Special Issue Reprint

Reconceptualising Communication for Development

A Critical Appraisal of the Field

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Perspective

Reconceptualising Communication for Development: An Introduction

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Abstract: Communication plays a crucial role in driving social change. Communication for Development (C4D) is a field that highlights the importance of communication in development, concentrating on how to effectively use a diverse range of media and communication channels that enable the inclusion, expression, and exchange of different voices in the development process in order to bring about social transformation. Over the past few decades, C4D has undergone both an evolution and a revolution in its approaches and methods. This has led to the growth of a distinctive and at the same time diverse field, both theoretically and in practical forms. This Special Issue reviews critically the reconceptualisation of C4D that has progressively occurred and from which an interesting and at times contested landscape has emerged. It presents a range of both scholarly and practical perspectives that provide a comprehensive account of what the field has to offer today. This essay provides both a conceptual and historical introduction to the collection of articles included in this Issue and positions them within the new propositions and methods of the present-day field of C4D.

Keywords: communication for development; participatory communication

1. Introduction

Communication plays a crucial role in driving social change. Communication for Development (C4D) is a field that highlights the importance of communication in development, concentrating on how to effectively use a diverse range of media and communication channels that enable the inclusion, expression, and exchange of different voices in the development process in order to bring about social transformation. For many, this practice now also provides a set of tools to engage in a dialogic form of communication for social justice.

Over the past few decades, C4D has undergone both an evolution and a revolution in its approaches and methods. This has led to the growth of a distinctive and at the same time diverse field, both theoretically and in practical forms. Firstly, this field has established itself both as a notable academic discipline and as a conceptual framework for rethinking participation and inclusion in development. At the same time, on-the-ground application has extended and expanded into multiple sub-realms, which have seen the institutionalisation of different areas of C4D practice.

The field of development communication is inherently complex. It involves the intersection of two multidisciplinary areas—communication and development—while aiming to facilitate the intricate process of social change. This complexity is further heightened by the constantly evolving nature of the field, where new ideas are continuously introduced and often challenge or contradict existing ones. As a result, the field is shaped by a variety

of ideas that can be both viable and unworkable, depending on factors such as context, culture, and other variables that influence individuals and communities (Salem 2022).

Communication and information are fundamental not only in everyday life but also at the heart of central theories and models across various disciplines. The goal extends beyond simply understanding communication in its current form: it also involves critically assessing environments through a communication lens. To effectively address societal issues, communication research must adapt its perspectives and methods to actively intervene in society, combat inequalities, and contribute to creating environments where nations and individuals can thrive based on their own efforts. It is essential to develop approaches that evaluate contexts from a communicative standpoint, focusing on the interactions between key actors who shape these environments, and understanding how relationships among these actors are constructed and evolve. This approach will help create more equitable, inclusive, and empowering conditions for development and social progress (Diago 2019). As Dutta (2018) has argued, we need to regard communication

> '[. . .] as voice in resistance to the neoliberal formations of development by hegemonic state, market and civil society actors emerges from the margins, continually attending to the practices of erasure that produce the margins and seeking to undo these erasures'. (p. 88)

Further to that, as the global focus has shifted from traditional development, which adopted a rapid problem-solving often decontextualised from its broader reality, to sustainable development, aimed at setting in motion mechanisms that consider the long-term consequences on a community, the media landscape has also been evolving, reshaping the media's role in the process. This evolution has necessitated the creation of new roles for the media and the development of innovative communication approaches that support sustainability-driven solutions (Salem 2022). The goal has also been to challenge conventional methods of programme design, implementation, and monitoring, with the aim of enhancing the impact and sustainability of international development initiatives. This is particularly relevant in programmes focused on behaviour development and change, such as those coordinated by UNICEF, where new approaches seek to ensure more effective and lasting outcomes in improving the wellbeing of communities (Servaes and Malikhao 2020). At the same time, what has been required includes a reframing of communication as a transdisciplinary concept, whose role must be observed through the lens of a complex prism that assists in the formation of different points of analysis, which keep this field relevant to contemporary development processes. This is how C4D has advanced.

2. Steps Forward

The very first iteration of Communication for Development aimed to achieve positive social change through media and education in a rather linear way (McPhail 2009). This approach to knowledge transfer is linked to communication models derived from Modernisation theory, which typically employ a top-down method of communication and development. With time, C4D interventions have shifted away from solely concentrating on individual behaviour, a focus common in many past initiatives, and have instead adopted a more comprehensive, intersectoral perspective. In practice, this transition has involved evaluating all the factors necessary for change and determining how communication can address those factors, and which ones it can impact (Mefalopulos 2018).

Generally, there is now broader agreement on the value of a participatory approach, which emphasises local ownership of development through active community involvement. A participatory approach in Communication for Development wants to empower individuals and foster social change through societal transformation (Servaes and Malikhao 2008). This process takes place through a dialogical form of communication, which involves

sharing diverse perspectives, values, cultures, and experiences among participants (Otto and Fourie 2017). Dialogue is viewed as a continuous process of reflection that encourages participants to critically assess their own situations, recognise challenges, and develop solutions collaboratively (Otto and Fourie 2017; Polk and Servaes 2015). It also emphasises cultural sensitivity by integrating indigenous knowledge, traditional beliefs and cultural symbols into development strategies tailored to specific communities (Cahyono 2019). Participants are encouraged to be actively involved throughout the entire development process, from initial decision-making to final implementation, and in the monitoring and evaluation phases (Servaes and Malikhao 2008). In this Communication for Development approach, the exchange of information, dialogue, and different cultural practices is considered an essential step in the empowerment process, and not simply a way to achieve predetermined objectives (Bezuidenhout and Fourie 2023).

This, in turn, goes with the recognition that most rural people receive information about new technologies not through the media but through friends, family, neighbours and colleagues in related fields. As Servaes and Malikhao (2020) have posited, 'communication, media and ICTs are important tools in achieving social change, but their use is not an end in itself. Interpersonal communication, traditional and group media must also play a fundamental role' (p. 20). This is why, when using indigenous communication methods, it is important to explore rural environments to understand the traditional ways of passing on information, skills, beliefs, values and heritage from one generation to the next. indigenous communication can only be effective when it combines the indigenous knowledge of the community with the new information being shared through these traditional channels. For communication to bring transformation here, the participation of Indigenous people is crucial, and it goes beyond merely accepting the ideas transmitted through these channels. These factors are key to the success of indigenous Communication for Development initiatives (Mbakogu 2015).

More recently, technological progress and digitisation have significantly impacted the field of communication. Emerging digital platforms offer a fresh, non-linear model for development communication, moving away from the traditional one-way or top-down approaches. These platforms enable dynamic, interactive, and multi-directional communication, as well as diverse forms of citizen involvement (Tufte 2013). They have also created opportunities for marginalised communities to actively contribute to their nation's development, while strengthening the capacity of citizens and non-governmental organisations to participate in media advocacy (Salem 2022).

The C4D framework has been widely applied to examine various Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) initiatives, including telecentres, village phone programmes, e-health, e-government kiosks, and others. It has been used to establish a clear link between communication technology interventions and their impact on development-related behavioural changes. Communication interventions involving ICTs cover areas such as access to and exchange of information, knowledge creation, open access to knowledge, strategic communication, and the development of information and communication infrastructure and technologies. ICT interventions enhance knowledge, which is expected to improve individual productivity, thus contributing positively to the development of both individuals and organisations (Hoque et al. 2016).

Building on the progress highlighted thus far, this Special Issue offers a comprehensive range of perspectives on C4D that span from feminist theories, communication for social change, health communication, rural communication, indigenous forms of communication, social movements, social media and ICTs. The following section brings to light the distinctiveness of each contribution, reminding the reader of the abundant opportunities

for research inquiries in this area that can bring about significant input and critical analysis for the broader field.

3. The Diverse and Rich Facets of Communication for Development Today

The work produced for this Special Issue reviews critically the reconceptualisation of C4D that has progressively occurred, and from which an interesting and at times contested landscape has emerged. It presents a range of both scholarly and practical perspectives that provide a comprehensive account of what the field has to offer today. Through the work of scholars as well as research partners, this collection celebrates the advances in this field and the diverse array of approaches that have come to drive both the study and the practical design of communication in development contexts.

Through theory. Theorising in Communication for Development provides a framework for understanding the complex processes through which communication contributes to social change. Theories in C4D guide both practice and research, helping to shape strategies but also conceptual approaches that are relevant to current debates and future applications. In this context, Wilkin's, Tufte's and Govender's writings (this issue) contribute distinctive inquiries to this review of the field, which illuminate the multifaceted nature of C4D and demonstrate its significance across different realms of study.

Wilkins critiques the narrative that celebrates digital technologies as tools for enhancing participatory governance, entrepreneurship, and collective activism, offering a feminist perspective that highlights the political and economic factors shaping access to voice, the ability to listen, and opportunities for dialogue. This analysis views mediated communication not as a mirror reflecting existing realities but as a prism that shapes both our opportunities and challenges in driving social change. To create meaningful change, Wilkins argues, we must remain accountable to social justice, using critical assessments and informed discussions to pave the way for more effective communication for social transformation. A critical evaluation of feminist perspectives provides a valuable framework for rethinking our understanding of development and the role communication can play in effective interventions. Over time, Communication for Development has evolved from neglecting women's issues to acknowledging gender differences in experiences. It has also highlighted the importance of participatory processes. Yet, current strategies are still falling short in both effectiveness and ethical considerations. Wilkins urges how, at this point, it is crucial to take further steps to foster a more humanitarian approach to C4D that can guide institutional practices in both programmes and research.

Tufte draws attention to the growing call, among communication and development scholars, for pedagogies aimed at social change, highlighting forms of resistance, critique, and new practices emerging in the field. His review article engages with a 'pedagogical turn', arguing that it is within these pedagogies that we can find pathways to unlearn and relearn communication for social change. Through a decolonial analytical lens, the article tackles what defines these critical pedagogies and how these can contribute to an unlearning and relearning within the field of communication and social change. Tufte discusses the implications of unlearning through critical pedagogies for redefining the field of communication and social change by suggesting critical areas for future research.

Govender explores the interdisciplinary perspectives that combine principles from Communication for Development and social change with public health, through a process of divergence and convergence that leads to new ways of thinking about decision-making. A central theme in this discourse is viewing many health issues as development challenges first, recognising the importance of community responses during pandemics, while simultaneously empowering individuals to make informed decisions. This approach to health

communication, which the author refers to as Communicating for Health-as-Development (C4HD), emphasises health as a form of development, addressing the complex, one-way, non-process-oriented, and often non-data-driven aspects of health outcomes. Real development, Govender argues, occurs through "messy" health communication efforts. Using examples from HIV and COVID-19, her paper highlights ongoing developments in the field and the convergence of public health and Communication for Development, while celebrating interdisciplinarity.

From the practice. Practical applications in the field of Communication for Development are critical to include the voices of those who hold local knowledge and expertise to tackle development-related problems. As expounded previously, this aspect of the field has been conceptualised over the years through the participatory communication paradigm that has accompanied the evolution of C4D. Authors such as Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) and Servaes and Lie (2013), amongst others, have discussed how enabling communities to participate in and drive development processes starts with communication.

In this Special Issue, Cardey, Eleazar, Ainomugisha, Kalowekamo and Vlasenko have explored what rural development means today in the context of environmental change and how this, in turn, reshapes the conceptualisation and practice of C4D. Rural areas around the world are undergoing significant changes, often marked by heightened vulnerability to climate and environmental shifts, extreme weather events, conflict, socio-economic changes, inequalities, and demographic transitions. These transformations are putting pressure on rural communities, whose livelihoods depend on agriculture and natural resources. Communication for Development has played a key role in addressing these challenges by introducing tools to work directly with these communities in a way that is inclusive and takes into account their concerns and practical solutions. These authors introduce case studies from Malawi, Ukraine and the Philippines—countries that represent contrasting rural development and environmental change challenges—to offer lessons that provide valuable insights into C4D thinking and practice.

Herrera-Huérfano, Ochoa-Almanza and Sanz's contribution to this Special Issue suggests rethinking communication, development and social change through a decolonial lens, using the case study of the Ticoya resguardo in Colombia. The oral traditions of Indigenous elders shape a history of the land, positioning orality as a practice of communicative and cognitive justice that challenges the dominant frameworks of the nation-state. The article analyses border tensions both as a tangible reality between Colombia and Peru, and as a metaphor for identity struggles. The theoretical framework applied by these authors draws on debates surrounding post-development, the pluriverse, and Southern epistemologies, questioning social inequalities. In this distinctive reality, the creation of a radio series plays a central role in capturing elders' stories through conversations, social mapping, and storytelling. Herrera-Huérfano, Ochoa-Almanza and Sanz (this issue) delineate how, once linear narratives are broken, an understanding of territory transcends state borders and identity struggles among river communities. Through the case of the Ticoya resguardo, and with an emphasis on the need for a decolonial approach to communication, these authors elucidate how communicative justice can elevate local and everyday experiences.

Dyll and Tomaselli (this issue) explore the role of communication in local and indigenous cultures in relation to development initiatives. These scholars draw on the example of the !Xaus Lodge, a cultural tourism project in the South African Kalahari desert that is community-owned, state-funded and privately operated, to demonstrate how C4D strategies, informed by 'applied cultural studies', can empower local communities to drive development and mutual understanding. Their contribution to this Special Issue shows how these strategies can navigate the complexities of diverse stakeholder interests, cultural backgrounds, and worldviews in a specific geographic context. Dyll and Tomaselli offer

a unique perspective on Communication for Development, arguing that when viewed through a cultural studies lens, this practice enhances the potential for democratisation and participation in community-driven development and social change processes. Together with 'applied cultural studies', C4D can foster agency by providing opportunities for voice and self-representation in social interventions. The authors bring to light how this cultural studies approach—originally rooted in the Birmingham School, influenced by Marxist development theory, and first adopted during the South African anti-apartheid struggle to develop cultural strategies—has now been applied to indigenise research practices in the southern Kalahari.

On reflecting further. The multifaceted nature of Communication for Development opens up spaces to reflect on and reconceptualise this field from less demarcated perspectives. Contributions in this area bring to light the potential of C4D that is still untapped, and present ways in which the application of a C4D lens to diverse inquiries can lead to compelling outcomes.

Noske-Turner, Sivaram, Kalley and Hiremath (this issue) have argued here that using social media for social change effectively requires adopting a "hacker" mindset to develop strategies that subvert, resist, and adapt the logic of these platforms, alongside an ecological approach to understanding media and communication. This contribution utilises the idea of metaphors to provide a practical framework to give shape to these concepts. The current era of digital capitalism presents challenges for Communication for Development, both in theory and practice: on the one hand, mainstream social media platforms have become an integral part of the daily media practices for an increasing number of people worldwide; on the other hand, the profit-driven nature of these platforms often makes them hostile environments for discussions aimed at progressive social change. These authors delve into civil society organisations' use of capitalist-driven social media platforms in their development and social change work, and into the challenges and compromises they face, whether consciously or unconsciously. This critical exploration draws on insights from workshops held with IT for Change, a non-governmental organisation in India that critiques the political and economic dominance of Big Tech in the Global South.

Pathak-Shelat and Bhatia (this issue) analyse the neoliberal framework of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) as a model that imposes oversimplified and linear notions of empowerment and development on users from the Global South. Focusing on the rapidly expanding EdTech sector in India, this contribution questions the role of EdTech as a transformative solution for countries like India, which face the challenge of educating their large population. Drawing on immersive ethnographic research with youth from low-income families in three Indian cities—Ahmedabad, Delhi and Vadodara—this work wants to highlight how young people's interactions with EdTech resist this standardisation. The analysis put forward identifies three key factors that shape how low-income students and families perceive and engage with the promises of access, equity, and quality made by EdTech companies and governments: issues of access and autonomy, the continued importance of place-based learning and in-person interactions, and disparities in the quality and rigor of content. The importance of considering the socio-economic and cultural contexts of young learners in the Global South is brought to light, with an emphasis on the needs that learners have towards personalised, place-based experiences; mentorship; high academic achievements, and face-to-face interactions that are juxtaposed to the one-size-fits-all solutions. These authors contend that young people are presently unable to fully benefit both from these experimental DIY practices and from the tech-driven learning opportunities offered by these platforms; this is due to the fact that EdTech, in its current form, does not fully meet these needs.

Ayres, Vega-Casanova and Cabrera (this issue) discuss how, following the advancements in civil and human rights during the twentieth century, social movements have come to be seen as key agents of social change. Even Oyedemi (2018) observes that 'social movements can be understood as formations through which a collective voice is projected for social change' (p. 10). Yet, as underscored by this contribution, certain citizen mobilisations are not always aimed at driving social transformations that benefit the most marginalised groups. Examples of these are the acts of vandalism that targeted public institutions in Brazil in January 2023, the anti-democratic mobilisations that occurred in Colombia in opposition to the peace agreement with its Revolutionary Armed Forces FARC, and the strifes that took place in Chile against a proposed, more inclusive constitution. Worldwide, anti-democracy movements and those opposing human rights are gaining momentum, negatively impacting the realities in which organisations advocating for excluded groups operate. In contrast to this, Latin American approaches to social and behaviour change (SBC) stress the importance of engaging in social movements to promote social justice and form alliances that amplify the voices of those most affected by a lack of justice, while respecting the organic nature of citizen-led actions. This essay explores questions that address the contrast between the popular roots and the hegemonic interests of social movements, looking both at how the Latin American tradition of social movement theory and practice can inform strategies for effective social change, and at SBC strategies' contribution to this through combating anti-human rights movements while empowering social movements that advocate for inclusion.

4. Concluding Remarks

The field of Communication for Development has undergone significant transformation over the decades, evolving from early top-down models to more participatory, interactive, culturally sensitive, and even technology-driven approaches. This shift reflects broader changes in society that have redefined the ways in which communication is conducted and how social change is pursued. Today, communication is seen as a tool for empowerment, collaboration, and collective action, rather than merely a means for information dissemination.

Current theories and methods such as feminist perspectives, critical pedagogy, participatory and indigenous communication, health-based approaches to communication, behaviour change, ICT4D and social movements, align closely with the practices of C4D in emphasising reflection, collaboration and mutual learning. This also reflects an understanding of the importance of local knowledge and context in driving meaningful social change.

At the same time, as this Special Issue underscores, the challenges of inequality, misinformation and power dynamics persist, highlighting the need for continued innovation in theory and practice. The future of C4D is expected to produce further strategies and conceptual ideas that are adaptable, inclusive, and capable of addressing both local and global challenges. As we move forward, the field will continue to evolve, guided by an ongoing commitment to social justice, inclusiveness, and the transformative power of communication in creating a better future.

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Article

The Feminist Gaze on Communication for Social Change

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Abstract: A critical appraisal of the field of feminist approaches offers a valuable critical lens to help reshape our conceptualizations of development and the roles communication may play in constructive intervention. Development communication has shifted over time from ignoring and obscuring women to recognizing gendered differences in experiences. Development approaches have also brought participatory processes into focus. However, our strategic initiatives still fall short, both in effectiveness and in ethics. At this juncture, we need to take next steps more seriously in order to promote a more humanitarian approach that would guide institutional practices in programs and research. In this article, I aim to critique the discourse that celebrates digital technologies as tools to promote participatory governance, entrepreneurship, and collective activism through a feminist gaze that privileges the political and economic contexts that condition access to voice, the capacity to listen, and potential for dialog. This analysis builds on an understanding of mediated communication as a prism rather than as a projected mirror, structuring our potential as well as our challenges in creating constructive social change. We need to be accountable toward social justice, relying on our critical appraisals and informed dialogs to create paths to stronger and more impactful communication for social change.

Keywords: development; social change; communication; digital media; gender; feminist critique

1. Introduction

Despite the well-intentioned and expertly crafted strategic communication interventions designed to resolve serious contemporary concerns, many development programs fail to achieve significant social change (Hornik 1988). While credible evaluation research on outcomes contributes to our ability to improve programs, we also need creative conceptualizations, based on critical analyses, to expand our assessments to include attention to processes and contexts. The purpose of this article is to offer a feminist critique that will contribute to constructive prescriptions to advance social justice.

Before moving to an argument stating that the field of development communication would benefit from revision, I articulate the study of social change in relation to development intervention and the role of communication within the planning, execution, and discourse of strategic intervention. Development represents a path toward social change enacted through the work of agencies and communities with strategic intent to promote public benefit through defined intervention. Reconceptualizing development means exploring how communication serves to support as well as limit strategic initiatives. In this discussion, I move from considering communication broadly, as a narrative as well as a process, to communication more specifically being mediated through digital technologies.

By focusing on gender within the broader field of development communication, development discourse has shifted its representation from an absence of women to a commodified and objectified portrayal, addressing relevant critiques that gendered differences contribute to the experiences that challenge social justice. In considering process, communication scholarship may have given credence to participatory approaches in social change, but without dialogic communication, our efforts fall short both in effectiveness and in ethics. In this article, I explore how a feminist gaze focusing on the potential as well as problems

of mediated communication brings into play dialogic approaches to communication for social change.

The critical appraisal offered is guided by a vision promoted through a feminist gaze, meant to light a humanitarian approach that is concerned with social justice. Feminist perspectives offer a valuable critical lens to help witness our world, articulate our approaches, and strengthen strategic intervention. The term "feminist gaze" subverts concern with what Mulvey (1975) identified as a "male gaze", particularly relevant in discussions of media representation considering how characters and their characterizations are produced from a masculine, heteronormative perspective. Through a feminist gaze, then, we may begin to appropriate the conditions of media production to improve our contribution to strategic social change. Ultimately, we want to rely on our visions and our voices for expression; in addition, we want to mobilize collective engagement in the creation of mediated intervention to activate strategic social change.

A feminist gaze builds on a critical and humanitarian approach to guide institutional practices in development programs and communication research. I critique the discourse that celebrates digital technologies as tools to promote participatory governance, entrepreneurship, and collective activism through a feminist lens that accentuates the political and economic contexts that condition access to voice, the capacity to listen, and the potential for dialog. This analysis builds on an understanding of mediated communication as a prism rather than as a projected mirror, structuring our potential to create constructive social change. The framework of a mediated prism allows us to explore the complexities engaged in producing and reviewing the stories that are created to explain contemporary concerns and their proposed resolutions, relying on a metaphor that recognizes the prejudices that filter our fear and our understanding of the world (Wilkins 2021).

This critical appraisal concludes with suggestions for reconceptualizing the field of development communication. We need to be accountable toward social justice, relying on our critical analyses and informed dialogs to create paths to stronger and more impactful communication for social change.

