PLA tools employed have encouraged the incorporation of local knowledge and perspectives, leading to more realistic, effective and relevant solutions to community problems. More so, PLA strengthened the capacity of the community women to analyse their situations, make decisions, and take action, empowering them to address future challenges. This also translates to the fact that PLA promoted collaboration and communication among community women, fostering social cohesion and a sense of collective responsibility. This highlights the core principles of the Participatory Communication theory which include voice, dialogue, reflection and action. The community women as well as the student facilitators, have been able to interact, share and exchange ideas, empower themselves, taken a second look at their situations and looked for ways forward.

Impact, Challenges and Ways Forward

Following this implementation, the community women as well as the student facilitators had learned valuable lessons and gained some skills. Some participants share their experience from the project. For example, HumaimatuAliyu observed that through this process, “I have been able to overcome shyness, learn effective communication skills and practice active listening. I have also learnt how to be assertive without being abrasive. I have improved my public speaking skill too.”Bilkisu Muhammad, a petty trader, noted that “I am currently separated from my husband. Participating in the project has given me the opportunity to re-evaluate myself. I am so happy and I have learnt a lot. I learnt the importance of being patient especially with one’s spouse, whether he provides food or not. I will do my best to continue building on the knowledge and skills I have learnt.”Kahimatu Ismail, another women from the community said: “I have been reminded of the need for good personal and environmental hygiene which I have taken for granted. Henceforth, I will take proper care of my environment, home, children and the general wellbeing

of my family.”Lop’an Joseph Maktu, one of the student facilitators affirms that: “communities are more responsive when they are actively involved in identifying their own needs and solutions rather than being passive recipients. I also agree that field realities may not always align with pre-planned strategies and development communication succeeds when facilitators foster genuine relationships with the community.”

Another student facilitator Joy Abraham said that: “I have learnt first-hand that facilitating PLA requires open mindedness to learn and to be teachable by the community members and your team mates. More so, the homestead experience taught me the importance of tolerance, love, survival and teamwork.” Mercy Igashi, a student facilitator said: I learnt that perspectives matter, just like the E, M, W, 3 game that was taught during the workshop. What is true to you may be absurd to another and what is absurd to you may be true to another. I have learnt to be more proactive and spontaneous because these skills will help in times when situations do not turn out as planned. I also realized that most times, the community members are aware of their issues and problems. They just need a little push to actually take the required actions.”These perspectives from the community women and the student facilitators highlight key empowerment indicators such as self-efficacy, negotiation capacity, and ability to influence decision making in a non-abrasive manner which Manyozo (2020) observed as gaps in assessing the impact of PLA interventions among women.

Carrying out bottom-up interventions in development communication using participatory methodologies such as PLA are not without challenges. There are human, financial and environmental challenges among others, to be surmounted. Many semi-urban communities like Dogawara that have benefitted from similar programmes especially those funded by NGOs often confuse academic exercises for such. As such, participation may wane when some community members realise there will be not financial incentives for participation. In this particular context, the population of women who showed up on the first day had dropped by a significant number on the second day when they realized that ‘gifting’ was not part of the project. This of course affected the general turn of women within the community but did not stop the initiative. While it would have been beneficial if more women within the community participated, it further pointed to areas that may need to be considered in future outings.

Being an academic endeavor, the project lasted for five days. This means that the facilitating team and the community women were hard-pressed which led to exhaustion. More time is required for field experiments such as this, to allow for steady paced engagements which may be more beneficial.

Conclusion

This study has explored the process and impact of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools within the framework of development communication among women in Dogarawa community. By engaging women through inclusive and dialogic methods such as transect walk, community mapping, focus group discussions, and role-play, the study illustrates how PLA tools can stimulate critical consciousness, enhance collective agency, and deepen local ownership of development initiatives.