2. Communication for Social Change

In this section, I offer an overview of communication for social change in order to advocate critical analysis and creative revisioning. Social change as an area of research and practice includes strategic intervention implemented through organizations and agencies and mobilized through collective social movements. Building from interdisciplinary approaches in the social sciences, scholars describe varied justifications and aspirations, enabled through different interventions, contexts, and communities. Whether orchestrated through formally defined organizations or informally motivated groups, these campaigns are strategic in intent, aiming toward achieving collective claims for public benefit.

While social change represents a comprehensive approach to the study of strategic intervention, whether produced through the work of development organizations or collectively mobilized communities, the goals pursued encompass a broad set of interests, ranging from individual behavior change, such as health practices, to social justice, considering the conditions that exacerbate inequities (Gallagher 2011; Sen 2000). While attention to development focuses on programs engaged by formal bilateral and multilateral agencies, along with private and public agencies explicitly promoting defined interventions, scholars began to broaden this field to include the work of social movements and community programs, in addition to development work, under the broader heading of "social change" (Wilkins et al. 2014).

Communication becomes relevant to the practice and process of social change as a way of structuring movements and interventions, understanding contexts of problems, and targeting solutions. Communication helps achieve strategic social change in various ways, whether as a technology or platform to work toward development goals, as mediated content in cultural contexts, or as intervention mobilizing collective action or advocating for policy change.

Communication scholarship devoted to the service of institutional development programs informs an approach known as "development communication", guiding the strategic use of communication to achieve development goals funded and implemented by formal development agencies. Within the field of development communication, research has contributed to the planning and assessment of program implementation, when communication is meant to be a tool "for" development. In this vein of scholarship, communication may be studied as an intentional text, such as a short-form video or lengthier entertainment–education program, through planned communication and mediated platforms. Goals may include creating strategic campaigns that are integral to a wide range of communities, inviting attention and, at times, attempting to inspire individual, normative, or institutional change.

In addition to strategies focusing on communication for development, critical scholars have raised attention about the way communication contributes to a discourse "about" development, referencing the implicit ways communication reinforces our social distinctions in comparison to the explicit ways communication may be designed to resolve social differences. Another way communication matters to the work of development references the explicit public relations designed to raise the visibility of programs and credibility of donors (Pamment and Wilkins 2018). These then represent explicit strategies not designed to reach communities that are meant to be engaged for social change, but instead, the publics and audiences aligned with donors, so that development agencies and agents may "look good" while "doing good" (Enghel and Noske-Turner 2018; Kogen 2018; Wilkins 2018). This strategic work to promote public appearance draws attention to agencies, celebrities, and donors championing social causes.

3. Dialogic Communication for Social Change

Communication then may work for development to support implementation for defined objectives or toward attempting to raise the reputation of donor agencies and individuals. The process of engaging development invites attention to the potential for participation in determining concerns, reserving resources, and directing response. Participatory approaches to development are designed to enhance the effectiveness of intervention as well as to build on ethical foundations for community engagement, raising attention to access and voice (Couldry 2010). Although participatory communication has been inspired by concerns with overly hierarchical and deterministic intervention, its potential has been challenged by the contexts of power in which it is engaged. Attention to dialogic communication recognizes the importance of power structures in affording but also limiting the potential for listening and conversing (Quarry and Ramirez 2009).

Scholars reviewing the literature demonstrate the problems of participatory approaches in reaching their promise. In their meta-analysis, Kim and Lee (2023) illustrate the dominance of technological determinism, focusing participation at levels of access rather than decision making, while romanticizing local concerns at the expense of recognizing global structural inequalities. Kogen's (2022) review of communication for social change scholarship confirms Kim and Lee's findings, adding that projects that claim to be participatory are comparatively less so than those published in other academic fields. She critiques communication for the literature on social change for posing vague conceptualizations of these key concepts, advocating instead for an approach that foregrounds communicative power, recognizing the access, capital, and competencies needed to engage public communities and policy makers.

The ability to participate becomes channeled through the ways in which we motivate and celebrate individual engagement in social causes. Noske-Turner (2023) describes a "new spirit" of "social changemaking", building on a social entrepreneurial direction chronicled by McAnany (2012), privileging corporate agendas. These approaches laud heroic, charismatic leaders who present in optimistic parlance. Social injustice then becomes addressed through a trendy "spirit of capitalism" through the publicity of "celebrity entrepreneurs" (Noske-Turner 2023). The power to communicate is conditioned by the

structures that channel social and financial capital as well as the platforms prevalent in an increasingly mediated society.

4. Digital Media in Strategic Communication for Social Change

In an increasingly mediated society, social change and development programs are saturated with digital technologies as tools for change, and they are more celebrated than cautioned against. Communication technologies have the potential to mobilize collective action, promote advocacy, and strengthen voice (Wilkins 2024). For example, the fifth Sustainability Development goal to promote gender equality incorporates a target to "enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women" (United Nations (UN) 2016). Many development agencies promote these technologies as ways to support market participation, economic investment, and entrepreneurship serving instrumentalist goals (Wilkins 2019; Wilkins and Kim 2021).

Digital media serve social movements as well as development agencies, underscored by Cammaerts (2021) in articulating how our "hypermediated and datafied" society promotes and challenges the work of social movements. Referencing Castells' (2012) analysis of "new" social movements as being less hierarchical and more decentralized than those previously studied, Cammaerts recognizes the possibilities of social media in offering continuity in areas such as fostering collective identity and discontinuity, given more open ideological and fluid identities. Given weak organizational structures and distanced social ties, social movements enabled by social media may be more open to a variety of participants, although not consistently activated, as well as divergent interpretations. Considering the social change aspired by Danish youths, Hemming Pedersen (2022) confirms the potential for mediatization to liberate possibilities as well to increase dependencies, as an increasingly datafied world enhances inclusion as well as extends individualization.

Although digital media enhance the potential to engage participants across national boundaries, we need to recognize the value as well as challenges of mobilizing through these channels as well as a dialectic of assertion and resistance. Cammaerts (2021) cautions us from "not uncritically embrac(ing) the technological deterministic claim that changes in the ontology of social movements are primarily driven and determined by the internet and social media" (p. 18). What has been critiqued elsewhere (Dutta 2011) as a problematic neoliberal approach to development is relevant to this concern that reliance on digital platforms may run counter to more collectivist and collaborative intentions. In essence, we need to be more cautious and more curious (Waisbord 2025) when considering the potential for communication technologies, emerging and legacy, in motivating and activating global social change.

The key to this characterization of connecting through access to digital platforms is that these networks may transcend some limitations in embodied physical locations when enabling online mobilization. While territorial boundaries certainly circumscribe our physical mobility, through restrictions in policies and resource capital, social movements activated through hypermediated communities may take on a transnational attribution, privileging the global context (Cammaerts 2021), which is particularly prominent in feminist advocacy (Mukherjee et al. 2023; Van Bauwel and Krijnen 2021). Next, I turn to the ways that feminist critiques inform our interest in reconceptualizing the field.

5. Feminist Critique and Aspiration

In this section, I turn a feminist gaze toward a critical analysis of development communication. Feminist critique informs how we understand global development attention to women and gender (Matos 2023) and how digital media, as a tool and as text, raise opportunities as well as challenges in our quests toward social justice.

Beginning with a historic view of development discourse, we see how women have moved from relative invisibility to visibility without voice, to being constructed as more actively engaged participants in social change and leaning more toward leading development

and social change (Steeves 1993; Wilkins 2016). The UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) gained superficial recognition in public discourse, while the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing highlighted the endurance of concerns raised years earlier. Since then, development agencies have strengthened their attention to women and gender, though at times diluting their efforts through their projected "mainstreaming" of these issues. Critical feminists remind us of the challenges in practice in working to direct resources and programs that recognize gender inequities (Matos 2023).

Gender references not only social categories, but also intersecting contexts of power and oppression relevant to class, ethnicity, and other distinctions (Dutta 2011; Steeves 1993). Privileging attention to gender aligns our analyses of power with these social identities, asserting gender as a social construction distinct from biological determinism. Some feminist scholars of development focusing on women as a primary community raise concerns that, in doing so, we lose sight of the gendered dynamics that contribute to problematic social, economic, and political conditions (Matos 2023; Steeves 1993; Wilkins 2016).

6. Power and Problems of Digital Media

Critical feminist scholars have contributed to our understanding of the power of digital engagement as well as the constraints embedded within political contexts that structure resources and access. Research exploring the digital production of news and information across cases demonstrate the promise of strategic intentions designed to advocate feminist goals (Dosekun 2023; Mohammed 2023; Navarro and Gómez-Bernal 2022; Pain 2020). As evidenced in these studies, gender represents one dimension of power, but given its integration, it contributes toward complicated processes of representation and engagement (Mohammed 2023; Van Bauwel and Krijnen 2021). Moreover, these public digital spaces may become venues for online harassment, problematizing a rosy projection of potential (Kurasawa et al. 2021).

The power of digital media is manifest in the potential to raise visibility and to enhance social connection and capital. Against this potential, we recognize concerns with excluding participants, inspiring resistance, raising burdens of labor, and obscuring broader political contexts. In her study of advocacy journalism in Argentina, Cabas-Mijares (2023) explores the politics of knowledge produced by feminist communities. Access to knowledge production becomes a central concern across case studies (Kurasawa et al. 2021). These dynamics serve to remind us that digital media need to be understood within particular contexts as integrated into human production rather than foregrounded through technological determinism. Arguing in separate studies that the literature does not do justice to the context of communities in the African region, Wildermuth (2021) and Ackah (2023) offer illustrations in which digital inclusion does not necessarily lead to democratic governance, social justice, or economic gain.

On the side of potential, digital media have raised visibility for feminist interests, with more inclusive voices and, in some instances, with more far-reaching activism (Chidgey 2021; Navarro and Gómez-Bernal 2022; Van Bauwel and Krijnen 2021). Although the rise of celebrity activism in social change has enhanced visibility and strengthened networks, this trend resonates with privileging individualized consumption as a preferred path of participation. While celebrity status attracts public attention, the entrance of commodified female capital into a world of strategic philanthropy raises many questions, particularly if we aspire to assert social justice in both private and public spheres.

Although mediated representations of gender roles in the U.S. have shifted slightly and slowly over time, sentiments toward responsibilities have supported more gendered equity in public and professional domains, but much less so in private spheres. Through a comprehensive, longitudinal analysis documenting television representation in conjunction with attitudes toward gendered roles, Hermann et al. (2022) chronicle the painfully slow rate of change in media representation as well as the particularly narrow focus of normative change. They conclude that this resistance to gender equity may be inspired by the relative gains accrued by women in professional domains. Flood et al. (2021) confirm this concern,

demonstrating that public assertions in support of gender equity are met with denial and disavowal, apathy, and appeasement. Recognizing a dialectic of progress and pause, movement toward gender justice is neither immediate nor linear, but punctuated frequently through varied forms of resistance (Van Bauwel and Krijnen 2021).

Although there may be potential for digital media to advance social change, studies of feminist movements illustrate how inclusive participation can be challenged without adequate access or resources. Several case studies show that activists relying on digital platforms are more likely to be among the elite than those in marginalized conditions (Dosekun 2023; Mohammed 2023; Navarro and Gómez-Bernal 2022; Pain 2020). It is not just access to technologies and time, but also the exhaustion of social movement work that contributions to this exclusion (Enghel 2025). In contrast, to be included in mediated activism, one becomes subject to the celebration of individual performance and consumption (Navarro and Gómez-Bernal 2022) at the expense of political context (Wilkins 2020).

7. Feminist Aspirations for Global Social Change

Given serious critique, how then might feminist aspirations strengthen our approaches to global social change? Communication for development is well versed in technologically deterministic attention to mediated platforms, persuasive texts designed to motivate individual change, and in public relations meant to elevate the status of donors and agencies. Feminist critiques draw attention to how we can position development within contexts relevant to dimensions such as economic conditions, regulatory policies, and climate sustainability.

A critical feminist approach centers power as conditioning the potential for strategic work to contribute to social justice (Gallagher and Montiel 2023). Reconceptualizing the role of digital media means considering the power to create and circulate mediated narratives. Digital media represent more than technologies and platforms, structuring how narratives are composed, shared, and interpreted in the enactment of programs and practices. Development narratives contribute to the discourse that guides institutional practice and intervention (Cornwall 2007; Dutta 2011; Thomas and Van de Fliert 2015) through justifying strategies based on framing social problems and solutions. This discourse implicates particular models of social change, inscribing problems and possibilities as well as highlighting participants and processes (Wilkins 2016).

Development narratives follow similarly gendered tropes as found in other genres, such as news, popular culture, and education (Wilkins 2016). The gendered narrative of women requiring rescue, with development agencies as saviors, relies on problematic plots that project women as passive and in despair. When women are projected as having agency, development discourse highlights their individual potential and accomplishments in episodic framing rather than enduring trends and collective achievements.

Among narratives supporting guided social change, empowerment stories of individual triumph dominate, while contextually embedded stories of justice compete (Wilkins 2016). Within the empowerment narrative, serving the liberal framing of development, individual women are not only responsible for their success, but also for their failure, should they find themselves unable to secure employment, a safe haven, or avenues for participation. In contrast, narratives privileging social justice draw attention to gender inequities, which are exacerbated by economic globalization. In each case, constructed problems impose a direction on the strategic interventions that are posed as solutions.

The gendered nature of these narratives surfaces when heroes are male, women succeed through masculine characteristics, or female victims are objectified as distant and not capable of their own rescue (Cloud 2004; McAlister 2005; Wilkins 2016). The conscription of villainy and the narrative of rescue contribute to the gendered discourse that guides the work of strategic social change. Designating those accountable for social change resonates with narratives ascribing evil, incompetence, and corruption to villains, whose acts cause harm to victims, typically asserted as women and children, paving the way for masculine heroes to engage in rescue.

Situating development as a gendered concern also facilitates movement away from victimizing, infantilizing, and objectifying women (Shome 1996). Attention to gender dynamics reminds us that our communities host complexity as well as diversity, and they are able to mobilize and contribute to collective rescue. Problematic narratives highlighting women's value as entrepreneurial, as maternal, and as consumers avoid recognizing the material and normative conditions that limit potential and progress. Programs that elevate entrepreneurs require credit and capital. Programs that accentuate consumption are predicated not only on immediately available resources, but also on systems of credit and interest, as well as the supply of products and regulated safety for their use. Our abilities to care, to create, and to consume have value, but they must be understood not as individual acts of heroism but as acts structured through material and policy conditions.

Feminist analysis raises critical questions that position development concerns within a framework of global social justice (Gallagher 2011). Women's collective action, through social movements as well as contributions through professional and political work, becomes part of this process. The distinction is not necessarily a juxtaposition of passive against active roles, but the way in which agency becomes articulated, whether as an individual or as collective processes and outcomes.

8. Mediating Dialogic Communication for Global Social Change

Witnessing our world through a feminist gaze privileges the political and economic contexts that condition access to voice, the capacity to listen, and the potential for dialog. By conceptualizing mediated communication as a prism that channels and changes narratives, we may consider how to create a different kind of program. The institutional production of knowledge, whether serving the industries of news or of strategic social change, engages explicit politics as well as implicit sentiments through this projected prism in ways that serve political elites and perpetuate inequities (Wilkins 2021). We need to be accountable toward social justice, relying on our critical appraisals and informed dialogs to create paths to stronger and more impactful communication not squarely in the realm of formal development, but extending to effective and ethical paths toward social justice (Cornwall 2007; Enghel and Noske-Turner 2018).

In the interest of considering reconceptualizing the field of development communication, I explore how a feminist gaze would inform how we practice and study communication for social justice, recognizing the hypermediated conditions that structure mediated prisms. Specifically, we need to consider how to recognize the importance of narrative in normative change; to reckon with the serious challenges as well as opportunities for advocacy; and to reward accountability that engages dialog toward responsibility.

Feminist approaches to strategic social change need to support the composition of narratives that move our conversations from the plight of individual women with heart-breaking stories to the ways communities work together to forge new territories for collaboration and growth. We need to shift our narrative frames from relying on heroic, masculine narratives to those that center feminist agency and collective action. Defiance and anger may become sources of strength (Pain 2020), respecting the vulnerability with this assertion without falling prey to manipulation. Subverting dominant norms takes time and must be addressed across genre and platform, requiring collective effort and modulating against dialectics of progress and resistance.

It is this collective work that enables advocacy, representing not individual stories but the weight of shared experience. Advocacy requires more than voice; it also requires public listening and, moreover, dialogic communication enabled through structure and normative practice (Dutta 2011). When advocating social justice, we need to situate gender equality within the contexts in which norms emerge yet may also be subverted. And we need to understand the industries in which communication, as well as development, structure resources toward the potential for social justice.

Dialogic communication contributes to processes of mobilization as well as promises of accountability (Wilkins 2020). The praxis of social change demands that action be integrated

with reflection such that paths for social change may adjust as contextual conditions change over time and differ across communities and issues. A critical feminist gaze centers humanity within our attempts to leverage and learn through communication technologies to promote social justice.

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Unlearning Communication for Social Change—A Pedagogical Proposition

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Abstract: We have in recent years seen growing calls for pedagogies for social change amongst communication and development scholars, identifying resistances, critiques, and emerging practices in the field. This review article addresses this 'pedagogical turn', suggesting that it is in these pedagogies we can see the pathways to unlearn and relearn communication for social change. Offering a decolonial analytical lens, this article asks two questions: What characterizes these critical pedagogies? And how can the various pedagogies contribute to unlearning and relearning the field of communication and social change? This article is structured in five parts, first offering a review of key critiques articulated within the field of communication and social development in the past two decades, arguing that, in practice, what we are seeing is the organic development of a pluriverse of knowledges, values, and visions of society. Secondly, it proposes the decolonial term of 'unlearning' as a pedagogical pathway and epistemological ambition for the production and recognition of a pluriverse of knowledges, thereby challenging dominant perceptions of society and social change. Thirdly, it introduces a model of analysis which structures ways whereby we can think about monocultures and ecologies in relation to a range of dimensions of the pluriverse. Fourthly, it reviews key critical pedagogies, discussing how they address epistemic injustice both in broader societal contexts as well as in the university space. This article concludes by discussing how the process of unlearning through critical pedagogies has implications for the configuration and definition of the field of communication and social change, suggesting three areas for further research: ways of seeing (positionality), new subject positions (relationality), and new design processes (transition).

Keywords: communication for social change; pluriverse; decoloniality; pedagogy; unlearning

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, a growing body of knowledge has emerged that explores how to conceptualize the relation between communication, development, and social change. We have also seen an expansion of the field, from being a field only addressing practice within the so-called development sector, or international development cooperation, to also including the vast and well-established field of community development, and more recently, also including social movements and other spheres where social transformation occurs, and where communication plays a role.

We have seen an abundance of critique of the dominant paradigms in both development and social change as well as in communication, critiques pointing to the dominant approaches not doing justice to the development challenges they address and the communities whose livelihoods were at stake. Growing calls for other worldviews, other voices and positionalities from where to speak and influence these livelihoods have emerged. Calls for other ontologies and epistemologies have been heard, and other worlds have been imagined.

More recently, calls for other pedagogies have emerged. Critical pedagogies (Nutall and Mbembe 2008; Mignolo and Walsh 2018), pedagogies of seeing and feeling (Manyozo

2023), indigenous pedagogies (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023), anti-racist pedagogies (Gomes 2017; Dias 2022), and creative–critical pedagogies of hope (Schwittay 2021, 2023) have been called for, mostly within development and social change debates but also specific to the field of communication and social change (Dutta 2015; Villanueva 2018; Suzina and Tufte 2020; Zermeno et al. Forthcoming). These are calls for action but also calls for other learning processes and for the visibility and presence of other knowledge systems. As we know, Paulo Freire's centenary in 2021 sparked an abundance of celebrations and confirmed a strong contemporary interest in his works. Freire spoke of critical pedagogies as a liberating pathway to empowerment, conscientization, and social change already in the 1960s (Freire 2005b), and later he developed and redeveloped his work, framing it as pedagogy of hope, pedagogy of indignation, pedagogy of the city, of freedom, etc. (Freire 1993, 2000, 2004, 2005a). The increase in calls for other worldviews is closely connected to the renewed interest in Freirean pedagogy.

However, what do these calls for other pedagogies mean? Are we to teach differently? From a different subject position? Or is it about creating non-formal spaces of learning or about demands for epistemic justice? What is at stake when so many scholars in each their own way are calling for other pedagogies? The last two decades of critique can been seen as a process of unlearning the field, where philosophical foundations and dominant epistemologies are being questioned and redefined. The 'pedagogical turn' in communication for development and social change moves the field beyond the critiques of the dominant paradigm and towards the formulation of imagined futures, crafting the pathways to other worlds as pedagogical projects.

These pedagogies are not only about what is taught and how, be it in formal or non-formal settings, but equally about the strengthening of worldviews and cosmovisions, and about the knowledge that is being produced. These pedagogies claim other spaces, other ecologies of knowledge, where other voices, values, and practices can thrive in the pursuit of a variety of justices.

The growing attention to pedagogies of change also requires reflection upon the role of the catalyst of change. There is an implied 'we' in many of the proposals, being the teachers, development practitioners, academics, or activists. The proponents of other pedagogies are addressing both the formal learning environment like universities, but many are more concerned with broader societal ecologies of change.

This article focuses on introducing and discussing some of the pedagogies of social change that are currently transpiring. This article is structured in five parts. Firstly, I offer a brief review of some of the critiques articulated within the field of communication and social change in the past two decades, arguing that, in practice, what we are seeing is the organic development of a pluriverse of knowledges, values, and visions of society. Secondly, I explain how 'unlearning' is a pedagogical proposition, an epistemological ambition about producing and recognizing knowledge from different points of departure, thereby challenging established perceptions of society and reinterpreting society. Thirdly, I introduce a model of analysis developed by Herrera-Huerfano et al. (2023) and which structures ways whereby we can think about monocultures and ecologies in relation to a range of dimensions of the pluriverse. Fourthly, I present some of the proposed pedagogies and discuss how they are both connected to broader processes of social transformation as well as to a struggle for the decolonization of university curricula and for epistemic justice. Finally, I conclude by discussing how the processes of unlearning and developing pedagogies for social change have implications for the field of communication and social change.

2. Communication and Social Change—A Brief Retrospective

In the publication 'Communication for Social Change Anthology', which I co-edtied two decades ago, a narrative of 50 years of Communication for Social Change research and practice was chronicled. The book brought together a collection of over 200 articles and excerpts documenting the development of the field globally (Gumucio-Dagron and

Tufte 2005). The material brought forward many critiques of the dominant paradigm and its strong embeddedness in the modernization paradigm while at the same time illustrating a rich global production of alternatives, mainly from the global south, pointing towards the power structures, technological developments, cultural practices, and community initiatives that were evolving within what at the time was mostly known as the participatory paradigm.

In the time that has followed, we have witnessed the growing body of research offering critiques of the dominant paradigm. They include critiques of its narrow behaviour change focus (Waisbord 2001), development institutions not listening to the subjects of development (Quarry and Ramirez 2009), critiques of evaluation practices and the number frenzy associated with most widespread methods (Thomas 2014), a critique of the marginalization of the subaltern with the development of a culture-centered approach to communication and development (Dutta 2011), analysis of the privatization of funding to the development sector and its implications (Wilkins and Enghel 2013), critiques of the unjust development paradigm and its community consequences (Manyozo 2017), and a critique of the lack of attention to power dynamics, suggesting more deeply theorized attention to the spaces of power in development practice (Ewoh-Opu 2019). We have also seen calls for citizen perspectives and new subject positions in communication and social change (Tufte 2017), the de-westernization of communication (Waisbord 2019), and a call for the un-making of the field offering a more explicit critique of the underlying model of capitalism that informs the dynamics civil society operates within (Noske-Turner 2023).

In addressing current development challenges, we have seen growing calls for rethinking and complexifying the role of communication, for example in health communication (Obregon and Waisbord 2012), environmental communication (Van de Fliert 2014), and in peace-building (Baú 2016). As elaborations and redevelopments of the participatory paradigm, we have seen calls for alternative (Peruzzo 2022), popular (Suzina 2021), and community communication (Pavarala 2020; Paiva 2007). They have each in their way contributed to nuancing both the empirical breadth of the field—focusing less on the sector of international development and more on community-based initiatives—but also on questioning the epistemological foundations.

In synthesis, from the origins of the dominant paradigm in social-psychology and communication studies with origins in the US decades ago, and its competing participatory paradigm emerging primarily from the global south, the last two decades have unraveled a multitude of new voices and perspectives positioning communication and social change as an interdisciplinary field of research connected with anthropology, sociology, political science, cultural geography, public health, environmental studies, and media and communication studies. It has more firmly manifested itself as a praxis-oriented discipline navigating a diverse gamut of dynamics—power, culture, agency, communication—within the traditional development sector but equally within indigenous community development processes and within social movements.

We have over the past two decades seen a cumulative critique of many facets of the monoculture of development and social change and of the dominant paradigm of modernization within communication for development and social change. This critique has drawn our attention to both systemic challenges, political economy issues, power dynamics, and notions of subjectivity, as well as unveiling alternatives to be found within community communication, and popular and alternative communication.

It is, however, the growing calls for other ontologies and for epistemologies from the global south that are emerging with consistency, and that enable me to argue that we are seeing the organic development of a pluriversal approach to development and social change. Universalizing perspectives and claims, typically associated with monocultures of development, are being countered by a growing recognition that we are living in a pluriverse where many worldviews and knowledge systems co-exist. As I will argue in this article, it leads to far deeper critiques of structural inequalities, embedded in the legacies of coloniality and which profoundly influence the prospects of any imagined future.

We are furthermore seeing a growing recognition of what Anibal Quijano called the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000). This is a decolonial lens through which to interpret development and social change but also through which to understand communication. Quijano's matrix offers a way to understand how hegemony operates through a logic that configures economies, relations, and epistemes. While the Latin American attention to decoloniality has been growing, similar processes can be seen in Asia and Africa. In Asia, the way of articulating similar challenges has been through the lens of the subaltern (Spivak 1988), while in Africa, decolonization has been a keyword, tied back to the pan-African and non-aligned movements and the efforts of newly decolonized nations to find their space and collaborate, while more recent developments have had strong emphasis on intellectual decolonization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

In the field of communication for development and social change, we saw early articulations of decolonial perspectives by, for example, Mohan Dutta (2015), offering an elaborate critique of the dominant paradigm in development communication and on that basis proposing three 'decolonial perspectives', emerging from subaltern perspectives and framed within his own culture-centered approach (CCA). The three perspectives are about listening, participation, and co-conversation. Other relevant and profound critiques drawing our attention to aspects of coloniality, imperialism, and patriarchy can be found in Villanueva (2018, 2022), Chasi (2021), Manyozo (2023), and in Wendy Willems' decolonial critique of Habermas's public sphere (Willems 2023). In this article, I will, however, highlight the work of Eliana Herrera-Huerfano who, in her doctoral dissertation (Herrera-Huerfano 2022), explored indigenous communication from communities in the Amazon, and who, together with Joan Pedro-Caranana and Juana Ochoa Almanza, developed an interesting heuristic framework, embedded in decolonial thinking, with which to explore communicative justice (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023). I will return to this shortly.

In the broader field of social science, scholars and activists have drawn our attention to feminist, anti-racist, and indigenous perspectives, most of these adding to the critique of the monoculture of development and offering significant contributions to a pluriverse of cosmovisions informing our understanding of society and social transformation. As Herrera-Huerfano et al. rightly state: 'The evolving perspective of the pluriverse is grounded in decolonial scholarship and comes from the practices that communities and social movements around the world are implementing to question the Modern hegemonic paradigm and improve the degrees of justice' (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023, p. 7). There are global trends, many localized and regional movements from the global south resisting the universalizing and dominant discourses.

A common denominator in the social science critique of development is the call for pedagogies, a variety of them, as a means to cultivate and operationalize a pathway forward, towards possible futures. We have seen a proliferation in very recent years of the use of pedagogical language. These calls for pedagogies for social change are also seen amongst communication scholars, identifying resistances, critiques, and emerging practices naming them as pedagogies for social change. It is this growing emphasis upon the pedagogies of social change that this article wishes to address, suggesting that it is in these pedagogies we can see a pathway to unlearn communication for social change. It is thus in the context of a growing decolonial scholarship positioned within the perspective of the pluriverse, and calling for pedagogies of social change, that this article asks two questions: how can we understand these calls, and how can the various pedagogies contribute to advancing the field of CFSC through the process of unlearning?

3. Unlearning through Dialogue of Knowledges

'Unlearning' is a pedagogical proposition that aims to challenge established perceptions of society by questioning them, leading to reinterpretations of society. It is an epistemological ambition about producing knowledge from a different point of departure. From a decolonial perspective, it is about what Mignolo coined as 'epistemological disobedience' (Mignolo 2009), critiquing the way we go about our field of study but not remaining

in the critique or expressing other worldviews but also formulating pathways to open up action in pursuit of these other worlds.

However, scholars speaking of pedagogies of change are differently positioned. There are those who conceive and develop pedagogies for application mainly within the academic institutions (Icaza 2022; Schwittay 2021). Others articulate a language of pedagogy affiliated more with approaches to knowledge production more broadly, and that are often connected with the struggles for recognition and inclusion of minority groups in society (Gomes 2022; Dias 2022; Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023; Mbembe 2021).

'Unlearning' captures the broader defined critical pedagogical project emerging typically within feminist, anti-racist, or indigenous movements. Framed within decolonial frameworks, it emphasizes the power dynamics but also the historical processes of exclusion and oppression that inform these struggles for justice. These again are rooted in broader philosophical approaches to knowledge production, such as cognitive justice (Visvanathan 2021; Santos 2018) and epistemic justice (Fricker 2007). As will appear in the following examples, some key scholars, including bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Frantz Fanon, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o have made strong calls for pedagogies of change.

However, prior to presenting and briefly analyzing some examples of pedagogies of change, I would like to introduce the mentioned model of analysis that Herrera-Huerfano et al. developed (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023). It offers a breakdown of how to approach a dialogue (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023, pp. 18–19) of knowledges from a decolonial approach in support of a strengthening of pluriversal approaches to society and social change. Their heuristic model serves as a useful point of departure to understand in more detail what 'the monoculture of development and social change' entails and how we can link this discussion with a further advancement of the epistemological grounding of communication for social change. The model (see Table 1) offers three analytical entry points: a breakdown of what the monoculture of the Modern Paradigm comprises, the ecologies that challenge them, and their relation with different forms of justice that the pluriverse requires for its existence and extension.

Table 1. Model of analysis: relations among monocultures, ecologies, and dimensions of the pluriverse.

MONOCULTURES	ECOLOGIES	DIMENSIONS OF THE PLURIVERSE
Monoculture of Modern knowledge	**Ecology of knowledges** Value of other knowledges and criteria of rigor that give contextual credibility to knowledge	**COGNITIVE JUSTICE**: Relational epistemologies/ontologies. Recognition of knowledges (popular, peasant, traditional, indigenous, practical knowledges)
Monoculture of the naturalization of differences	**Ecology of recognitions** Recognitions of social movements, social and cultural diversity, autonomy, emancipation and collective action	**SOCIOCULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL JUSTICE**: Communitarisms, communalisms, cooperation and solidarity, plurinational communities and states, peace, horizontal
Monoculture of globality/universality	**Ecology of trans-scales** Simultaneous recovery of tensions and articulations between the local and the global, as the community	(democratic) relations, self-management, unity within diversity, historical memory, cultural self-appreciation, interculturality, relations from the local to the global

Table 1. *Cont.*

MONOCULTURES	ECOLOGIES	DIMENSIONS OF THE PLURIVERSE
Monoculture of linear time	**Ecology of temporalities** Recover the sense of cycles, circular and radial time that are typical of biological processes and nature	**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**: Rethink the relationships of the human being with nature, human and non-human relationships, rights of nature, biocentrism, alternatives to development, ecological meta-citizenship
Monoculture of capitalist productivity	**Ecology of productivities** Recover and value alternative production systems that are carried out in popular economic organizations through self-management, cooperative organization, solidarity, and protection of the land and territory	**POLITICAL ECONOMY JUSTICE**: Self-sustainable economies, post-extractivism, solidarity economy, cooperatives, self-management, equality, the commons, the public, degrowth, post-development, de-marketisation, slowdown of consumption, autonomy
Monoculture of liberal democracy	**Ecology of demodiversity** Different models and practices of democracy, plurality of powers, and legalities	**SOCIOPOLITICAL JUSTICE**: New political subjects, legalities and powers, participatory spaces, popular experiences, assemblies, protest, plebiscites, communality, direct democracy
Monoculture of Modern communication	**Ecology of communication** Decentralizing understanding of communication to ensure the right to communication and diverse and egalitarian communication	**COMMUNICATIVE JUSTICE:** Recovery of different ways of thinking communication and communication studies, critique of colonial communication and mainstream media, subaltern communication, access, public policies, right to communication, democratization of mediations, representations, practices, technologies, and media systems

Herrera-Huerfano's model takes its point of departure in the work carried out at CES, at the University of Coimbra, more specifically in the ALICE project led by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Bringing forth an analysis of the sociology of *absences*, the ALICE team propose a sociology of *emergences* which, viewed in the perspective of decolonization, aims at 'turning absences, nonexistence, or historical invisibilities into presences' (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023, p. 14). The model identifies seven monocultures. Five of the monocultures were offered by ALICE. Additionally, Herrera-Huerfano et al. have added the monoculture of liberal democracy and monoculture of Modern communication.

While the model does an excellent job in connecting the domains of critique with the spaces and aims of social change, I would argue that it is the pedagogical approach and practice that weaves the various dimensions together, addressing, for example, one or two of the monocultures operating within particular ecologies to achieve specific 'justices'. So, if we return to the pedagogies proposed by many of the communication and social change scholars mentioned in the brief review above, we can draw on this heuristic framework to discuss how the proposed pedagogies relate to development challenges. This article proposes the use of a decolonial pedagogical lens to articulate the spaces and develop practices in pursuit of justice.

4. Critical/Decolonial Pedagogies

In the book 'Decoloniality', which Katherine Walsh and Walter Mignolo wrote half of each (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), Walsh offers an insightful analysis of how she perceives decolonial pedagogies. She sees pedagogy as closely linked to social struggle. She draws clearly on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, seeing the decolonial pedagogy as a methodology that is grounded in peoples' realities, subjectivities, histories, and struggles' (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, p. 88). The social struggles are thus for Walsh, as they were for Freire, pedagogical settings of learning, unlearning, relearning, reflection, and action.

While Walsh and many others draw actively on Freirean pedagogy, there are also scholars who flag the limitations of Freire. The fact that he was a scholar emerging within the Latin American Left after World War II with Marxist and humanist emancipatory paradigms guiding his thinking is, for some, problematic. Both the maori anthropologist Linda Tuhiwai Smith and the Native American intellectual Sandy Grande draw attention to some limitations of the applicability of his work in their contexts. Smith, according to Walsh, argues that his views 'worked to negate and obscure the methodological standpoints, practices and processes and approaches of feminist theorists of color, ethnic minorities, and indigenous people. This negation applies to the methodologies and/as pedagogies that derive from the lived experience of colonialism, racism and the struggles for self-determination and decolonization' (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, p. 89). In other words, Freire's liberating pedagogical praxis did not align with the realities experienced by some groups in society. Grande argued that Freire's theoretical formulations and assumptions remained Western, anthropocentric, and largely Marxist-informed, something she saw as a tension vis-a-vis indigenous knowledge and praxis (ibid.). These critiques partly reflect the strong inspiration that Freire rightly drew from Western philosophy but also the fact that he did not contemplate the diversity of lived experiences, nor the all-encompassing influence of the colonial matrix of power. Walsh, however, argues that much of Freire's thought remains relevant and a source of inspiration in both anti-racist and indigenous pedagogies. In the following, I present some of the social struggles that develop pedagogies for change. The examples are the Black Movement in Brazil and the broader indigenous movement. From there I move on to discussing scholars that contribute to what broadly has come to be known as decolonizing the curriculum.

5. Anti-Racist Pedagogies

The Black Movement in Brazil offers a first illustrative example of developing a pedagogy, in their case, an *anti-racist pedagogy* grounded in the practical experiences with fighting for the rights and recognition of black Brazilians, while at the same time being engaged with and connected to other movements and knowledge systems, like that of feminist movements and indigenous groups in Brazil. The Black Movement and their academic ambassadors make it clear how they are inspired by scholar-activists like bell hooks (1994), Boaventura de Souza Santos, and Paulo Freire (Gomes 2022; Dias 2022). For example, Nilma Lino Gomes, an emeritus anthropologist, who has researched and participated in the Black Movement in Brazil throughout her lifetime, has written a seminal book, 'O Movimento Negro Educador' (Gomes 2017). In this book, she articulates and she later rearticulates (2022) the pathways of learning and relearning through which many participants of the Black Movement in Brazil have passed. These are pedagogical processes emerging from an experience of the exclusion, racism, and marginalization of blacks in Brazil. Gomes draws on bell hooks' call for love in explaining how the encounter of many black Brazilians with the Black Movement is a process of relearning (or strictly reeducation, Gomes 2022, p. 21) which requires the consideration of love an action rather than a feeling: 'It's a way to make anyone who uses the word in this way automatically take responsibility and commitment (Gomes 2022, p. 20)'.

Such actions are not necessarily spectacular and linked to large movements or organizations but can happen almost unnoticed in the everyday. While referring to the group of colleagues who worked with her on assessing the role of the Black Movement in Brazil and publishing a book together about it (Gomes 2022), she describes their individual processes as 'A process marked by different places and forms of political, personal, pedagogical and academic interaction. Of the authors, some had the experience of having integrated the political struggle to combat racism in a more organic way, others were part of the new generation of black intellectuals formed in academia and by this movement. And all of them are learners of the knowledge constructed by the black Brazilian population over the centuries, systematized and socialized by the Black Movement (Gomes 2022, p. 21).

Like so many other black people engaged in the movement, they are learners, Gomes argues, learning from the knowledges constructed over centuries. These learning processes are processes of resignification and reinterpretation of what the Black Movement is for the collective but also for the individual. Many have engaged in these processes but not necessarily in some entity or organization but elsewhere in everyday life, as a form of everyday activism and learning (Gomes 2022, p. 26). Such timelines and temporalities are worth noting and considering when identifying epistemologies of groups engaged in communication for social change.

Similarly, Luciana de Oliveira Dias, in considering the condition of a black epistemology in the academic space in Brazil echoes the risk articulated by the renowned indigenous leader Ailton Krenak, in arguing for the risk of oppressing diversity and in calls for recognition and rights (Dias 2022, p. 133). Dias further unpacks many of the challenges for 'a claims-driven and anti-racist pedagogy'. She sees a black anthropology spearheading such a pedagogy.

In arguing for a black epistemology, and recognizing her inspiration in Freire's 'pedagogy of hope', Dias outlines a pathway for the reworlding of the claim-driven, anti-racist pedagogy she calls for towards the realization of a black anthropology. She argues for a practice-oriented pedagogy, that seeks its historical concreteness in practice, given that hope, as she argues, does not reside in pure waiting but 'in the engaged, contained, questioning and active critical/loving construction'. Dias' pedagogical outline requires representation, dialogic communication, a redistribution of power, and a pluriversal approach to epistemology (Dias 2022, p. 152). This proposal promotes a dialogue of knowledge, challenging various monocultures that impose limits and creating and supporting various ecologies in pursuit of justice.

6. Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies

As within the anti-racist movements, a plethora of movements that have been growing significantly in recent years are the indigenous movements. Indigenous groups across the globe are self-organizing, claiming rights to territory, resources, identities, and in multiple ways, defending indigenous cosmovisions, ways of life, and relations to the Earth. A prominent indigenous leader from the Amazon, Ailton Krenak spoke at the Centenary celebrations for Paulo Freire, organized by Loughborough University London in 2021, arguing against universalisms, or what he calls 'unity'. Krenak made a strong argument for a pluriversal approach to the world and for the recognition of diversity as a key premise in our society: 'if we continue (…) insisting on the production of equality between us, without being aware that this equality needs to be sown in the field of diversity, in the recognition of difference, in the possibility of radical difference, we will always find a turning on the path, which will return us to the same place' (Krenak 2022, p. 72).

Krenak calls further for a respectful and affectionate relation to Earth: 'This idea of civilization that needs to sweat to earn something from the Earth is an idea very close to the idea of a slave. We are not slaves to the Earth. We are children of the Earth. And children usually get food for free. This is affection. Affection is not just a word. Affection is an experience. Eating, drinking, dancing, singing, and lifting the sky is a pedagogy, so to speak, of the Earth with its children: Eat, drink, dance, sing and lift the sky (…) is an exercise in staying alive as a celebration of life' (Krenak 2022, p. 75).

An example of an indigenous pedagogy perspective is seen with the work of Gabrielle Lindstrom and Robert Weasel Head (Lindstrom and Head 2023). In the spirit of the renowned late indigenous scholar, Dr. Betty Bastien, who wrote about Blackfoot Resilience and indigenous pedagogy (Bastien 2016), Lindstrom and Weasel Head offer a personal reflection upon the ontological responsibility of indigenous communities, reflecting upon what an indigenous epistemology entails, for example the relational aspects to ancestors, recognizing the ancestors that have come before. They speak of life-long learning and indigenous resilience as a way of seeing, tied both to ancestral knowledge, but also to the importance of land for indigenous groups. Both Krenak, Bastien and Lindstrom and Weasel

Head speak about foundational features of indigenous thinking, which, despite the call for recognition of diversity speaks to inseparable and affectional, non extrationist relations with nature, the role of land, and other perceptions of social relations, time, and space. They speak about pedagogies of resilience and affection as pedagogy.

Within communication scholarship and practice, we can see a growing attention to indigenous worldviews and communication practices. Claudia Magallanes-Blanco (2022) refers to an encounter from 2018 of Mexican scholars—including indigenous communicators from different ethnic groups, facilitators of community processes, and socially committed academics—meeting to reflect upon their communication practices, revisiting the history of indigenous media and communication in Mexico, the role of indigenous communication practitioners inside and outside their communities, and their relationship with the stage, and, overall, exploring how to go about media and communication from an indigenous perspective. Many similar meetings have been occurring in-person but also online in recent years, and a rich debate has been unfolding across many countries in Latin America. It is a tendency that Herrera-Huerfano confirms in her PhD 'Communication Practices in Indigenous Peoples: Mediations of Culture and Local Development in the Colombian Amazon' (Herrera-Huerfano 2022) and in the joint piece with Amparo Cadavid Bringe and Jair Casanova-Vega (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2024). As Magallanes clarifies, a lot of connections exist between discussions about indigenous communication with popular and community communication, and recent books offer insights into both region-specific Latin American experiences and debates (Suzina 2021) as well as broader global south experiences with the indigenous, alternative, and popular (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2023). What this developing scholarship points to is a process of unlearning, or as Magallanes frames it:

> 'Community, Indigenous and popular communication, materialized in media outlets, messages and practices, is a school of life that generates an alternative model of education. This model allows us to re-educate ourselves and re-signify, with a critical sense, the symbolic and community elements that are substantive for life. It shows more dignified views of who we are based on our words, detaching us from the colonizing language' (Magallanes-Blanco 2022, p. 24)

This current growing visibility of indigenous communication connects with long-standing debates around indigeneity and decolonization. In 1986, the Kenyan author and academic, Ngungi W'a Thiong'o, wrote his seminal text about 'decolonizing the mind' (W'a Thing'o 1986). In it, he argues for decolonization in the humanities, in theatre, literature, and film. He decided from that point onwards to abandon writing in English, and chose to write in Swahili, despite having been educated in English throughout and had built this career and his authorship writing in English. There are clearly epistemic struggles going on and political stands articulated in these situations, reflecting challenges that have been recurrent in the struggles against colonialism and that reflect across many disciplines. Magallanes argues that pedagogical projects are also political. Pedagogically, they are offering an indigenous perspective—claiming novel starting points, indigenous cosmologies, voices, languages, temporalities, and communicative practices.

Tied more closely to the field of development, Linje Manyozo takes discussions about indigenous approaches a step further towards operationalization. In his book 'Development Practitioners in Action', he develops his thoughts about how to draw on Freire's critical pedagogy in working with both teaching 'development' and doing development in practice. In advocating a people's pedagogy (Manyozo 2023, p. 113), and an inclusive co-design process, he argues for what he calls 'indigenous intelligence' as fundamental to 'enable us to navigate the dangerous and slippery waters of deliberative development' (Manyozo 2023, p. 113). As a Chichewa-speaking Malawian, Manyozo draws on Chichewa notions such as 'kudziletza' in arguing for a pedagogy of listening that emphasizes forgiveness as a perspective. Kudziletza is a perspective or lifestyle that combines forgiveness with peaceful engagement and letting go (Manyozo 2023, p. 91). Manyozo sees Kudziletza as an epistemological framework and praxis where you 'refuse to resist evil', providing space,

in Freirean terms, for wrongdoers to conscientize. Still within Bantu experiences, he also suggests the Bantu notion of leadership, and others.