The Dogarawa experience demonstrates that development communication transcends information dissemination, it becomes a dynamic process of mutual learning, negotiation, and empowerment. The participatory encounters provided spaces for women to articulate their lived realities, challenge socio-cultural barriers, and co-create solutions that resonate with their contextual needs. These outcomes underscore the transformative potential of participatory methodologies in fostering gender-sensitive and community-driven development. Nevertheless, the process also revealed persistent constraints, including limited literacy, entrenched patriarchal norms, and the need for sustained facilitation to consolidate gains. Addressing these challenges requires continuous engagement, capacity building, and institutional support to ensure that participation translates into tangible and enduring transformation.

In conclusion, the Dogarawa experience reaffirms the relevance of participatory learning and action as both a methodological and ideological paradigm for inclusive communication and sustainable development. When embedded in local realities and guided by mutual respect and dialogue, PLA tools serve as catalysts for social change, positioning women not as passive recipients but as co-authors of their own development narratives.

References

- Ahmadu Bello University (ABU). (2012). Studies on quality of life and environmental conditions in SabonGari Local Government Area. Department of Geography, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Ahupa, M. (2021). An experimental application of the theatre for development framework for peace building in Jol/Ropp communities in Plateau State, Nigeria (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Bassey, C., & Etika, A. (2019). Participatory communication and sustainable community development in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Development Communication*, 30(1), 45–58.
- Beltrán, L. R. (1976). Alien premises, objects, and methods in Latin American communication research. In E. M. Rogers (Ed.), *Communication and development: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 15–42). Sage.
- Chambers, R. (1994). Participatory rural appraisal: Challenges, potentials and paradigm. *World Development*, 22(10), 1437–1454.
- Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*. Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's empowerment: What works? *Journal of International Development*, 28(3), 342–359.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gumucio-Dagron, A. (2001). *Making waves: Stories of participatory communication for social change*. Rockefeller Foundation.
- Gumucio-Dagron, A. (2019). Communication for social change: Historical and contemporary trends. *Development in Practice*, 29(5), 543–555.
- Journal of Agricultural and Applied Technology (JAAT). (2022). Socio-economic analysis of poultry farmers in SabonGari Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Federal University Dutsin-Ma.
- Manyozo, L. (2020). *Communicating development with communities*. Routledge.
- Melkote, S. R., & Steeves, H. L. (2015). *Communication for development: Theory and practice for empowerment and social justice* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Mefalopulos, P. (2018). *Development communication sourcebook: Broadening the boundaries of communication*. World Bank.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2020). *Demographic and socio-economic survey of Kaduna State*. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics.

- Ojebode, A., & Akinwale, A. (2019). Community participation and sustainability in Nigerian development communication projects. *African Communication Research*, 12(2), 89–108.
- Ojo, T., & Ojebode, A. (2023). Gendered participation and empowerment through communication for development in Nigeria. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 15(1), 12–27.
- Oseni, O. (2024). Participatory communication approaches for family planning knowledge and practice in FCT-Abuja. *Covenant Journal of Communication*, 11(1), 56–73.
- Radio Nigeria Kaduna. (2023, January 5). Metropolitan authority spends over N1.4 billion on roads in Zaria and SabonGari LGAs. Retrieved from <https://www.radionigeriakaduna.gov.ng>
- Servaes, J. (1996). Communication for development in a multicultural world: Beyond universal models. In J. Servaes, T. L. Jacobson, & S. A. White (Eds.), *Participatory communication for social change* (pp. 6–22). Sage.
- Servaes, J. (1999). *Communication for development: One world, multiple cultures*. Hampton Press.
- Servaes, J. (2008). *Communication for development and social change*. SAGE.
- Tacchi, J., Lennie, J., & Wilmore, M. (2021). *Communication for empowerment: Participatory approaches to social change*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- The Hospital Book. (2023). Dogarawa Health Clinic and Sakadadi Model Primary Health Centre, SabonGari. Retrieved from <https://www.thehospitalbook.com>
- Tripathy, P., Nair, N., Barnett, S., Mahapatra, R., Borghi, J., Rath, S., ... Costello, A. (2017). Effect of women's participatory learning and action groups on birth outcomes in rural South Asia. *The Lancet Global Health*, 5(2), e119–e133.