Following a key principle in Freire, who draws both on Marxism and Christianity in his pedagogy, Manyozo argues for the need to connect political and spiritual solidarity, a proposal that also resonates strongly with the proposals of theology of liberation from the 1960s and 1970s. It is, according to Manyozo, important for students and future development practitioners, to be able to read both the word *and* the world. However, while drawing heavily upon Freire's critical pedagogy, Manyozo is more explicit in acknowledging and drawing actively upon indigenous knowledge systems in the pedagogies of change he proposes.

7. Universities and Pedagogies for Social Change

In developing the field of communication and social change, the role of universities is crucial as a strategic space of knowledge production. Across the globe, universities are increasingly subjected to market logics, and academic models originating in the Global North. As Philip Altbach rightly argues, the university is increasingly transformed from a public good to a private good (Altbach in Santos et al. 2022). As Santos furthermore argues, the historical project of humanity is increasingly replaced by the closing of the mind, instrumentality in forms of teaching and learning, and with risk-averse pedagogies resulting in the closing down of creative and problem-based learning, and with critical thinking and reflection being increasingly difficult to cultivate. Walsh has, in this context, argued for the need to critically explore the cracks in Western Christian civilization (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, p. 82). It is in this context that pedagogies for social change in formal educational institutions are crucial.

In the context of development studies, Amber Murrey and Patricia Daley offer an important contribution in their book 'Learning Disobedience. Decolonizing Development Studies' (Murrey and Daley 2023). It is a provocative critique of development, and also a proposal to 'unlearn' development and promote reworlding. Murrey and Daley both work at Oxford University, offering a very reflexive approach as how to navigate decolonial perspectives in the context of such an elite university entangled into the legacies of colonialism and empire: 'disobedience in the colonial university requires both anti-colonial critique and decolonial imaginaries' (Murrey and Daley 2023, p. 11). They draw substantially on decolonial thought, from Quijano's colonial matrix of power over Nyamjoh's analysis of epistemic Eurocentrism to Ndlovu-Gatsheni's and Icaza's decolonial options for pluriversal and alternative epistemes (drawing on what Mignolo and Escobar have called 'decolonial options', Mignolo and Escobar 2010). Drawing furthermore on Mignolo's call for epistemic disobedience, and in pursuit of the knowledges and perspectives that should inform and shape international development policy and programming, Murrey and Daley propose developing a praxis that does four things: (1) Centres indigenous and decolonial ontologies and epistemologies; (2) Is purposefully oriented to abolition; (3) Critiques the role of coloniality in informing human/nature relations; and (4) Is place and land-based. Such a praxis results in a 'disobedient pedagogy' which they again structure around five elements: humility, unlearning, learning-in-place, a decolonial ethic, and attention to power (Murrey and Daley 2023, p. 11). Their proposal draws substantially upon their own teaching experience, operationalizing how to teach development through a decolonial lens—moving the, at times, quite vague calls for 'decolonizing the curriculum' into a very concrete space.

In the context of communication for social change, such pedagogies are equally necessary. In a recent paper, three Latin American colleagues and I have developed an argument for a 'Laboratory' as a pedagogy for social change (Zermeno et al. Forthcoming). It is based on principles emerging within the rich Latin American tradition of participatory communication and communication for social change over 6–7 decades. We distil from this experience a conception of change that is informed by horizontal dialogue, critical reflection, and constructive hope, and that strives to collaborate *with* communities—not *for* them— by means of liberating/emancipatory education and dialogic/alternative/participatory

communication. The Lab idea further emphasizes the integration of theory and practice (see Zermeno et al. for an elaboration of the Lab model and Tufte 2024 for an elaboration of emancipatory communication). The proposal essentially builds on three key components. One is the critical–creative pedagogical approach developed by Anke Schwittay (Schwittay 2021, 2023). The second comprises the epistemological and theoretical principles of epistemic and practice communities (Feldman et al. 2013). Finally, it draws heavily on the practical experiences accumulated in the Kaleidoscope Network, a network of primarily Latin American scholars in communication and education that have brought their experience to the table as input to a Lab model pedagogy for social change, suggesting this for a university context (Zermeno et al. Forthcoming). Below, I elaborate on the critical–creative pedagogy.

Anke Schwittay developed the critical–creative conceptual framework on the basis of her work with university students of international development in the UK and as a response to the challenges often encountered by students within neoliberal educational institutions. Schwittay often encountered students with visions and aspirations when entering university. They often lost these visions and got disillusioned in their process of learning. It was therefore of fundamental importance for Schwittay to develop a transformative pedagogy whereby the students could not only better understand the global challenges they faced but also could imagine alternative responses to them. Teaching 'critical hope' is at the core of Schwittay's pedagogical proposal, and she outlines four interconnected pathways in critical–creative pedagogy.

Whole-person learning is the first strand. It argues for the inclusion of student experiences into the educational process. Drawing on John Dewey, Schwittay argues for the inclusion of both body and mind in the learning process. For example, she asked students on her course Urban Futures to bring their personal experiences of living in Brighton, UK where her university is located, into the classroom and then work with their diaries, emotions, and critical reflections to discuss rights to the city and urban citizenship (Schwittay 2023). The second pathway, that of *Creative Methods*, draws, amongst others, on Augusto Boal's methods and theories around theatre. The key point here is to bring art practices into transformative education, something that, with Boal's Forum Theatre method, is a very participatory and inclusive practice. Linked closely is the third pathway, that of the *praxis orientation*, a core concept in Freire's liberating pedagogy. Again, the process of working with praxis is embedded in Schwittay's teaching, asking students to develop activism campaigns for causes of their choice based on workshops where they acquire relevant theoretical and practical knowledge to develop such campaigns. Finally, the fourth pathway is that of Critical Hope. This proposal aims to avoid unrealistic optimism, and it is equally grounded in Freire's notion of radical hope, and as Schwittay states: "This is hope that is reparative in addressing past injustices, active in materially engaging with contemporary challenges and future-oriented in seeking transformative action" (Schwittay 2023, p. 12).

This critical–creative pedagogy needs a generative theorizing that allows the pedagogies of possibility to grow. *Generative theorizing* assumes an experimental and open stance that seeks connections and collaborations, aims to consider rather than judge. It furthermore embraces the unexpected and celebrates surprises. It is interested in building rather than (only) deconstructing, and when it is articulated as a critical–creative pedagogy, it ensures that its critical element does not overwhelm its creative sibling (Schwittay 2021). Generative theorizing furthermore rethinks the meaning of the higher educator. As Schwittay argues, it may consequently 'require unlearning of traditional approaches to theorization, a reimagining of the educator, pursuing prefigurative pedagogical politics where we begin to enact in the here and now the transformative vision we have for the future (an affective process, linked to our personal assumptions, aspirations and anxieties)' (Schwittay 2021). With generativity, critique and care become building blocks towards an 'academic subject of possibility'. If we connect this to Herrera-Huerfano's model of analysis around dialogues of knowledge, generativity can be seen as the integration of as many of

the ecologies as possible, developing 'a way of seeing' linked with a critical subject position and a practical way ahead.

To complement the analysis of critical pedagogies for social change in the context of universities, let us turn to the three-pronged decolonial pedagogy proposed by Rosalba Icaza (Icaza 2022). Icaza is the first professor in decolonial studies at a Dutch university. During her inaugural lecture (June 2022), she outlined a framework that is guided by feminist, decolonial, praxical thinking and an ethics of relational accountability (Icaza 2022). Her feminist and decolonial perspectives are interwoven, strongly inspired by Maria Lugones. In speaking of praxical thinking, she referred to her constant search for pedagogical possibilities: 'the opening of minds, hearts, ears when listening'. Furthermore, Icaza mentioned the ethics of relational accountability, and looking at 'a space in academia that nurtures pluriversality'. Based on these sources and principles, she proposed a decolonial pedagogy organized in three dimensions: firstly, a *pedagogy of positionality*, which is about exposing knowledge in a situated manner, raising awareness around the geopolitical location of the knowledge that is shared in for example academic canons; secondly, *a pedagogy of relationality*, seeking transformations in the classroom; and thirdly, a *pedagogy of transition*, which is about developing teaching practices that seek to break the epistemic borders.

Like Icaza, Achille Mbembe argues for the decolonial/decolonization project as a project that expands our conceptual, methodological, and theoretical imaginary, and does so through a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions (Mbembe 2021, p. 79). Drawing on Enrique Dussel and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Mbembe critiques the dominant Eurocentric academic model that has extended to most corners of the planet. He does not discard universal knowledge, but it must develop through pluriversity, which are spaces that are open to epistemic diversity. In the African context, Mbembe argues, the decolonization of the academic space has to do with articulating four interconnected processes: (1) Changing curricula, syllabi, or content (mostly in humanities); (2) Changing the criteria for defining what texts are included in or excluded from the canon; (3) Changing student demographics while recruiting more black staff and transforming academic and administrative bodies; and (4) Recalibrating the activities of teaching and learning in such a way as to institute a different power relation between teachers and learners (Mbembe 2021, pp. 77–78).

When comparing the above reviewed five pedagogies for change—Murrey and Daley, Zermeno et al., Schwittay, Icaza, and Mbembe—there are many overlapping features as to what constitutes a pedagogy that can both engage critically with society, be inclusive and open to dialogue, can challenges the academic canons, and that is attentive to the actual learning process. On the basis of this brief review, I see Icaza's argument for positionality, relationality, and transition as a generic conceptual framing that encompasses the full process of learning, unlearning, relearning, reflection, and action. It offers a pedagogical steer as how to counter specific monocultures, how to navigate within the ecologies you aspire for, and help guide your struggle for particular justices. While it is unlikely to target more than a few of the identified monocultures and ecologies that are in Herrera-Herfano et al.'s model of analysis, a pedagogy of social change along the lines of Icaza's three-pronged lens is a useful process-articulating approach that furthermore can integrate theory with practice.

While Herrera-Huerfano et al.'s model of analysis offer a general and all-encompassing mapping of problems (monocultures), spaces of opportunity (ecologies), and aims (justices), Icaza's decolonial pedagogy points us a step further to drawing up strategies for change, operationalized as pedagogies of positionality, relationality, and transition.

8. Implications for Communication and Social Change

Pedagogies of positionality, relationality, and transition constitute pathways in the unlearning and relearning withing the field of communication and social change. It is a way of organizing not only the critiques and limitations within communication for social change, as reviewed in the beginning of this chapter, but they suggest pathways towards

other imagined futures. They constitute an epistemological positioning, allowing for new knowledge to be produced and for communication for social change to be addressed through a decolonial lens.

The question is of course what implications this will have, both for the research and practice. The model by Herrera-Huerfano et al. remains a useful heuristic approach, a model of analysis that identifies a number of interconnected monocultures and some key ecologies where dialogues of knowledge can thrive, and similarly identifies a number of justices—cognitive, communicative, socio-political, environmental, etc.—that correspond to different dimensions of the pluriverse that potentially are addressed through the dialogues of knowledge. In moving this analysis a step further, I propose three focus areas as priorities we must address in supporting the processes of unlearning and relearning in communication and social change research and practice.

9. Ways of Seeing (Positionality)

Firstly, 'Ways of Seeing' is about exposing knowledge in a situated manner, raising awareness around the geopolitical location of the knowledge that is shared in, for example, academic canons on communication but also canons of communicative practice. How communication is perceived, implemented, and evaluated depends upon our positionality and thus our ways of seeing. Back in 2005, in writing the introduction to the 'Communication for Social Change Anthology' (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2005) we spoke about the roots and routes of the field, and the need to unpack these to understand the past and present and strengthen the pathways to the future. Similarly, Bhambra makes the argument that there are roots and routes that form your way of seeing and being (Bhambra 2020). A key example of how important this is can be taken from Herrera-Huerfano's own work within indigenous communication. She suggests what she calls 'communicacion propria' (translated as 'originative communication' in (Herrera-Huerfano et al. 2024)). It clarifies how, from an indigenous worldview, there are indigenous positions that inform public policy in support of indigenous communication. This indigenous proposal, which is further elaborated in Herrera-Huerfano et al. (2024), offers concrete pathways ahead.

10. New Subject Positions/Subjectivities (Relationality)

The second point is about acknowledging and strengthening the subject positions and relational structures within the spaces where learning, or conscientization, unfolds. This space, or ecology, can be a classroom or it can be any community space. Exploring and understanding these dynamics and recognizing and supporting the diversity of subject positions is what both Schwittay, in her critical–creative pedagogy, her pedagogy of hope, but also what Zermeno et al. in their Lab pedagogy for social change are working with. While enhancing the subject positions of collectives that influence change processes is key, it is also important to understand individual subjectivities and their relation to these collective processes of change. This is what I am currently undertaking in a research project exploring trajectories of activism. Scholars like Chantal Mouffe, Michel Foucault, and Engin Isin help us understand that agency is something that happens not only in the spikes of collective uprisings and in protest, but it also goes on in the everyday. For us, it is crucial to understand the dynamics and the role of communication herein.

11. New Design Processes (Transition)

Third and finally, new design processes are about developing pedagogical practices that seek to break the epistemic borders. Escobar's longstanding work, and not least his book 'Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds' (Escobar 2017), offers us a foundation that emerges from a recognition of the pluriverse, which is oriented towards communities and their processes of transformation, and which is attentive to the design of these processes. It includes attention to changing ecologies, or communing and reworlding, as key design categories that help us conceptualize and implement transformative design processes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2023). It is about

building a commons where the reworlding can happen. Manyozo's work with development practitioners and attention to design is a very concrete and relevant example of how this can unfold (Manyozo 2023).

12. Final Remarks

For Ngugi w'a Thiong'o, the decolonization project consisted primarily of critiquing the colonial knowledge chain (W'a Thing'o 1986) while Fanon spoke about provincializing Europe, turning our backs on Europe, and not taking Europe as a model. Decolonization, by these pioneering thinkers, was first and foremost a discipline, a process of getting to own oneself. It was, Fanon argued, also a pedagogy to teach the colonized through what kind of praxis he or she could liberate himself or herself (Fanon in Mbembe 2021, p. 54).

By recognizing such legacies in the struggles of 'getting to own oneself' as Fanon called it, the field of communication and social change is faced by challenges that transcend communication and are more about the underlying structures and processes of change. Hence, a decolonial perspective upon communication and social change requires engagement in the broader process of unlearning and relearning. Mbembe, who is Camerounian, living in South Africa, makes reference to how Latin Americans have fought back against the dominant Eurocentric academic model by both struggling against the epistemic coloniality and by rehabilitating the defeated, subaltern, or indigenous knowledges and life-worlds (Mbembe 2021, p. 59). We have seen an abundance of experience in Latin America—two examples of this are the Black Movement in Brazil and its call for anti-racist pedagogies, and the indigenous movements and their calls for indigenous pedagogies. We are currently seeing many other examples emerge elsewhere on the globe. The field of communication and social change is being substantially influenced by such movements and finds itself today in a process of unlearning. This article has unpacked this process. Now, emerging processes of relearning and re-centering are beginning to show more visible, articulated contours of other centres of knowledge production. Looking ahead, we will need more and deeper explorations into the contemporary experiences of other ways of seeing, being, and taking action.

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Article

Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Rethinking Communication for Development and Social Change in Health Communication

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Abstract: Communication for development and social change is an evolving field both in research and practice, transcending paradigms of conventional communication towards engaging and somewhat exposing some of the real-life communicative disorders experienced by communities. While public health and communication for development and social change operate from diverse paradigmatic thinking and are applied quite independently as disciplinary fields of study, health communication converges these fields in research and practice. In this paper, I discuss these interdisciplinary perspectives that draw from communication for development and social change principles and public health through a process of divergence and convergence towards new ways of thinking about decision making. Much of this discourse stems from understanding many health problems as a development problem first, one that recognises the role of community responses during pandemics yet at the same time places the agency back with individuals to make informed choices. Communicating for health decision making from this perspective is what I call Communicating for Health-as-Development (C4HD). C4HD foregrounds health as development, which caters to the messy, unidirectional, non-process-orientated, non-measurable and often non-data-driven approaches to health outcomes. It is in these messy health communication efforts that real development takes place. This paper, using examples from HIV and COVID-19, discusses these ongoing developments in the field and the convergence of public health and communication for development and social change from an interdisciplinary perspective, by exploring three key concepts: community engagement to influence decision making, community agency and ownership, and context and collaboration, which contribute to understanding communication for health-as-development.

Keywords: communication for development and social change; HIV and COVID-19 prevention; interdisciplinary health communication; public health; Communicating for Health-as-Development

1. Introduction

Communication for development and social change (CDSC) is an ever-evolving field both in research and in practice, transcending paradigms of conventional communication towards engaging and somewhat exposing some of the real-life communicative disorders experienced by communities. It has re-engineered the field towards intentional communication of relevance. Still, CDSC has worked through the crevices of epistemic thinking and practice to challenge the modus operandi of health communication. This is particularly evident through social and behaviour change communication (SBCC), for which communication for development and social change is a key enabler to shift some of the dominant behavioural approaches when addressing human behaviour. The behavioural

conception of health contends that health decisions are rational thought processes and an outcome of individual rational actions (Betsch et al. 2016; Airhihenbuwa et al. 2014). Again, behavioural approaches to health communication take the position that culture expressed as traditional attitudes inhibits positive health outcomes among so-called primitive populations (Schiavo 2014; Waisbord and Obregon 2012; Dutta 2011). Some scholars have argued against the essentiality of behavioural approaches to health communication, which relegate the influence of the community and culture on health outcomes (Melkote and Steeves 2015; Waisbord and Obregon 2012; Dutta 2011). In contrast to behavioural approaches, CDSC-inspired health communication imperatives contend that context-specific cultural attributes, such as cultural norms and social expectations, contribute to understanding the influences of health outcomes (Waisbord and Obregon 2012), and whilst not always positive, it offers a more critical lens to understand behaviour and health imperatives.

Indeed, Airhihenbuwa et al. (2014) highlight that to achieve meaningful public health outcomes, culture, in addition to behavioural outcomes, must be interrogated. Health communication, particularly from the CDSC perspective, focuses on eliciting social change at the macro level by foregrounding local culture, to complement public health imperatives towards the improvement of community and individual health outcomes. Despite the seeming relevance of macro-level epistemic thinking, dominant-paradigm-inspired health communication fields have been dominated by an over-emphasis on individual behavioural change and micro-level issues. Again, in practice, public health and health-related CDSC have been applied quite independently as disciplinary fields, creating epistemic silos and less-than-desired programmatic stand-alone, albeit to improve individual and community health outcomes. Thus, what is needed is a shift in epistemic thinking from conceptual silos to an interdisciplinary perspective of health communication that recognises the complementarity of diverse social change-oriented fields, such as health communication and public health to improve health outcomes. To address this, this paper critically reflects on the interdisciplinary perspectives of health communication, focusing on social change at the macro level.

While public health and communication for development and social change operate from quite diverse paradigmatic thinking and disciplinary fields of study, health communication converges these fields in research and practice. Through the robust engagement of scholars in the field of communication for development and social change (Servaes 2020; Tufte and Tacchi 2020; Thomas 2014), health communication is now established more broadly on the agenda of development (Salmon and Poorisat 2020; Waisbord and Obregon 2012; Schiavo 2007; Piotrow et al. 2003), as well as public health. In many ways, communication for development and social change has chartered the way forward to an interdisciplinary perspective that collaboratively merges health communication and public health at the patient–provider, community, organisational and advocacy levels. The essence of such engagement is to create opportunities through this empowering process for individuals to make community-informed decisions, thereby inversely converging decision making to the individual level again to achieve positive health outcomes (see Zoller 2017; Zoller and Dutta 2019).

In this paper, I discuss these interdisciplinary perspectives that draw from communication for development and social change principles and public health through a process of divergence and convergence towards new ways of thinking about health and decision making. Specifically, I analyse the diverse directions of the development of the health communication field. Communicating for health decision making and positive behavioural outcomes through a social change perspective is what I call Communicating for Health-as-Development (C4HD). Much of this discourse stems from understanding many health problems as developmental and a public health issue. My early work in 'development

and health communication for HIV/AIDS prevention' situates health first as a development problem and then as a public health problem (Govender 2011). This does not imply that pandemics should be devoid of rigorous public health intervention but that many behavioural change processes rest within wider development and social change issues (Govender 2021). Instead, C4HD thinking provides new insights into focusing on social change at the macro level for health communication during pandemics. This paper defines interdisciplinarity as acknowledging the complementarity of health communication and public health and drawing from their concepts, tactics and approaches to collaboratively communicate health-related social change during pandemics. This work defines a community as a group of people sharing similar social characteristics whose actions and inactions impact each other's health statuses and outcomes by virtue of their everyday interactions. Further, within C4HD, the role of the community as an actor in health communication is to provide the life context within which individual and community health can be understood. Again, the community is seen as having agency, empowered to engage in health interventions instead of recipients of such initiatives.

In this paper, I wish to explore how health communication from both a public health and communication for development and social change perspective has contributed to pandemic responses. Through this epistemic thinking, a new modality of communication has emerged, one that recognises community input as an integral part of the SBCC processes, while amplifying community voices in pandemic responses (Dutta et al. 2020; Essel and Govender 2023). Still, at the same time, agency is placed back with individuals to make positive health choices in times of public health emergencies. This suggests that we do not only approach a person during pandemics from a community level but ultimately recognise that decision making will occur on the individual level with community influence for pandemic communication. Drawing from research and practice in pandemics such as HIV and AIDS and later COVID-19, this paper explores the intersection of development communication and public health as an interdisciplinary perspective to C4HD that challenges the determinants of individual and community-level health outcomes during health emergencies.

2. Health Communication: Social Change Advances from Public Health

Health communication (HC), coined as a field in 1975 by the International Communication Association (ICA), was still primarily concentrated within this field of public health, dispersing health information with a sender–receiver approach often in the form of national campaigns, placing health issues on the agenda of news media and later promoting interpersonal patient–provider communication (Govender 2021). As a field, it combines theory and practice in understanding communication processes and changing human behaviour (Rimal and Lapinski 2009). Several leading books have been dedicated to defining health communication (Schiavo 2007; Bernhardt 2004; Harrington 2015; Cross et al. 2017; Schiavo 2014; Piotrow et al. 1997), many of which offer extensive insight from an interpersonal perspective, theorising and addressing effective communication with the patient–provider in healthcare settings. Some academics have explored health communication from a culture and media studies perspective (Dutta 2011; Airhihenbuwa 1995; Lupton 1994; Lewis 2014). However, few books address the intersection and even interdisciplinary nature of public health and health communication from a communication for development and social change perspective.

Health communication has become a well-recognised discipline linked to communication and health research (Ratzan 1994, p. 11) and public health in the era of epidemics, emerging diseases and increasing chronic diseases (Schiavo 2014). Public health adopts a post-positive perspective more specifically, focusing on primary health care, prevention,

protection, and promotion, with communication often being one approach in the arsenal of health promotion. Health, addressed primarily through public health strategies, without acknowledging the complementarity of CDSC-inspired health communication, can give less attention to the other developmental challenges (social, economic, physical and, religious) and nuances that influence health outcomes during pandemics.

Health communication, from this perspective, is a dominant paradigm associated with behaviourist paradigmatic thinking, and has an emphasis on the individual level of influence and decision making. (World Health Organization 2023) BCC uses communication as a tool to persuade individuals to adopt prescribed health behaviours (Green and Tones 2010). According to Pradip Thomas (2014), the commodification of BCC has reached epidemic proportions with individual projects devoid of context, often results-oriented through outcomes. Revisiting what the field of communication for social change brings through borrowing and adapting new theories, (Thomas 2014, p. 18) offers novel insights into established and new realities. For health communication, this means not denying the merit of understanding individual behaviour through the sciences but a transition from the sole medical model, which caps risk as the responsibility of the individual, towards engagement with social and structural factors that influence change (Green and Tones 2010).

These social change shifts are evident through social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) influenced by social determinants and multilevel enablers of change which are more concerned with collective action, often in the form of community engagement, social mobilisation and advocacy efforts (Thomas 2014). With COVID-19, risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) were mobilised as a new approach, shifting health communication into the active community engagement space (Gupta et al. 2021). Adopting multilevel theoretical approaches allows health communicators to provide meaningful input in improving and saving lives.

Hence, health communication from the public health and social change perspective is concerned with improving health outcomes (Gupta et al. 2021) but with a dualistic approach of engaging with communities, by mobilising individuals with informed, intentional health decision making. Communication for Health-as-Development (C4HD), from this perspective, works with public health and emphasises effective communication processes and community engagement to ultimately empower the individual decision-making process. This gives birth to a new paradigm of research, community engagement and practice, which does not only seek to conform or transform specific behaviours. Instead, communication is seen as a dialogical process of community engagement towards collective and individual health consensus. Yet, it is still a diverging and converging process that broadens into community narratives of influence on behaviour, and then narrows to individual decision making, placing the onus on the individual for positive health outcomes.

The field of health communication is, therefore, not confined, owned or solely transformed through public health. Rather, community-driven public health and health communication principles and tactics collectively contribute towards achieving positive health outcomes. Through empowering, enabling and agency-driven engagement processes of health communication, communities are empowered to advance their health choices. Just like community-driven public health imperatives, particularly for marginalised populations, Communication for Health-as-Development (C4HD) foregrounds development imperatives for social change that are messy, unidirectional, non-process-orientated, non-measurable and often not data-driven. It is in these messy health communication efforts that real development takes place.

3. Health Communication: Social Change Advances from Communication for Development

The work of Servaes and Lie (2013, 2020) positions health communication within development communication as a sub-discipline of the field of applied communication research. Recognised as a sub-discipline in communication, and as a discipline in public health, many scholars identify its multidisciplinary nature. Schiavo (2007, p. 7) defined health communication as a multi-faceted and multidisciplinary approach to reach audiences and share health-related information with the goal of influencing, engaging and supporting individuals, communities, health professionals, and policymakers to introduce, adopt and sustain a behaviour, practice or policy to improve health outcomes. Harrington (2015) similarly recognised the multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of health communication, but also highlighted the importance of collaborative investigation, with different disciplinary perspectives to explore a health or communication aspect of a health problem. Health communication is increasingly recognised for its diverse scholarship with interdisciplinary contributions (Nussbaum 1989; Walter 2016).

Tufte (2012) calls for a more explicit social vision and social ambition in health communication that favours a "broader-based interdisciplinary communication paradigm, where modernity, globalization and social change is well theorized" with "room and time for dialogue and debate guide our global health communication practice" (Tufte 2012, p. 613). As part of this process, Tufte flagged that the challenge for health communication remains in rethinking the role of media and communication in support of a development process and a public health vision where media (and communication) can better address the health concerns of populations (Tufte 2012, p. 617).

In revisiting this development process, interdisciplinary health communication scholarship, through the adoption of the ecological perspective, examines the relationship and connection between individuals, peers, families, communities and broader social, economic, cultural and physical environments. Research from this ecological perspective is conducted with various theoretical insights and principles that stem from humanities, social sciences and medical science, some of which reflect different paradigmatic approaches (Cohen 2022). As I think about interdisciplinarity, I ask, what does communication for development and social change mean for health communication?

The value of communication for development and social change and its contribution to health communication cannot be underestimated (Lie and Servaes 2015). Drawing from interpretative and critical–cultural perspectives, communication for health as development (C4HD) allows researchers to examine processes of engagement and its influence on decision making, community agency and ownership of health issues, placing increased emphasis on context and collaborative health goals. Through critical–cultural paradigms, these multiple ways of knowing and understanding health information, health promotion, patient–provider interactions and shared decision making (Hoffmann-Longtin et al. 2022) give a voice to marginalised communities to 'empower them for social change' (Harrington 2015, p. 20). Through "cultural constructions of health and responses to illness" (2017) and critically exploring and addressing the power relations, the co-production of knowledge with communities promotes progressive social change for health and development. So, as I think about the emerging developments in the field and what captures this convergence from public health and communication for development and social change in an interdisciplinary perspective, three key concepts inform what I call Communication for Health-as-Development. These include community engagement to influence decision making, community agency and ownership, and lastly, context and collaboration, which is an overarching perspective to successful effective health communication. These concepts are expanded below and explored using examples from two pandemics: HIV and COVID-19.

3.1. Community Engagement to Influence Decision Making

In Teer-Tomaselli et al. (2021), we discuss this approach where the adoption of health communication is through a lens of development communication, which explores new ways of harnessing media, particularly participatory media and methodologies, and local cultural frames to promote and advance health imperatives. Health communication from a communication for development and social change perspective challenges participation to ensure that "participation translates into individuals being active in development programmes and processes; they contribute ideas, take the initiative and articulate their needs and their problems, while asserting their autonomy" (Ascroft and Masilela 1994, p. 260). This participatory dimension of communication delves into the specifics of who these communities are, how they make sense of lived realities, and what interventions will contribute to positive health outcomes. Health communication from this perspective "is a long-term process that begins and ends with people's needs and preferences" where people are not merely targeted but active participants in the process of understanding and prioritising health issues, "finding culturally appropriate and cost-effective solutions, and becoming effectively engaged as the lead change designed in the planning, implementation and assessment of interventions" (Schiavo 2014, p. 12).

Communication for development and social change is concerned with processes and the way we communicate as the catalyst for the health outcome we expect; it is messy, as it challenges why people think the way they think about health and explores influences that contribute to a way of thinking and knowing. In many ways, communication for development and social change is more than applied health communication; it is about messy, unstructured critical ways of knowing, understanding and being as seen through the lens of communities. Yet the action or human behaviour that is necessary to achieve a health outcome is a result of this messy community engagement that ultimately influences individual decision making. It is at the level of the messiness of engaging in the development and social change that health communication and public health imperatives intersect.

The importance of collective voices in decision-making processes relates to health and social issues, where community-engaged health communication interventions echo a shared belief through community dialogues and voices, communities have greater ownership with shared health imperatives, they participate in health and social issues, and they collectively focus on local contexts in addressing the health issue (Schiavo et al. 2016). This is seen through the long HIV prevention trajectory of communicating health from a development and social change perspective to advance human behaviour and will be discussed below.

3.2. Community Agency and Ownership—Where the Power Lies

Given the conflicts in defining participation, which is often a buzzword coined in most development projects, Thomas (2014) argues that the dominant paradigm is yet to pass, as the participatory model has been co-opted within this perspective. Communication for development and social change as a field of research is positioned as the game changer in participatory communication; however, it runs the risk of over-emphasizing impact with a strong results-oriented agenda that can be institutionally and often funder-driven, leading to the corporatisation of health communication efforts. It must be noted here that, from a C4HD perspective, the actions and inactions of social actors within closely knit communities impact each other's health statuses and outcomes by virtue of their everyday interactions. As such, community agency, which Dutta (2011) conceptualised as the power of choice by communities, does not lie in the bosom of individuals but is a social construct. This paper borrows from Figueroa and his colleagues' conception of community ownership of communication for social change interventions. That is the extent to which communities feel responsible for the success of interventions and, therefore, credit themselves with it

(Figueroa et al. 2002). Following this, within C4HD, community agency leading to owner-ship of health imperatives should be centred in all health communication interventions.

Despite increased evidence on the centrality of community ownership and participa-tion in health communication interventions, as was seen in many HIV efforts (Govender and Karim 2018; Govender 2011), the integration of community mobilization and citizen engagement strategies, which are key areas of health communication, is too often an after-thought in most communication programs (Schiavo et al. 2016). Also, little community input was evident in many COVID-19 responses targeting closely knit Global South com-munities with limited resources (Essel and Govender 2023; Pavarala and Jena 2020). Pradip Thomas questions if participation and empowerment have become dominant paradigms in CFSC, which has agenda-setting powers, placing global health funding on the agenda of health communication, as seen through the resources from the Bill and Melinda Foundation, which is supportive of an "individual focused neoliberal, big pharma approach to global health" (2019, p. 7).

For CFSC to be utilised in health communication, community experiences that are grounded in local ecologies of best practice (Thomas 2019, p. 46), where there is a critique of biomedical models of health (Waisbord and Obregon 2012, p. 20), offer opportunities to question the power of health communication. The strength of CFSC lies in addressing issues of power, human rights, and social justice. Thus, CFSC should not be overshadowed by the need to demonstrate results with predominantly quantitative evaluations and impact indicators (Pavarala 2020), negating the real impact in communities that sometimes cannot be measured. Power is not a new concept to CSFC, yet the 'power to decide, the power to impose, the power to resource, the power to create, the power to define and the power to invest' are all necessary to advance pandemic communication beyond data-driven outcomes of health interventions.

3.3. Contexts and Collaboration

The relevance of context is diminishing in global public health. It has been systemati-cally ignored and marginalised in communication for social change theory, and this "neglect or marginalisation of context has been detrimental to community-based understandings of the needs that are grounded in culture and everyday life" (Thomas 2019, p. 3). Pradip Thomas's statement has been proven to be true in some instances, as witnessed by the top-down persuasive messages disseminated among communicatively marginalised Global South communities without community input during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dutta et al. 2020; Essel and Govender 2023). Understanding local contexts contributes to a nuanced understanding of development, social change, and advancing health communication.

The key to interdisciplinary health communication is also premised on the collabo-rative nature of scholars working from diverse disciplinary perspectives converging to explore a health problem. Often, this requires crossing bridges between communication and health professionals to utilise different approaches to gather data and evidence-based practice (Cohen 2022). However, from a communication for development perspective, health communication enables communities to be key collaborators in the co-production of knowledge and achieving health outcomes. Ultimately, the inclusion of individuals or communities will determine how we approach health outcomes, as social change is often influenced through multilevel processes of collaboration and engagement in interventions.

The Communicating for Health-as-Development (C4HD) perspective merges the merits of public health and theoretical contributions from communication for development and social change and suggests that this interdisciplinarity field draws on notions of community engagement and decision making, community ownership and agency, and

context and collaboration. I explore the merits of C4HD using examples from HIV and COVID-19 in South Africa.

4. HIV Prevention in South Africa: Are We There Yet?

In exploring these transitions of communication for development and social change responses, I first turn to the case of communicating HIV prevention in South Africa, which has had the highest rates of infections globally over a period of time (UNAIDS 2020). The early efforts of HIV communication in South Africa centred on the diffusion of health information, health propaganda, the adoption of Westernized ideologies and the health publicity paradigm that promoted the selling of acceptable health attitudes and practices (Johns Hopkins for Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA) 2013; Govender 2011; Harrison et al. 2010). This dominant paradigm of social marketing, accompanied by health propaganda, disproportionately focused on individual attributes (Melkote and Steeves 2015; Waisbord and Obregon 2012; Dutta 2011; Airhihenbuwa and Obregon 2000), and was criticised for its inability to achieve behaviour change, thereby disrupting some genuine community attempts in South Africa to reduce HIV infection (Teer-Tomaselli et al. 2021). Many scholars argued that failure to consider cultural influence and the wider socio-cultural context limits the effectiveness of top-down approaches (Betsch et al. 2016; Schiavo 2014; Yehya and Dutta 2010; Dutta-Bergman 2005; Obregon and Mosquera 2005; Airhihenbuwa 1995), many of which were seen as efforts to modernise, normalise and conform society towards acceptable behaviour. Yet at the same time, relegating all rights and power to cultural acceptability and practice can perpetuate health problems and societal practices.

The early 1990s saw the dawn of a new democracy for South Africa but also the intensifying need to address the interconnectivity of behaviour, culture, religious ideologies and human health. The antiretroviral treatment program, prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) program and ongoing medical male circumcision (MMC) dovetailed with behavioural change programmes to promote the adoption of new health practices in the South African epidemic (Simelela and Venter 2014). The early 2000s, however, saw heightened miscommunication around the treatment benefits of ARV, and SA was plagued by a decade of chronic misinformation, pseudo-science and conspiracy theories (Teer-Tomaselli et al. 2021; Sesanti 2018), with AIDS denialism often promoting the use of vitamins in fruit, vegetables and traditional cures instead of accessing ARV treatment (Cullinan and Thom 2009; Heywood 2004; Nattrass 2004). The frequent misinformation in the public domain and controversial medical conspiracy theories created doubt around the suitability and applicability of individual-oriented HIV/AIDS prevention efforts in South Africa, where health was not understood as a product of a complex interaction between the individual, the family and the community (Sidley 2007).

The Beyond Awareness Campaign (1996–2000), the first initiative undertaken by the National HIV/AIDS Directorate, undergirded the need to operationalise health communication (Parker et al. 2000) with cultural, social and economic factors foregrounded as key drivers for effective behavioural and social change response. An increase in participatory media (Parker et al. 2000) and culturally relevant participatory strategies using drama and forum theatre (Durden and Tomaselli 2012) challenged health education and the way we 'do' health, media and development. From 1998 to 2003, the ongoing community engagement, stakeholder engagement, advocacy and lobbying efforts of scientists, activists and civil society shifted the SA response with a scientific evidence-based strategy to support social mobilisation and advocate for access to antiretrovirals (O'Reilly 2016). Launched in 2009, Brothers for Life was an active social movement by men for men that encourage the uptake of health services, particularly testing and treatment. Using multi-media platforms and community events, the campaign mobilised men to actively engage in activities to

address Gender-Based Violence and HIV prevention in their communities (Mbasalaki 2014) and created a notable shift to a people-centred approach based on community mobilisation and collective action (Manyozo 2017; Dutta 2011; Figueroa et al. 2002).

The period between 2004 and 2014 saw an avalanche of communication interventions to curb misinformation; there was also a prominent rise and shift in the focus on behaviour change communication alone to combination prevention, which included biomedical intervention specifically with the use of antiretroviral for prevention as treatment (TasP), behavioural and structural interventions (Govender 2024). At the same time, shifts in the dominant paradigm of development were evident with the locally produced South African television Soul City, which adopted entertainment education (EE) with a social and behavioural change strategy (Tufte 2012), to significantly advance the South African public health agenda. Communicating for participatory development with an emphasis on community dialogue and collective action became a cornerstone for convergence where community-level interventions were necessary to understand local context and influence behaviour change (Kincaid and Figueroa 2009). Through the developments in HIV communication, communicating for health as development is mobilised by empowering ordinary people to actively find solutions to local problems, including health, which is critical for their involvement and programme sustainability (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano 2020; Tufte and Mefalopulos 2009).

The period of 2014 saw a major decline in communication efforts with the termination of many funded strategic social and behavioural change communication interventions (Gumede et al. 2022) and the increasing focus on PrEP, the first oral pill to reduce HIV infection by 90% (Govender and Karim 2018). However, the history of HIV communication from a communication for development and social change perspective in South Africa demonstrates the potential of various stakeholders addressing the importance of context and collaboratively working with communities to engage in dialogue and critically engage in the behavioural change process. With combination prevention, there is a heightened need for effective socio-behavioural change with medical literacy and understanding of medical technologies such as HIV treatments, HIV testing, viral load testing, male circumcision, microbicides, and pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis, all of which require communication with community engagement to address local contexts that are often cultural, economic and political (Kippax et al. 2011).

Advances made in revolutionising HIV communication over the last three decades to include community voices through community inclusion, social mobilisation and advocacy have been challenged by the shift from behavioural interventions to social change communication, but new emerging biomedical interventions which are less user-reliant, such as oral PreP, shift the agency and decision-making power back to the individual. This, in many ways, reaffirms the need for a process of divergence and convergence through communication efforts that engage with community needs and values, and then re-assesses its influence on individual decision making and the uptake of new innovations. In some ways, the culture-centred approach, context of communities and participatory ways of engaging communities to delve into their HIV prevention preferences sheds some light on and new insights into the uptake of these biomedical developments (Bokolo and Govender 2022; Govender and Karim 2018; Govender 2011). Placing the agency back with individuals for behaviour change and health choices for HIV prevention requires a broader socio-cultural context and often development challenges to be elevated to inform social change (Govender 2024). Any intervention in the epidemic, whether it is understood as "biomedical", "behavioural" or both, requires community engagement and mobilisation to make a difference (Adam 2011) and this has been evident in the case of HIV prevention in South Africa.

5. COVID-19 in South Africa: Have We Learnt Anything Yet?

COVID-19, like HIV communication, constituted much more than a biomedical problem but a major narrative and communication problem (Lewis et al. 2021). While South Africa was commended for its proactive and swift action to contain COVID-19 (United Nations South Africa 2020), its communicative response adopted a public health perspective with top-down communication and limited community engagement and participation around the dominant prevention messages in the early stages of the pandemic (Govender 2021). In many ways, the victories and successes of many of the later community engagement efforts for HIV prevention were absent from the COVID-19 communication space (Gumede et al. 2022; Jansen and Madhi 2022), which could also be expected given the public health emergency of COVID-19. However, as we reflect on the overall communication response with COVID-19, there are many lessons that can be explored for future pandemic and public health emergencies.

Top-down communication was evident through the globalised response of mask wearing, social distancing, personal hygiene and isolation/quarantine. The 'stay at home' message was a predominant message for many South Africans and attributed as a success of the initial COVID-19 response. However, this 'stay at home' message had severe consequences for many communities. For instance, resource-limited communities and disadvantaged communities were often forced to neglect COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, which sent large waves of poverty throughout the country, and increased unemployment rates with a further loss of 3 million jobs, and a surge of informal traders looking for alternate work. The contradictions to the 'stay at home' message emerged when people started to queue either for food supplies, donations, social grants or the debt relief programme that the government made available. Dominant public emergency responses needed more understanding of the wider social context and beneficiary community needs during pandemics (Govender 2021).

The key narrative emerging during this time was that COVID-19 prevention was possible if people 'stayed home', yet a dual pandemic, that of poverty, was escalating. A decade earlier, Campbell and Scott (2012, p. 177) asserted that "both globally and within particular countries and contexts, it is generally those with the most limited access to economic and political power who are the unhealthiest". Inequality played out in the form of unequal social relations and the underlying cause of health among disadvantaged groups, exacerbated further during pandemics such as COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS. The context within which people live is a crucial aspect of their health status (Dutta et al. 2020; Airhihenbuwa and Obregon 2000). The SA communication efforts aligned with global responses, where key messages focused on a very individual level of behaviour change, and limited efforts to integrate community responses. Concerns of modernization, cultural imperialism and Westernised approaches during pandemics were still evident (see Teer-Tomaselli et al. 2021), and COVID-19 communication, in many ways, followed a diffusion of health information, health propaganda, and the adoption of Westernised ideologies that were largely promoted by governments and key experts in the field (See Lewis et al. 2021; Lewis et al. 2024).

In previous pandemics like HIV, cultural practices were critically engaged, and agencies of communities were used as tools to address prevention. The COVID pandemic used key communication influencers who were predominantly political, health experts and powerful people in the community to reinforce global public health messages to different publics as the crisis evolved. The work of Dutta et al. (2020) here challenges this hegemonic pandemic communication for its ideology of individualism and its erasure of structural contexts and drivers of health inequalities. They further advance the need for community-driven health communication that is culturally centred. Dutta et al. (2020) foreground

questions of social justice during pandemic disease outbreaks, creating communicative infrastructures that facilitate advocacy and activism (see Lewis et al. 2021). Whilst community engagement is not always attainable during pandemics such as COVID-19, which was a public health emergency and a state of national disaster in many countries, the long-term management of COVID-19, with South Africa having one of the longest lockdowns globally, questions the overall impact of the intervention.

Further contradictions emerged with conflict in care. Many messages advocated for isolation and quarantine, yet this was extremely difficult in communities where communal living and a desire to protect each other exceeds self-care (Gumede and Govender 2024). In terms of isolation, families often isolated, with the care and support of families, and this resulted in many government facilities being under-utilised. In some ways, this could be a form of cultural resilience, rendering many of the health facilities and interventions irrelevant. The concept of Ubuntu—humanity for others—is deeply entrenched in community practice, and this became contested. Several studies during COVID suggested that Africa has made great strides through Ebola, TB, and HIV, and the value of social and community capital during pandemics cannot be overemphasised. Further, Ubuntu-inspired community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic challenge some of the dominant public health responses targeting individual behavioural change that emerged with COVID-19. Terry Flew aptly outlines that a deficit of trust lies at the heart of many communicative problems that emerged during the pandemic, occurring at professional, institutional and individual levels (Flew 2021) and the community level.

There is a need for 'rethinking pandemic responses in ways that were localised and people-centred, ensuring the inclusivity of local voices and experiences' (Govender 2021, p. 8). Expanding on this need for community engagement, several studies conducted in SA demonstrated the diversity and understanding of risk through community dialogues that addressed the local interpretations of COVID-19 prevention messages, suggesting high levels of knowledge and awareness of COVID-19 prevention measures (Rossouw et al. 2024). This position highlights a need for structural transformation of the environment where people live and work but not more paternalistic dissemination of WHO-inspired COVID-19 prevention messages (World Health Organization 2023). Thus, inherently health-promoting environments are expected to have healthier inhabitants compared to health-inhibiting settings. Efforts directed at promoting people's health will be much more impactful if they can remove barriers to health promotion in the environment within which people live and work (Schiavo 2014).

6. Towards Theorising a New Paradigm of Communicating for Health-As-Development

The transitions in HIV and COVID-19 prevention mirror the revolutionary nature of development communication in theory and practice, a field that is constantly re-crafted, re-constituted and re-engineered to ensure that voices of the community are not lost in the noise of global economic and political agendas. Health communication, with its progressive development and dynamic normative nature, re-amplifies the need for the inclusion of community voices in addressing health imperatives. My own research has contributed to re-visiting this interdisciplinary research through exploring the intersection of communication for development and social change with public health, and health communication.

In recent years, development programmes have seen a shift from focusing on a single health or development issue to encompassing multiple topics or issues within a programme. This shift is also reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the overlaps and interdisciplinarity of the global development areas. In global health, for example, the shift to an integrated approach draws attention to issues of universal health coverage,

primary health care, health system strengthening and client-centred care. Corresponding to this larger trend toward integrated development, there is an increased interest in integrated social and behaviour change communication that addresses multiple health issues and behaviours; this can be seen as a critical strategy to improve health and development outcomes (Johns Hopkins for Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA) 2013). An integrated SBCC approach can often imply an interdisciplinary perspective, one that caters to the intersectionality of health, development and praxis within the frameworks of applied human sciences and biomedical research. Through the messiness of development in research and practice using the HIV and COVID examples, the role of community engagement in decision making and community ownership is increasingly recognised in health communication. Further, the importance of context and collaboration contributes to the development and social change in health communication.

Optimising these intersections in the health communication field contributes to future pandemics, expands our field's interdisciplinary strengths, and advances a health agenda. This is achieved through recognising the importance of community voices and ownership of decision making where community mobilisation as a form of development is integral in improving people's health. Campbell and Scott (2012) pointed out that community mobilisation is an integral approach to achieving the ideal of a 'health-enabling social environment'. Thus, community mobilisation (community participation, partnership and ownership) provides the fulcrum of the health-oriented social change process. Community mobilisation is defined in terms of (1) the intertwined strategies of grassroots participation in health and social development efforts (participation) and (2) the building of alliances and collaborations between communities and more powerful groups (partnerships)" (Campbell and Scott 2012, p. 178). Taking this lens, Communicating for Health-as-Development amplifies community engagement for informed health decision making at the individual level, community empowerment through ownership and enhancing collaboration. This collaborative nature through community participation and partnerships creates diverse opportunities for empowering beneficiary communities and individuals to achieve pressing health outcomes during pandemics. Against the background of the rapidly changing health messaging in response to the fluid nature of pandemics, it needs to be pointed out that changing health behaviour is a difficult task at any level, even among highly motivated individuals. This situation is more dire among people sceptical of prevention messages, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For successful pandemic responses, understanding the lived experiences and how global public health response messages are localized is imperative. To illustrate, Ebola in Western Africa highlights how a "*people's science*" (Richards 2016), through a mediated approach, explored local cultural practices. Again, integrating global messages into a local context was able to delve into the depths of some of the complexities around human behaviour towards eradicating some of the health challenges. Ebola, like HIV, worked with the power of community partnerships for an in-depth knowledge of prevention and treatment messages through cultural frames (Kunda and Tomaselli 2009; Govender and Karim 2018; Govender et al. 2017). The decisive role of communities provides an evidence-based reality to address health and development. The rise of community voices enables a "space for such acts of exchange, listening and narrative formation" (Mansell and Manyozo 2018, p. 327). It allows us to reflect, engage, critique and appreciate the contribution of local communities as key stakeholders and as research partners in the co-construction of knowledge in health and development.

This applied research and local stakeholder engagement illustrates the merit of research–community partnerships, albeit donor agencies drive their socio-economic agendas. This position is consistent with Bessette's (2004) assertion that a key factor in achieving

success with communication for development and social change initiatives is developing and nurturing local partnerships between and among identified stakeholders. Partnerships can be between communication researchers and locally identified stakeholders and/or between locals and powerful external groups (Bessette 2004). From a health communication inspired by communication for development and social change perspective, such a researcher–community partnership is even more crucial. This position is buttressed by the treatise that the primary role of health communicators is to provide alternative social spaces conducive to marginalised populations seeking social recognition and enacting their resistance against forms of social hierarchies responsible for health inequalities (Campbell and Scott 2012).

Health communication inspired by communication for development and social change models and approaches relies on an increasing sense of community ownership, information equity, social norms and collective self-efficacy (Pavarala 2020; Thomas 2014; Figueroa et al. 2002). Inherently, these developments in research and practice support the urgency for community collaboration with an understanding of the context that influences health behaviours. Such an approach creates spaces for community mobilisation that, in many ways, also reflects the interdisciplinary nature of public health and communication for development and social change.

7. Conclusions

Pandemics like HIV have seen the dispersing of health information largely driven by communication experts, an increased emphasis on patient–provider interventions under the ambit of health promotion, and some communication for participatory development interventions driven by a development agenda with communities. Scholarship in the field of health communication is therefore diverse with interdisciplinary contributions that specifically contribute to health information, health promotion, patient–provider interactions, and shared/collective decision-making processes, and this interdisciplinarity encourages multiple ways of knowing (Hoffmann-Longtin et al. 2022). Whilst an ongoing pandemic like HIV has allowed for layers of community engagement at various stages of prevention efforts, public health emergencies like COVID-19 necessitated a firm and much-needed epidemiological response; the problem arises, though, when pandemic communication adopts Western messages without understanding localised experiences in the adaptability of key messaging (Laskar and Bhattacharyya 2021; Dutta et al. 2020; Pavarala and Jena 2020). The case of HIV prevention has, in many ways, demonstrated the value of communication for health-as-development, and at the same time highlights how the shifts in prevention approaches cause a revisiting of the value of moving from individual levels to community levels of engagement and then converging back to the individual level again for community-influenced individual decision making. Whilst this paper has focused on the interdisciplinarity of health communication, this paper is somewhat limited in its examples from South Africa only, and drawing from only two pandemics as examples; however, given the extent of infections, death and disease management within the country, and the extensive communication for social change initiatives, this paper offers an evidence-based perspective from the Global South.

This paper discussed Communicating for Health-as-Development (C4HD) as an interdisciplinary approach to communicating health. The Communicating for Health-as-Development perspective merges the merits of public health and theoretical contributions from communication for development and social change and suggests that this interdisciplinarity field draws on notions of community engagement and decision making, community ownership and agency, and context and collaboration to communicate health. The interdisciplinary approach to health communication emphasises a shift from individual

behaviour change to macro-level change, often at the community level, where wider collaborative and socio-ecological perspectives are needed for health-as-development, which is deeply entrenched in the communication for development and social change perspective.

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Article

Communication for Development: Conceptualising Changes in Communication and Inclusive Rural Transformation in the Context of Environmental Change

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Abstract: Globally, rural conditions are in states of change. They are often highly vulnerable to climate and environmental change, extreme weather events, conflict, socio-economic changes, inequalities, and demographic changes. These changes are putting stress on rural areas, which rely upon agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods and are often the foundation of national economies. Communication for development (C4D) has played an important role in addressing these challenges. Its thinking is broadly consistent with rural development goals—indeed, the roots of C4D come in part from rural development and agricultural extension. Communication for development (C4D) was defined by the World Congress on Communication for Development as "...a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It also seeks change at different levels, including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating, and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communications". However, after decades of action to address these interrelated rural development challenges, much remains to be done. This paper critically considers the following: What does inclusive rural development mean now, in light of environmental change, and how does this affect the conceptualisation and practice of C4D? This was done by using three countries as case studies: Malawi, Ukraine, and the Philippines. Each of these countries represented contrasting challenges and opportunities for rural development and environmental change, with lessons from their experiences shedding insight into the communication for development thinking.

Keywords: communication for development; rural communication; rural transformation; inclusive rural development; environmental change

1. Introduction

Rural communities and the conditions in rural areas are changing. With changing environmental conditions, rural areas traditionally reliant on agriculture and natural resources are facing substantial challenges in continuing to provide sustainable livelihoods for the rural citizenry. Policy shifts in economic and social development priorities are changing the rural landscape: increased needs for housing have brought rural land into peri-urban areas, changing its use from agriculture to properties and commercial developments. Agricultural policy initiatives have been changing, with a greater focus on increasing production towards more commercial goals, including diversifying agricultural sectors to generate a

larger national income through the agriculture sector. Inclusive rural transformation is important in addressing these changing rural conditions, supporting sustainable development, and redefining the nature of rurality to support rural communities.

Rural transformation was defined by Berdegué et al. (2013) as a "process of comprehensive societal change whereby rural societies diversify their economies and reduce their reliance on agriculture; become dependent on distant places to trade and acquire goods and services; move from dispersed villages to towns and small and medium cities; and become culturally more similar to large urban agglomerations". Additionally, Borodina and Prokopa (2019) indicated that agricultural growth cannot be a goal in itself or the main source of currency returns in a society oriented towards rural development. Consequently, rural transformation results in the blurring of the social, cultural, and economic differences between rural and urban areas. This has resulted in shifting population dynamics, rural identities, and agricultural practices.

Rural transformation not only involves rising agricultural productivity but also increased commercialisation, diversification of production patterns, better rural coverage, and access to rural services and infrastructure (Benfica 2019). Moreover, Berdegué et al. (2013) also argued that the development of infrastructure, such as roads and telecommunication services, are essential drivers for rural transformation. Therefore, transformation is possible through various types of services, each of which requires information as a major input. People in rural areas, whether literate or not, require access to information services that will help them become more capable and productive in their daily operations, discharge their social and political obligations efficiently and become better-informed citizens (Harande 2009). The development and progress of any rural area depends on its ability to acquire, produce, access and use information through effective communication, with the latter being a key aspect of inclusive rural development and inclusive rural transformation.

Inclusive rural transformation is fundamental to the achievement of sustainable and resilient rural communities due to its positive impact on the reduction of poverty and hunger (Wang et al. 2023). The existing rural–urban divide in areas such as access to infrastructure, energy and economic opportunities delays and hinders the progress of socio-economic development (IFAD 2016). As a result, inclusive rural transformation is necessary to ensure that no one is left behind in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the United Nations. Inclusive rural transformation involves a range of interconnected actors, including government (national, regional and local), non-governmental organisations, the private sector, research institutions, communities, and local organisations. Inclusive rural transformation requires access to information and communication in order to benefit farmers and rural communities. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (FAO 2014) notes that,

> "[S]upporting dialogic communication and knowledge-sharing processes is a powerful means of helping farmer organizations, indigenous peoples, rural communities and civil society organizations to make their voices heard and be part of the development agenda. The challenge is to promote institutional and policy frameworks that will allow equitable access to information and communication services in rural areas and ensure the active participation of smallholder farmers. Communication for development policies can translate farmers' right to communication into fair and transparent regulatory frameworks that enable the rural population to access information and manage communication processes".

While this articulates the role of communication for smallholder farmers to achieve inclusive rural transformation, these same principles need to be applied to farms regardless of size. The key is inclusive, so the perspectives of farmers and rural communities are integrated into rural development processes.

Communication, in relation to development was initially defined by Quebral (1971) as the "art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfilment of the human potential". A number of definitions of communication emerged (FAO 1984; The World

Bank 2006), which were applied and interpreted by organisations in different ways, with the term eventually referred to as "*communication for development and social change*". Despite its changing definitions and interpretations, Servaes (2007) identified some underlying common values and later defined communication for development and social change as "the nurturing of knowledge aimed at creating a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned", concluding that it is a social process with its ultimate objective being sustainable development and change at distinct levels of society. Communication has long been recognised as a driver for innovation and social change in rural development across the world (FAO 2017). It was previously considered a straight line from the developed "source" to the underdeveloped "receiver", a characteristic of the top-down communication model consisting of one-way persuasion (Servaes 2020). However, in the 1980s and 1990s, participation became popular in the development sector, and participatory communication established itself as one of the subdisciplines of communication science (Lie and Servaes 2015). Participatory communication is related to the multiplicity paradigm of development, which focuses on the people as controlling actors and participants for development, emphasising bottom-up communication, as well as the right to communication (Servaes 2007). Agricultural extension is another subdiscipline of communication, both a contributor to communication for development thinking and a disciplinary and practical sibling. It started with concepts of communication, such as diffusion of innovations and knowledge and technology transfer to farmers. As a result, the extension was perceived as a linear knowledge transfer. This approach was reformed by the FAO by promoting communication as the focal and crucial factor for decision-making in development interventions (Balit and Acunzo 2020). The change was also influenced by challenges to dominant linear thinking about rural development, challenging modernist assumptions about how change should take place, through what mechanisms, and to what ends.

Challenging these linear assumptions about communication prompted new conceptualisations of rural change that better fit more systems-driven thinking about the extension, such as agricultural knowledge and information systems (AKIS), innovation systems and farmer field schools (FFS). More recently, rural communication encompasses a broader and more holistic conceptualisation of integrated rural development, including agricultural extension, but with a much wider scope, including education, health, political and sociocultural issues that are not directly related to agriculture.

Communication approaches have gradually shifted from being focused on technology to being focused on people, which was emphasised by the FAO's *Rural Communication Services* (RCS) (FAO 2017). The participation of rural stakeholders and actors is essential to the entire development process and should be embedded at all stages of development projects through dialogue and multi-stakeholder awareness raising, as well as the co-creation and operation of communication systems and processes. This evolution of communication for development has been driven by praxis, which Freire (1972) articulates as "reflection and action upon the world to transform it". For Freire, praxis was part of five characteristics of effective dialogue, which included communication between equals, problem posing, conscientisation and "human values" such as love, humility, faith, hope and critical thinking, as he believed that entering dialogue presupposed equality among participants and that there must be mutual respect and trust for sustainable transformation (Musakophas and Polnigongit 2017). This understanding of dialogue is evident in the principles of communication for development described by Balit and Acunzo (2020) which emphasise two-way communication, with the communicators acting as mediators to facilitate rural community discussion, building on existing resources, enhancing local capacities, and strengthening rural communication services and processes.

Environmental communication has recently been dominated by the issue of climate change and is now often interchangeably referred to as climate change communication, which focuses on climate risks and public engagement with issues of environmental change. Although climate change communication has been growing since the late 1990s, green-

house gas (GHG) emissions continue to increase globally, with societies more vulnerable to variabilities in climate and the dynamic nature of environmental change. All of this challenges the effectiveness of current communication efforts and the ability of their audiences to implement changes in response to this communication (Nerlich et al. 2010). Globally, many people consider climate change risks as "virtual", depending on the level of climate awareness and economic status (Adams 2007), which poses a challenge to communication for development. Nerlich et al. (2010) determined that climate change communication involves social and cognitive psychology on the one hand, which studies attitudes to risk, strategies that can be used to trigger behaviour change, mental barriers, and predispositions, and on the other hand, communication studies and social studies of science, which investigate the interactions between scientists, media, policymakers, and stakeholders. Development initiatives in rural areas targeting climate change resilience and adaptation are on the rise, including increasing perspectives such as community-based adaptation (CBA). Reid (2009) defined community-based adaptation as a "community-led process, based on communities' priorities, needs and knowledge and capacities, which should empower the people to plan for and cope with the impacts of climate change". This perspective on environmental change shifts the conversation from simple awareness raising into supporting community-driven action, much in line with Freire's praxis.

Rural development has always been driven by changes in agricultural systems and livelihoods. However, hunger, marginalisation, poverty, and malnutrition are still on the rise in rural areas, which suggests that the current rural development is far from inclusive (Gillespie et al. 2017). Inclusive development was defined by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as an "equitable development approach built on the understanding that every individual and community, of all diverse identities and experiences, is instrumental in the transformation of their societies" (USAID 2023). Consequently, inclusive rural development was defined by Borodina and Prokopa (2019) as development resulting in guaranteeing and creating conditions for people in rural areas to use land and other local resources in an economic activity; an adequate distribution of economic growth results in agriculture and other sectors of the rural economy; participation in social and public life to unify communities and protect human rights.

Ruben and Beekman (2019) concluded that inclusive rural development should aim at reaching nutrition security, fostering agricultural productivity and creating people value addition. The entire rural population must have equitable opportunities for access to public services such as education and health (Sachs 2004). Therefore, inclusive rural development not only contributes to poverty alleviation and agricultural improvement but also to overcoming social, political, and economic exclusion of people living in rural areas. Environmental and climate change exacerbate challenges to inclusive rural development, as the effects of environmental change are unequally distributed, with the most severe effects impacting those with the least capacity to adapt and address them.

Rural development is successful when it relies on communities, i.e., when positive changes in rural areas are made by rural communities based on their experiences (World Economic Forum 2018). This was supported by Poyo (2021), who stated that "the practice of inclusive rural development involves investing in the people and places for which the challenges of their rural location are compounded by disadvantages that stem from how they have been impacted by systemic biases and blatant discrimination." To identify feasible strategies for inclusive rural development, Ruben and Beekman (2019) emphasised the importance of understanding major transitions in production, demography, household expenditure and consumption, household assets and markets to generate improved food systems. Theophilus (2021) suggested promoting the participation of rural youth and women in social, political, and economic processes as a strategy to achieve inclusive rural development. Addressing environmental and climate change processes from the perspective of community-based adaptation also needs to keep these interconnected needs and issues at the heart of processes and strategies for change.

This study explores the current interpretation of inclusive rural development in light of environmental change and how this can affect revisiting the premises of communication for development. It does this through a desk-based analysis of case studies from Malawi, Ukraine, and the Philippines. It asks the following questions: What is the rural communication landscape? What are the current environmental issues? What is communication doing to address these challenges? Where are the gaps in theory and practice? By reviewing the different issues and opportunities in these contrasting countries, this study explores the nexus of environmental change and rural communication, asking how it can be improved to support inclusive rural communication given these climate and environmental dynamics. The results of this study will interrogate thinking in communication for development, considering how it can support responses to environmental change in rural contexts.
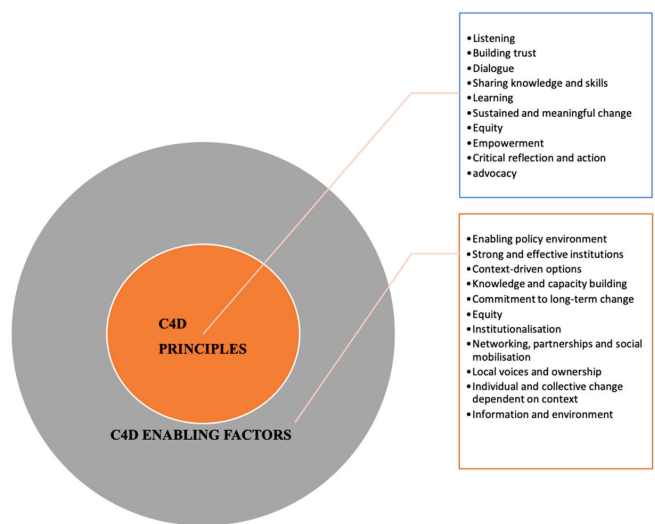
2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Conceptualizing Communication for Development and Inclusive Rural Development

This research investigates the context of communication for development and environmental change in Malawi, Ukraine, and the Philippines case studies. To achieve this, we first present conceptual frameworks to understand communication for development and inclusive rural development.

2.1.1. Conceptual Framework for Communication for Development

To better analyse the communication for development context in each case study, the principles and enabling factors of C4D were defined, as shown in Figure 1. For this paper, these principles of communication for development come from a definition articulated by Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (1998): communication for development is the use of communication processes, techniques, and media to help people create awareness of their situation, create options for change, resolve conflicts, work towards consensus, plan actions for change, acquire knowledge and skills, and improve the effectiveness of institutions. This is consistent with the definition of communication for development adopted by the World Congress on Communication for Development in 2007: "Communication for Development is a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It also seeks change at different levels, including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating, and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication" (The World Bank 2006). Enabling factors are conditions that support communication for development. In this paper, these come from an articulation of rural communication conditions outlined in the rural communication services framework (FAO 2024a, 2024b). Together, this framework highlights what communication for development aims to achieve and the enabling conditions that promote the successful implementation of these principles. For this paper, these will allow us to analyse the context of communication for development across the three case studies.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework to analyse principles of C4D and their enabling factors.

2.1.2. Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Rural Development

The main indicators of inclusive rural development include the improvement of integrated agri-food systems, resilience to environmental change, human rights, social equity, food security, and economic growth. The basis of the conceptual framework in Figure 2 was borrowed from the triple helix thesis (Etzkowitz 2003) on university–industry–government relations in innovation and the learning regional model designed by Rutten (Rutten and Boekema 2007). The main components of our design are the rural communities, governance, and communication for development.

Figure 2. The integrated conceptual framework for inclusive rural development.

The integrated framework, therefore, involves the interaction between the main components, aiming to facilitate effective communication, knowledge sharing, social change,

and the use of local knowledge in grassroots development initiatives, as opposed to the top-down transfer of expert knowledge. This integrated framework was used as a tool to analyse each case study and to investigate the challenges and similarities in communication for inclusive rural development.

2.2. Case Study Analysis

To analyse the context of communication for development and environmental change in Malawi, Ukraine, and the Philippines, a cross-case analysis, based on the case study research defined by Yin (2009), is applied in this study. Each country was treated as a bounded case. Specifically, the multi-case method introduced by Stake (2006)was used to facilitate a comparative analysis of the three countries over the past 25 to 30 years. The conceptual frameworks described in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 were used to generate conceptual themes to analyse the case studies. Principles of C4D and enabling factors for C4D (Figure 1) were identified (where they existed). These were compared between country case studies. The themes of the integrated framework for inclusive rural communication (Figure 2) were also identified within each country and compared. Environmental change as a cross-cutting theme was analysed across the three case studies. For each case study, the period of observation of rural transformation and communication activities is the last 30 years.

3. Results

3.1. Case Study: Malawi

3.1.1. Introduction

Malawi, an agriculture-based nation in the southern part of the East African Rift Valley, has a population of 20 million, with over 80% being rural and 85% of the population engaged in agriculture (Botha 2023). The rural population relies on small-scale farming, which is significantly affected by environmental changes. Empowerment and access to quality information are crucial for resilience to environmental challenges. However, these facilities are often lacking in rural Malawi, where many vulnerable and marginalized populations live. Technological advancements are changing communication landscapes, presenting opportunities for addressing social and environmental challenges through new communication approaches (CDAC 2022; Malawi Government 2012). Supporting rural communication is essential for addressing environmental sustainability, a key development issue in Malawi.

3.1.2. Rural Communication Landscape in Malawi

Malawi's rural communication context consists of both formal and informal communication systems, which play an important role in supporting the flow and dissemination of information and knowledge among rural populations. The communication landscape in Malawi's rural areas is shaped by a mixture of internally and externally influenced communication approaches, including modern technologies, community-based initiatives, and traditional or discursive practices. TV, radio, and ICT are examples of technology influence, whereas social influence includes community gatherings, informal networks, and institutions. Discursive communication combines mediated and unmediated modes of communication (Gomo 2015).

Radio and interpersonal social modes of communication have traditionally played important roles in community mobilisation and participation in various development initiatives. Radio and traditional forms of communication remain popular among rural populations due to their intimate link to personal and cultural values (Abdulai et al. 2023; Ragasa et al. 2021). However, technological innovation is creating new communication technologies that are altering rural people's access to and distribution of information. According to Abdulai et al. (2023), the fast growth of modern media is diverting attention from traditional communications, which have served as important platforms for cultural production and information dissemination for rural development. As a result, there is an

increase in preference for technologically oriented and modern forms of communication and infrastructure.

In rural Malawi, formal communication structures are part of government-led projects, extension and advisory services, non-governmental organisation (NGO) development programmes, community media services, and educational institutions. Extension services provided by the government through sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, disaster risk reduction, and overall environmental management practices play an important role in providing public information on development projects and policies to improve rural livelihood. Pluralism in extension service provision has enabled other players, NGOs, to expand their work in rural development (Masangano and Mthinda 2012; Masambuka-Kanchewa et al. 2020). Malawi's informal rural communication structures are mostly interpersonal and heavily influenced by traditional communication techniques, social ties, and social networks. Folk media such as dance, drama, folktales, riddles, songs, and proverbs, as well as communication structures such as village gatherings, religious institutions, community leaders, and word-of-mouth, continue to be used in most rural settings in Malawi (Gomo 2015; Zeleza Manda 2015).

3.1.3. Government's Thrust to Enhancing Rural Communication and Agricultural Information

In Malawi, sectors dealing with specific issues such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, disaster risk reduction, and overall environmental management practices have their own established official communication and community engagement structures that fall under the category of rural communication practice. These frameworks promote community engagement and inclusion in decision-making on critical problems affecting their livelihoods. For example, in agriculture, the government has structures at the national, district, village, and community levels.

In terms of rural communication, the District Agricultural Extension Service Systems (DAESS) uses decentralised platforms to engage stakeholders at the district, area, and village levels. These institutions include village agriculture committees (VACs), area stakeholder panels (ASPs) comprised of multiple VACs, and district stakeholder panels. All these platforms help to identify significant community needs and hold service providers accountable for meeting them (Freer et al. 2018; Government of Malawi 2000). Participatory extension systems and approaches, such as farmer field schools (FFS), farmer extension facilitators (FEFs), and farmer-to-farmer extension (F2FE), are increasingly emerging as formalised mechanisms for communication and knowledge exchange (Amadu 2022; Fisher et al. 2018). In forestry and fisheries, village platforms such as Community-based Natural Resources Management Committees (CBNRM) and Beach Village Committees (BVCs) facilitate community engagement, communication, and participation, whereas civil protection committees (CPCs) at district, village, and community levels convey disaster-related issues (Haambiya et al. 2020; Zulu 2008).

3.1.4. Collaboration towards Inclusive Rural Communication

The spread of information communication technology (ICT)-based platforms also influences the rural communication landscape. Radio is a popular and easily available ICT platform in rural areas. Malawi has seen an expansion in community media since the dawn of democracy in the early 1990s, with the establishment of community radio stations. Currently, the country has around 30 community radios spread across its 28 districts, which serve as important venues for discussing local issues and sharing information. Audio-visual tools such as participatory videos have also been used to engage rural people and their local perspectives on development issues like climate risk (Padgham et al. 2013).

Telecentres, internet-based technologies, and mobile platforms such as mobile phones that use short-text messaging, mobile instant messaging (MIM) like WhatsApp, and social media such as Facebook as social learning platforms are all examples of ICT facilities. Audio-visual products, such as participatory video, function as both platforms and tools

for information dissemination and knowledge sharing. In Nkhota-kota, a district in central Malawi, women farmers utilised a WhatsApp forum shared with extension workers to seek agricultural advice by posting pictures and questions (Banda et al. 2016). The platform also allows community members to create and consume content by sharing their farming experience and knowledge with other farmers.

3.1.5. Understanding the Environmental and Climate Change Issues in Malawi

Malawi is facing enormous challenges from environmental and climatic change, which are impacting the country's ecosystems, economy, and livelihoods. Over the last seven years, Malawi has faced over 20 significant flooding incidents and seven droughts, resulting in massive losses to people's livelihoods and the country's economy. For example, the country's 2015 floods and 2016 drought caused economic losses of $335 million and $365 million, respectively. The drought rendered roughly 7 million people food insecure (Commission 2021). Women suffer more than men because of unequal opportunities and adaptation support (Global Environmental Facility 2019).

Human actions, particularly the growing population in Malawi, are identified as a significant factor contributing to deforestation and environmental degradation. The population growth rate of 2.8% per year in Malawi is leading to the loss of large amounts of forest due to human demand for natural resources. This is evidenced by the annual deforestation rate of 2.4%, resulting in the loss of 33,000 hectares of forests each year (Government of Malawi 2014; Ngwira and Watanabe 2019). Another concern is the dwindling fish populations in most major water bodies due to changing water flow and levels, pollution, and overfishing. In Malawi, fish accounts for around 40% of the total protein supply. The continuous decline and rising cost of limited fish populations jeopardise Malawi's nutritional diversification in animal protein (Global Environmental Facility 2019). Other challenges include land and river pollution from unsustainable farming and poor domestic and industrial waste management. Climate change also increases the number of invasive alien species, such as the fall armyworm, which is devastating to agricultural productivity, especially maize, Malawi's major crop.

3.1.6. Communication as a Driver to Address Climate Change

Rural communication in Malawi is playing a crucial role in addressing environmental issues by raising awareness, facilitating knowledge sharing, educating communities, and promoting the adoption of sustainable environmental management practices. Community media, such as community radio, spreads environmental information. Chanco Community Radio in eastern Malawi dedicates 60% of its programming to climate change and natural resource management issues for communities in the Lake Chilwa Basin, which suffers water level issues owing to climate variability. The radio station airs environmental programs such as *Zaulimi* (agriculture), *Imvani za Kumudzi* (The Village Voice), and *Ulimi ndi Nyengo* (weather and farming). Community radios and radio listening clubs (RLCs) promote environmental education (Chavinda 2023a; Masina 2023). Chavinda (2023b) found that community radio and RLCs allow "communities and marginalised groups to share knowledge and experiences about climate change."

Another ICT-based tool is participatory video (PV), which some communities use in collaboration with NGOs to share their local climate change adaptation experiences. Baumhardt et al. (2009) investigated how individuals in one village in the district of Salima used PV to propagate community-based climate change adaption solutions. Based on community members' own experiences shared through PV with four neighbouring villages, the study indicated that participatory videos were a successful way to spread knowledge on climate change adaptation. Farmer extension facilitations (FEFs) are participatory extension service platforms that demonstrate how communication structures may tackle environmental and climate change concerns.

3.1.7. Gaps in Inclusive Rural Communication

Malawi's present rural communication landscape has some shortcomings. First, communication services are selective in addressing environmental challenges. According to the literature, most services prioritise trending development issues such as climate change and food sustainability over other equally important issues such as water and land pollution. Another barrier to the efficiency of rural communication is a lack of financial resources to assist the process of inclusive production of information and content on crucial issues. Because of a lack of funds to support participatory approaches to communication and development, most early warning systems and information on climate-related disasters still lack elements of people-centeredness and the incorporation of local knowledge and perspectives associated with climate risks (Calvel et al. 2020).

This demonstrates that some rural communications services continue to use a top-down approach to communication, with little involvement from affected communities. The institutionalisation of rural communication services via policy frameworks is also problematic. Some policies addressing crucial developmental concerns, such as disaster risk reduction (DRR), do not recognise communication (particularly participatory communication) as a vital tool in DRR initiatives. The significance of communication is rarely acknowledged in policy frameworks such as the Malawi Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Act of 1991 (Chirwa 2023).

Another problem is the digital gap, which persists due to a shortage of electricity, ICT infrastructure, and extra income to cover the high cost of internet services. The use of internet-based apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook are only prominent among young people compared to adults, and inequality in terms of phone ownership leaves many women out when it comes to access to information through phones because men are the majority owners who control the gadgets and the choice of content (Messenger 2018; Steinfield et al. 2015).

The discrepancies extend beyond formal communication structures. Manyozo (2018) notes that some informal communication channels may reinforce existing social inequalities by marginalising specific voices and perspectives depending on gender, race, sexuality, or class. Some settings, such as community gatherings, are frequently dominated by influential voices from community leaders and men at the expense of women and lesser-known members of society.

3.2. Case Study: Ukraine

3.2.1. Introduction

Effective local government is fundamental for successful community development. This has been repeatedly confirmed within the framework of decentralisation reforms in Ukraine through the rapid development of individual settlements and communities. However, the full-scale war has affected all areas of life in Ukraine. It has exacerbated known problems, revealed others, and delayed the solutions of others. As a result, it is undermining community development across the country.

One of the weaknesses of the local government in Ukraine is the low levels of information and communication technologies employed for basic public services. Local government systems must develop and modernise according to current challenges, considering the disruptions of communications during the war. Local governments were not ready for an urgent restructuring of their information and communication technologies in light of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. As a result, the war has shed light on the fact that it is the responsibility of local governments and officials to ensure the basis for financial independence, efficient communication and constant communication between the authorities and the community (Проніна and Семенко 2023). For Ukraine, strengthening digital and technological capacity is crucial to its future sustainability through strengthening national security and accelerating European integration as the main vector of Ukraine's recovery (Kitsoft 2022).

Today, the policy of the Ukrainian government is aimed at developing its digital economy and society. One of the areas of digital development is the reform of local government bodies in terms of digitalisation. Local government officials should be more motivated to learn about the new conditions that have arisen during this period of military aggression through the introduction of modern management skills to their activities. However, there is a lack of a systematic vision of the potential results of such development processes. Moreover, even during the pre-war period, officials, local council deputies and representatives of civil society institutions did not prioritise forming a management culture and an appropriate level of professional competence in this field.

3.2.2. Key Issues in Rural Development

Nearly 30 years of agrarian transformations have not brought about the expected increase in prosperity for rural communities. Today, rural areas are in a vulnerable state, with the weakening state of natural resources and the environment. Social infrastructure, livelihoods, and social services such as medicine, culture, and preschool education are all deteriorating. Human potential is decreasing while unemployment and poverty are flourishing, all of which stimulate labour migration and the departure of young people from the countryside. Россоха and Плотнікова (2018) defined the main tasks of rural development as including the implementation of economic, environmental, and social functions, the rational use of natural resource potential, and the compliance with principles of scientific land management. This is more difficult given the conditions of rural change at present.

The level of wages in agriculture remains one of the lowest among other sectors, with wages being 69% compared to the average wage in Ukraine. At the same time, only 661.4 thousand people are officially employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing, with a high prevalence of personal small-scale farms. However, the share of incomes from personal, small-scale farms is constantly decreasing—23% of rural households have per capita monetary incomes lower than the standard level. The poverty rate is 1.7 times higher among rural populations than in cities, with 39% being poor among rural households, compared to 19% in urban households (Костюченко 2017). The majority of agricultural, forestry, fishing, pasture and aquaculture production is family-owned and based on family labour. There are approximately 4.2 million family-owned small farms, having an average land area of 1.5 hectares. Family-based farms are the places of employment for 80% of people employed in agriculture (Міністерство аграрної політики та продовольства України 2015).

3.2.3. Framing Communication in Ukraine

In the context of the ongoing conflict, for two years, Ukrainian society has relied on news, particularly information about air alerts, changes in the situation on the war front and politics. However, over the past few years, not only have news consumption habits changed, but so has the information space itself. Ukraine is in an active phase of information warfare, manifesting as the spread of information and psychological special operations, disinformation campaigns, and automated accounts to influence public opinion. Ukrainian authorities are trying to address these challenges but are resorting to the monopolisation of the information space, which causes distrust in Ukrainian society. As a result, understanding the specifics of media consumption by different audiences of Ukrainian society is important in reducing disinformation.

Social networks remain the most popular source of information for Ukrainians, as chosen by 77.9% of respondents. Television came in second with 62.5%, followed by the Internet (excluding social networks) with 57.7%. Radio and print media accounted for 33.7% and 17.8%, respectively, but have become more popular compared to last year. Золотарьова and Снопок (2023) stated that the "United News" marathon is watched daily by 60% of television news consumers, with 84% of the consumers trusting it. Google Services and Ukr.net are the most popular Internet sources of information, followed by TSN. Among radio stations, music and entertainment stations are most utilised by the people who then

listen to the news in between music sessions, with the leader being "Ukrainian Radio", which is part of the National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine (Закусило 2020).

3.2.4. Rural Communication Landscape in Ukraine

Communication with communities has been facilitated by the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre as a communication partner of the USAID Program—Decentralisation Offering Better Results and Efficiency (DOBRE), with one hundred communities receiving six years of consultation support. Research conducted by the International Republican Institute in collaboration with the Sociological Group "Rating" showed that the level of trust in local government heads increases annually and stands at 59%, specifically due to the high quality of local services and satisfaction with the actions of local authorities.

At the local level, information policy issues are regulated by several types of legislature, including the Statute of amalgamated territorial communities, the Regulations of the council, the executive committee, individual decisions of the council, its executive committee, and decisions of the mayor. According to the law of Ukraine on "Local self-government in Ukraine", local self-government bodies issue regulatory legal acts. At the same time, councils and their executive committees make decisions, and rural and city mayors issue the orders. At all stages of the creation and duration of the official acts of local self-government—from their adoption to cancellation—an informational component is present (Куропась 2020).

3.2.5. Frameworks, Structures and Policies for Rural Communication and Agricultural Information

According to the constitution of Ukraine on local government, information, the procedure for coverage of state authority activities, access to public information and reports on local government bodies by mass media, the necessary authorities are obliged to ensure strict adherence to the principles of transparency, providing citizens access to information, which is realised through constant constructive dialogue with the public. The presence of local government bodies in the information space is ensured on the one hand by ordering and placing relevant materials in printed media, on the air of television and radio programs, and in the online space on contractual terms, and on the other hand, by independently creating and distributing content through social networks. In rural areas where there is limited access to the internet, informational bulletins in newspapers are an effective means of communication. Electronically, the existence of an official website (https://old.loda.gov.ua, accessed on 12 June 2024) is a communication basis connecting the government bodies and the community.

The legal framework for the implementation of agricultural advisory activities in Ukraine is defined by the Law of Ukraine on Agricultural Advisory Services, which states that agricultural advisory services are "a set of actions aimed at meeting the needs of individual peasant and farm households, economic entities, other agricultural enterprises of all forms of ownership and management, as well as the rural population in increasing knowledge levels and improving practical skills for profitable farm management" (Офіційний вебпортал парламенту України 2012). Advisory services have played a significant role in ensuring the processes of land privatisation and denationalisation, the establishment of farming, and the reform of former collective farms and state farms into market organisational formations. However, the network of agricultural advisory services is still developing, currently covering less than 5% of agricultural producers (nubip 2013). All agricultural advisory services, advisors, and experts are unified in the National Association of Agricultural Advisory Services of Ukraine (NAASU), established on 11 March 2023. Корінець and Мітягін (2014) stated that the purpose of NAASU's activities was to contribute to improving the welfare of the rural population and the development of rural areas through increasing the level of knowledge and improving the practical skills of the rural population and agricultural producers, as well as satisfying and protecting the social, economic, as well as other common interests of association members.

3.2.6. Towards Inclusive Rural Communication

Implementing decentralisation policies aimed at transferring power to local government bodies and expanding the rights of rural communities has not yet produced the expected positive impact. Moreover, residents of rural areas are convinced that the new government initiative is a tool for creating political fiefdoms and concentrating power in the hands of the same individuals. The lack of a favourable economic climate leads to the stagnation of development in many local-level institutions, which, in turn, hinders the formation and development of rural civil society. There is an urgent need for effective state intervention aimed at promoting the development of local community institutions, such as local agri-food chains, direct sales of local products, networks of farmer cooperative associations, and associations of small landowners, as such organisations would serve as powerful catalysts for rural economic development.

Valeriy Fishchuk, the vice president of the Innovative Development of Ukraine Association, stated that the most effective way to bring urban opportunities to rural areas is to connect rural areas to the Internet (Дубровик-Рохова 2018). Population distribution by Internet access in rural areas indicates that 6.2 million people (47.8% of the total population) used Internet services over the past 12 months (Осипова 2019). The main problem with internet usage in rural areas is the limitation in technical capabilities for connecting sparsely populated areas and developing digital infrastructure. The overall provision of quality high-speed internet throughout the country also remains unsatisfactory. In the global internet speed ranking, the Speedtest Global Index in January 2020, Ukraine ranked 84th out of 140 countries for mobile internet speed (Бородіна 2020).

3.2.7. Understanding Environmental and Climate Change Issues in the Ukraine

Climate change poses serious threats to the balanced development of Ukraine due to the high carbon intensity of the economy, increasing frequency of extreme weather events, and associated risks to public health, livelihoods, natural ecosystems, and sectors of the economy, which are expected to intensify soon. Ukraine is part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol and is committed to fulfilling a set of obligations under these international agreements (Голова Верховної Ради України 1996).

The Ukrainian government was among the first to ratify the Paris Agreement. In 2021, it submitted an updated nationally determined contribution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 65% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. It is important to consider that since the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the country has experienced widespread hostilities resulting in extensive infrastructure damage, casualties, and population displacement. War, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, negatively affects the country's readiness and adaptation to climate change. Additionally, the environmental consequences of the current war in Ukraine, due to military actions near nuclear reactors, burial sites of radioactive waste, oil refineries, and chemical plants, continue to increase environmental risks. Massive damage to civilian infrastructure has also undermined the adaptive capacities necessary to overcome the threat posed by climate change. This will consequently increase the risk of displacement due to natural disasters, increase the threat of environmental shocks and stressors for migrants in vulnerable situations, and force some people to remain in environmentally hazardous areas (Голова Верховної Ради України 1996).

3.2.8. Communication as a Tool to Address Climate Change

The issue of climate communication has become increasingly relevant, involving raising awareness among the general public about the seriousness of the problem, its causes, consequences, and ways to overcome climate challenges, as well as promoting the involvement of all stakeholders in actions to combat climate change. The fourth theory of climate change asserts that the greatest impact on climate is caused by human activities unrelated to greenhouse gas emissions but rather by transforming the Earth's surface through deforestation, desertification, and urbanisation.

Based on the concepts of globalism, new humanism, sustainable development, climate justice, and climate theory, in Ukraine, we propose to consider global climate change from the perspective of "climate humanism"—a concept that should combine two key ideas: the necessity of addressing global climate issues and the importance of human participation in this process to protect and promote human well-being in the context of a changing climate environment (Шевченко 2023). This is consistent with communication for development thinking, putting the focus on local adaptation and resilience to environmental change.

3.3. Case Study: Philippines

3.3.1. Introduction

The Philippines, as a developing country, has been argued to follow the traditional path regarding the implementation and access to ICT (Information and Communication Technology) for Development (Panganiban 2019) due to its centrally driven, top-down approach, which often lacks long-term perspective and sustainability concerning assessing its impact and learning mechanisms. It resulted in poor agricultural performance, particularly in conducting research through agricultural and rural extension programs focusing on training, skills development, and support in non-farm production-based activities (Custodio and Sombilla 2023).

Moreover, since there is a gap in digital transformation, according to Lapuz (2023), community residents must participate in bridging this gap and enabling the co-production of shared interest in a family-centric approach. Based on studies from Panganiban (2019), most Filipino farmers need to learn how to utilise computers. Additionally, farmers have limited access to the internet and therefore seek help from their children to facilitate information and knowledge transfer, which is aligned with Manalo and van de Fliert (2011) suggestion that the youth can be considered as "infomediaries" in ICT utilisation.

3.3.2. Key Issues in Rural Development

In a rural transformation study by Custodio and Sombilla (2023), the Philippines has not been experiencing any significant transformation for more than three decades, with only three out of the 16 regions except for Metropolitan Manilla having a relatively higher rural transformation, namely, Calabarzon, Central Luzon, and the Davao Region. The proportion of the underprivileged in Philippine rural communities has reached 25.7% compared to 11.6% in the urban areas, and there were 2.7 million farmers and fisherfolks (30% of the population) who lived below the national poverty threshold as of 2022 (Authority 2023). This resulted in a continuous shift towards participating in highly industrialised sectors of the economy between 2010 and 2020 (Ali and Son 2007), wherein the economy improved, and employment opportunities in the urban areas increased, encouraging rural–urban migration. The same study highlighted that occupational opportunities for the male population tended to be broader than those for the female population.

3.3.3. Framing Communication Access in the Philippines

There are several forms of media in the Philippines which enable access to information. According to Evans (2016), as of 2013, there were 105 daily newspapers, 104 magazines, and more than a hundred local commercial radio and television stations. According to a study by Cruz et al. (2016), radio was essential to reach, inform, and engage in Philippine rural communities. However, the broader perspective of agricultural information needs to be further explained due to media practitioners and broadcasters' limited skills and technical knowledge. Based on the same study, as of 2012, 85% of Philippine households had radio access, while 60% had access to television, which is particular to the rural communities, especially those that do not have stable access to electricity. Hence, the use of radio, which is perceived as handy, portable, and affordable, tends to have more advantages than its traditional media counterparts, such as television and newspapers (Cruz et al. 2016). Mobile phones are also being used to explain organic agriculture technology (Declaro-Ruedas 2019). This was supported by Galeon et al. (2019) with farmers utilising mobile

phones to communicate, access, and share information through text messaging, the most practical and highly available technology to share knowledge.

However, according to Panganiban (2019), in-person communication strategies remain a significant part of the agricultural extension services in almost half of the municipalities in the country. Through the establishment of the Farmers Information and Technology Services (FITS) Centres, which aim at bridging the gap between information and technology, farmers and other stakeholders are provided with fast and easy access to information and technology services in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and natural resources (Dela Cruz 2022). These centres provide physical access to the Internet and information, education, and communication (IEC) materials through e-learning modules and receive training support from agricultural extension workers (Panganiban 2019). FITS centres are established in key municipalities by the Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Training Institute, which they would eventually turn over to the specific municipal agricultural offices once they can utilise the centre to assist their stakeholders.

3.3.4. Rural Communication Landscape in the Philippines

The rural communities' access to communication modalities varies depending on the ability to access various forms of communication. However, among these forms of communication, addressing the issue of accessing technology-mediated communication modality is perceived as more of a secondary issue since the country has a more significant issue concerning the need to address basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter (Dela Pena-Bandalaria 2007; Panganiban 2019).

Therefore, the Philippines' primary source of information lies in their family-centric approach as a mechanism for social empowerment since, in the digital world, commonalities in the function and responsibilities make individuals more open to networking. According to Cruz et al. (2016), 97% of rural households rely on radio, the most pervasive medium of mass communication in the Philippines, particularly at the grassroots level. Moreover, as the reach of the Internet broadens and now includes radio applications, it also broadens the reach through integration with television broadcasts, such as the concept of podcasts and Teleradio. Declaro-Ruedas (2019) suggested enhancing agricultural extension workers' skills in delivering key messages through different extension modalities that would reach a broader audience.

3.3.5. Government's Thrust to Enhancing Rural Communication and Agricultural Information

The agricultural extension in the Philippines is governed by RA 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, which decentralised the extension function from one central government that supervises and facilitates extension and training services for farmers, fishers, and other beneficiaries wherein extension and training activities were delegated to the local government units (LGUS) (Declaro-Ruedas 2019). As such, the value of agricultural extension work largely depends on the availability of extension professionals who are qualified, motivated, committed, and responsive to the social, economic, and political environment (Declaro-Ruedas 2019). In line with this, modes of extension activities include training and visit systems and farmers' group meetings, which are perceived as practical tools for technology and knowledge transfer. However, these activities suffer from the risk of unsustainability due to the threat of limited funding allocation.

Furthermore, the establishment of Farmer Field Schools, which started in Southeast Asia, promoted a participatory approach to learning and decision-making by farmers, engaging a farmer-to-farmer approach by combining indigenous and modern technologies (Declaro-Ruedas 2019). However, based on the same study, the devolved extension seems isolated in the context of Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) due to a very weak linkage with national and international agricultural research resulting from the quality of farmers' participation in government programs. According to Panganiban (2019), social networking platforms were also utilised by the agriculture department and

attached agencies as alternative dissemination channels. Facebook is used to share recent news about activities, post and link announcements, broadcast essential activities such as training and seminars, or even report emergencies not limited to natural disasters and crop pest damage. Moreover, social media channels are also utilised to obtain feedback from the public and communicate their concerns to the government.

3.3.6. Collaborations towards Inclusive Rural Communication

Non-government organisations and private entities also initiate ICT systems, particularly Knowledge Sharing Systems (KSS), comprising social media, websites, mobile apps, digital libraries, and radio programs, to address relevant issues (Galeon et al. 2019). A study by Paderanga (2011) cited that the existence of the private sector was tremendously skewed as large enterprises comprised only a small unit of the economy compared to micro, small, and medium enterprises.

Moreover, to ensure connectivity, the telecommunications industry is vital to the country's economy. However, the need for telecommunications in the country and some degree of competition in the industry, such as penetration of telephone lines, was low at 4.48 persons per 100 population. In comparison, internet utilisation stands at 6.03 persons. Meanwhile, the number of mobile subscribers per 100 people is 58.88 due to the preference for nonvoice services, especially text messaging. As the study by Librero (1999)argued, most telecommunications firms could not meet their respective commitments to install lines in rural areas where such services are considered economically impractical. Since telephone companies were assigned areas where they should install their lines, most have been unable to comply with this requirement because of various factors such as lack of electricity, inaccessibility, and peace and order conditions. Moreover, they avoid installing communication lines in areas with low commercial activities, such as rural areas, due to the fewer opportunities to gain capital investments.

3.3.7. Understanding Environmental and Climate Change Issues in the Philippines

Holden (2019) cited the Philippines as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change. The same study argued that environmental degradation and unsustainable development practices contribute to the country's vulnerability to climate change. Several factors affect the country's vulnerability, particularly mining-related environmental degradation (Holden and Jacobson 2012). In addition, deforestation also contributes to the immense degradation of the environment in the country, resulting in landslides in deforested lands. Coral reef degradation and mangrove loss have also affected the country's efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change. According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC 2014), after Super Typhoon Haiyan, communities with preserved mangroves survived the severe storm surge experienced in other coastal areas in the country.

Poverty is a significant contributor to climate change, which lessens the population's resilience. The outmigration of people from rural areas towards urban cities due to issues of land ownership affects the ability of the people to cope with the basic needs that are essential to resilience, such as having a decent living wage and provision of housing (Holden 2019; Morin et al. 2016). The population's rapid growth is another factor experienced by specific sectors in the country. As the population density increases, access to resources also increases, affecting the quality and quantity of assistance that the government can provide to the population.

3.3.8. Communication as a Driver to Address Climate Change

According to Friedrich (2020), for specific areas in the Philippines, as with other countries in the Global South, people's access to information about climate change and access to media needs to be more comprehensive. Rural areas depend on media sources through radio, television, the internet, and newspapers to some extent. Moreover, educational institutions provide information through community discussions and tackle it in churches.

Additionally, several policies, laws, and regulations have incorporated natural and environmental hazards and possible consequences, making the Philippines one of the first countries in the world to cite climate change as a legal issue (Friedrich 2020). There is a need to disseminate country-specific knowledge in dealing with climate change. As such, the government was perceived to pre-select and highlight particular knowledge that would address the country's climate change issues.

3.3.9. Way Forward

The case of rural communication and climate change mitigation in the Philippines still has a broad area of knowledge to explore. As Panganiban (2019)suggested, the government needs to bridge the gap in communication within the rural and agricultural areas as evidence regarding ICTs' contribution to development results in challenges. Developing policies utilising the grassroots approach is necessary to encourage stakeholder collaboration and enhance public value.

Regarding effective climate change communication, including local knowledge in knowledge transfer can be an efficient way of studying how to successfully relay information in rural areas (Friedrich 2020). According to Evans (2016), there is a need to conduct qualitative research studies focusing on the differences between nations across the risk or responsibility divide about climate change. Furthermore, studying the relationship of cultural values to news coverage of global issues is a potential area to exploit in communication for development.

4. Discussion

4.1. Rural Transformation

Table 1 presents key themes in relation to rural transformation and rural transformation actors in each of the case studies. Across the three case studies, we can see common types of rural transformation in linking actors across agricultural value chains and in agricultural areas to achieve collective change. Networks of actors and stakeholders in rural transformation increasingly cooperate or engage in dialogue for enhanced environmental sustainability, natural resource management, sustainable energy, and sustainable agriculture. This is recognizing the need for collective work across sectors to achieve sustainability goals. There are also transformations in economic terms, with change taking place through increased networks across value chains, digitisation in agriculture, working across rural value chains to make better use of technology, and greater integration of businesses for economic development. These transformations are driven by a consistent range of actors across the three countries: local, regional, and national governments; non-governmental organisations, including farmer and agribusiness associations; private sector actors; civil society organisations; media entities; and learning institutions, including higher education. These demonstrate the multi-sectoral and multi-actor nature of rural transformation.

Table 1. Rural transformation and rural transformation actors.

	Malawi	The Philippines	Ukraine
Types of rural transformations	• Enhanced community-based forest management practices; • Adoption of sustainable practices for agricultural production; • Improving environmental stewardship through community structures responsible for best practices in environmental management; • Increased adoption of sustainable energy technologies that conserve energy and reduce overreliance on cooking energy from charcoal; • The emergence of environment-related projects in rural communities is addressing environmental issues.	• Multiple stakeholder partnerships in designing and implementing development programmes; • Enhancing the abilities of rural communities in co-creating knowledge, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive development process. • Collaboration between NGOs, private entities towards enhancing ICT-mediated systems	• Globalisation and increased engagement with global economies; • Digitalisation across sectors; • IT technology expansion across rural value chains; • Conglomeration in businesses and enterprises; • Environmentally sustainable agricultural practices are emerging;
Who addresses problems related to inclusive rural transformation	• The government (local, regional, national); • Civil Society Organisations; • International, national, and local NGOs; • Media; • Community members.	• The government (local, regional, national); • Support from other actors (academia, NGOs, and private entities) for a holistic approach to rural transformation.	• The government (local, regional, national); • Agrifood companies and private sector; • Nongovernmental organisations and networks; • United territorial communities.

4.2. Environmental Change

For each country, environmental change and climate change are substantial rural development concerns. All the case study countries have policy mandates for implementing sustainable development agendas. They have different strategies for coordinating these policies, so the cohesiveness of the response differs nationally. It is important to note that while there are differences in the environmental concerns for each country, they differ more in scale than in scope. In each country, issues around water, soil and land degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and air pollution are key environmental challenges. They are also all affected by weather events whose severity has been linked to climate variability and change—increase in temperatures, extreme weather events (like typhoons) and changing rain conditions. Malawi and Ukraine report issues around pollution from industrial and domestic sources, an issue that, while not as dominant in the Philippines, remains relevant, particularly with changing population patterns through urban–rural migration in the country and policy aspirations towards more agricultural production rather than the export of raw materials. Ukraine has the added specificity of the environmental impact of the war, as arable and highly fertile land has been contaminated by the fallout from missiles, terrestrial war, and ammunition contaminants. The environmental impact of this is still being determined, but the nature of the compounds that have leeched into the soil has implications for plant, animal, and human health in addition to the impact on land use for agriculture itself. The nature of the response—the scale, who pays, what tools are available—differs by resources and national priorities. Table 2 presents a summary of the key themes in environmental change from the three case studies.

Table 2. Key themes in environmental change in case study countries.

	Malawi	The Philippines	Ukraine
Key environmental challenges	• Rapid deforestation; • Soil degradation; • Water scarcity; • Climate change; • Biodiversity loss; • Pollution from industrial, agricultural, and domestic sources; • Overpopulation.	• Environmental Degradation; • Unsustainable development practices • Destructive typhoons such as Typhoon Haiyan in the mid-2010s heavily affected the Visayas region. • The increase in temperatures brought about by El Niño in 2024 resulted in the rapid loss of water and electricity supply in several areas of the country.	• Poor quality water; • Air pollution; • Degradation of land resources; • Destruction of forests; • Household waste; • Objects of military activity.

4.3. C4D Principles and Enabling Factors

We can see in each of the cases the continued relevance of communication for development principles in inclusive rural transformation. We can see continued challenges in supporting inclusive rural development where they are lacking. Communication remains at the heart of integrated rural development. When we look at how communication functions in Malawi and the Philippines, there has been a longer history of engagement with communication for development projects and processes. There has been a specific emphasis on communication in integrated community development, and activities at local, regional, and national levels have been designed with these principles in place. Indeed, Malawi and the Philippines are both theoretical drivers of communication for development thinking (i.e., Chris Kamlongera in Malawi and Nora Quebral in the Philippines). They also have substantial practical integration of communication for development in national and local activities. In Ukraine, this has not yet been so explicitly articulated. The nature of the communication activities and roles in transformation, when compared to Malawi and the Philippines, is broadly consistent in scope and intent. Conceptually, there are different histories and levels of engagement with communication for development as a framing mechanism for communication and rural transformation. In Ukraine, this is very new. However, the communication roles and processes are comparable, and institutions for rural transformation are growing in scale and national importance (such as UCAB—the Ukraine Agribusiness Club). Table 3 highlights the key themes in how communication operates and how it contributes to inclusive rural transformation.

Table 3. Key themes in communication and rural transformation.

	Malawi	The Philippines	Ukraine
How communication operates	• Community engagement and participation; • Community media; • Traditional forms of communication such as community drama, storytelling, folk music to relay environmental messages resonant with local context; • Extension services; • Unearthing environmental challenges through media coverage.	• Establishment of farmer field schools and adoption of a family-centric approach to communication for development; • Communication that recognizes the family as a unit of change; • Interaction with transformed rural communities during activities facilitated by the government at the local level.	One-way communication tools: - Dedicated section on the website, a column in newspapers and newsletters; - Announcements and information notices on boards; - Posts on Facebook. Two-way communication tools: • Formal and informal meetings/gatherings; • Formal and informal groups in messengers (Telegram channels, Viber groups, etc.); • Holding events for united territorial communities; • Surveys (organised through questionnaires or through surveys on Facebook, message systems, etc.); • Farmer organisations and associations; • Higher education institutions (secondary and tertiary).
How communication contributes to transformation processes	• Community mobilisation for participation in environmental management practices; • Community empowerment through knowledge acquisition and exchange; • Advocacy for environmental policies, legal frameworks, and sustainable practices; • Resource mobilisation for interventions on environmental issues; • Communication and information dissemination serve as an aid in disaster preparedness and response.	• The intersection between the use of communication media and the facilitation of dialogue between and among the stakeholders, including rural communities themselves; • While there are limitations in providing equal access to basic communication services, these are being addressed through innovative practices by government agencies to bridge the gap in facilitating various government-mandated services.	• Interaction involving feedback between the rural populations and authorities; • Communication between rural actors—within farmer networks, in informal and formal settings.

Communication, remaining at the heart of integrated rural development and rural transformation, is key to listening, building trust, and empowerment for sustained and meaningful change, which are fundamental to creating the networks needed to support farmer resilience. This requires creating relationships and networks between actors to create a communication environment that will contribute contextually relevant solutions for rural communities.

Learning, capacity building and dialogue are also fundamental in capacitating rural communities with technical and analytical skills that can enable them to design programmes, contribute to local development initiatives, and make decisions about their future concerning environmental change.

We can see in the case studies similar challenges and opportunities in the communication environment. While each case study has a different policy environment, each one has a policy context that, in principle, wants to address environmental concerns and has different inhibiting factors for the communication policy environment. For formal communication, this can be how the communication environment and access to information are institutionalized within national, regional, and local government structures. Where there are weak local institutions, there are also information gaps and a weaker policy environment. To improve information and build communication capacity to address environmental change, each case study pointed out the need for greater knowledge and capacity building, networking, partnerships, social mobilisation, and consensus building between institutions. With these weak local structures and the need for improvements in the communication environment, particularly in information access, there remain questions about how much there is local ownership, local voices, and context-based individual and collective change.

4.4. Conceptualizing Inclusive Rural Development

4.4.1. Communication for Development

If we return to our conceptual framework for integrated rural communication, two key themes emerge from the case studies for communication for development: the context of media and communication and rural communication.

Each of the case studies has a diverse communication landscape, with a range of communication tools such as radio, TV, newspapers, and mobile telephony. While different communication preferences exist in each country (i.e., preference for radio in Malawi versus social media in Ukraine), they have robust landscapes. They are also highly regulated media environments: in Ukraine and Malawi, the government has control over communication—therefore, there is a high chance of reporting only what is relevant to the authorities and not necessarily considering the rural community. In the Philippines, the governance of media is restricted, but there is more room for a rural media ecology.

There are national policies around media institutions, but communication concerning rural and agricultural information is largely decentralized in each of the three countries. National services provision—be it extension or through services delivered by different ministries—are, in principle, provided at local levels. However, there are notable gaps between national policy and local service delivery. In each country, we see a range of private, public, and non-governmental actors filling gaps in government service delivery to varying degrees of quality, consistency, and success.

There are gaps in the physical ability to extend media—each country reports infrastructure challenges in electricity, internet hardware, and telephony in rural areas, which undermines media access. In Ukraine, this is exacerbated by the war. This has led to a reported digital gap in the three countries—digital technologies need more infrastructure and technical knowledge to reach rural populations. With the growth of social media as an important information source and communication network in each country, there are gaps in access, ability to critically interpret information, and misinformation.

4.4.2. Rural Communities

Across the case studies had common themes around the nature of rurality and rural–urban dynamics. The poverty rate across all three case study countries is high, with a substantial urban–rural split. While the Ukrainian economy has been growing and diversifying at a different pace in different ways from Malawi and the Philippines, it is being damaged by the ongoing war. For rural communities, this has meant that the rural economy is facing constraints and challenges across the value chain, and rural agricultural capacity has been weakened. In the Philippines, economic and growth policies are looking to expand agriculture as a section of the economy, particularly in value addition and processing. In Malawi, while there are much smaller farms than in the Philippines and Ukraine, it is still a hugely important sector, making up 80% of the rural economy. As a result, changes in rural dynamics have an effect across national economies in each case study.

However, population dynamics make rural economies more vulnerable. Rural–urban migration is a challenge in all three countries, particularly for young people who are leaving the agriculture sector. There is an ageing rural population, which will experience environmental change differently and have different sets of livelihood challenges. This can affect rural innovation, livelihoods, and community environmental resilience. In Ukraine, this migration extends across borders to escape the war, though there was a movement from the countryside before the large-scale invasion.

That said, there is space for community-driven initiatives to re-emphasize the importance of the rural environment in each country. There are initiatives to support rural innovation, improving infrastructure and opportunities in rural areas, and efforts to stem rural–urban migration. However, they will need citizen participation and action to be effective in long-term change.

4.4.3. Governance

Questions about governance have already arisen in the discussion of media governance and rural communities. However, there are two additional areas. One is land ownership and control. In each country, who owns the land and makes decisions about it is important in rural development. Policy and practice around land ownership remain contested in each country. Land ownership is different based on gender, socio-economic position, and social position. For instance, women may be less likely to own land or decide its use. Indigenous groups in the Philippines can claim ancestral domain rights in principle, but there are questions about the practice of granting land that can challenge the practice. In Ukraine, there has been a process of de-communalising farms since Ukraine's independence, but the newer engagement with European Union (EU) legislation and the changing government position means that rules about land ownership are in a state of fluctuation.

There is also the question of policy goals around environmental change and climate change. In each case country, there are strong national policy plans and multi-year programmes for how the countries will address environmental change dynamics. They depend on the country's specific challenges, but all are consistent with international goals around the SDGs and engage with ongoing policy development related to international policy priorities. However, each country also sees gaps between national policy creation and local policy implementation. The structures, such as extension systems, that are due to implement programmes based on the national policy directives are under-resourced and overburdened, with a tendency towards top-down programmes and policy implementation.

5. Conclusions

Information and communication environments are key in addressing environmental change and building community and rural resilience. A strong information and communication ecology must support critical dialogue, transparent communication, and communities getting the information they need at the right time. This suggests a focus on capacity building and building knowledge systems. Technical skills and information are crucial

in being able to adapt agriculture and rural practices to continue to support rural livelihoods. However, networks, strong institutions, a strong communication environment, and networks of local actors are also fundamental to ensuring a longer-term communication environment that can respond to and support the resilience of communities to climate change and climate shocks.

Governance remains an issue. For communication, this means governance of the media environment—regulation and support for formal media institutions, governance of informal media and communication infrastructure. Where these are weak, communication will be undermined, and gaps will remain in communication and rural transformation. Governance related to environmental priorities also needs to address the linkages between national priorities and local implementation: what are the gaps, where are their capacity challenges, and are there mismatches between national and local rural and environmental priorities?

Equity remains important at all levels. Gender inequalities remain and must be addressed. However, power structures at local levels can also prioritize different factors of social differentiation (such as age). In failing to address these power structures, we will continue to fail in the equity goals of inclusive rural transformation. These same inequalities will also continue to undermine resilience to environmental change. Each of these can be addressed through strategic communication for development principles and a strong enabling communication environment.

When we look at the rural landscape for the three case study countries presented in this paper, we can see similar challenges: governance, communication gaps, income and social inequalities, livelihood challenges, and their intersection with environmental change. In each of these case studies, rural communities had less capacity to address the environmental challenges they were facing but still needed to contend with the consequences of their outcomes. As a result, these are issues at a crisis point. However, when we look at the principles of communication for development and their contributions to rural development, they speak to the core of the challenges articulated in each case study. Overlooking the contribution communication can make to equitable, sustainable change undermines and frustrates inclusive rural transformation. This leaves communities and individuals more vulnerable to the consequences of environmental change and climate events—less resilient and adaptive, with poorer livelihood and food security outcomes. These do not fulfil the visions for equitable and sustainable global development enshrined in the SDGs.

However, communication for development does need to expand the conceptualisation of the communication environment. It needs to consider in its principles the need for interdisciplinary and trans-sectoral knowledge specifically to deal with climate and environmental change. The information environment needs to provide the skills and capacities to interpret complex environmental information locally and make locally driven decisions about resilience and adaptation. This information needs the networks and infrastructure (hardware and software) to get information to the people who need it at the right time. This requires building strong networks and a communication environment where urgent information can pass quickly to communities. This means that communities have the capacity to assess information, there is a strong local capacity for environmental information, and longer-term social change is supported by communication processes that follow communication for development principles. As the Ukraine case suggested, a perspective of "climate humanism" combined with communication for development holds great potential to grow communication for development while also supporting integrated, inclusive rural development in the context of changing environmental conditions. Looking forward, frameworks such as Rural Communication Services hold great potential for consolidating these issues to support integrated rural development through communication, adjusted to ensure we address key environmental and climate change challenges.

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Article

Border Tensions for Rethinking Communication and Development: A Case of Building History in Ticoya *Resguardo*

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Abstract: This article proposes rethinking communication, development, and social change from a decolonial perspective through the case study of the Ticoya *resguardo*. It examines how the oral traditions of Indigenous elders construct a history of the territory, positioning orality as a practice of communicative and cognitive justice that transcends the dominant structures of the nation-state. Border tensions are explored both as a physical reality between Colombia and Peru and as a metaphor for identity conflicts. The theoretical framework incorporates debates on post-development, pluriverse, and southern epistemologies, challenging social inequalities. A qualitative methodology based on the praxeological method was implemented in four stages in collaboration with the *resguardo*'s communications committee. Producing a radio series narrated by participants was crucial for gathering the elders' narratives through conversations, social mapping, and storytelling. The findings emphasize the break with linear temporality in narratives, the sense of territory beyond state borders, and the identity tensions of river dwellers. The conclusion underscores the necessity of a decolonial perspective, recognizing the impact of monocultures in obscuring diverse forms of life. The Ticoya *resguardo* case illustrates how communicative justice can highlight the local and everyday, considering the territory essential in the pluriverse, aligning with Escobar's and Santos' proposals on transitions toward a pluriversal world.

Keywords: CDCS; oral communication; communicative justice; cognitive justice; pluriverse

1. Introduction

This article[1] proposes rethinking communication, development, and social change from the perspective of decoloniality in communication. Its proposals arise from the case analysis of the Ticoya reservation and their experience in constructing a history of their territory based on the oral traditions of Indigenous elders. This research experience allowed for the recognition of orality as a practice of communicative justice (Herrera-Huérfano et al. 2023; Hamelink 2023; Fuchs 2021) and cognitive justice, through which Indigenous communities build their sense of local place beyond the dominant structures of the nation-state.

Here, border tensions represent both a reality and a metaphor. A reality because the *resguardo*[2] is located in the border zone between Colombia and Peru, highlighting the inherent tensions in the identity dynamics of nation-states attempting to overshadow the ethnic territorial identities of Indigenous communities. Moreover, a metaphor, as understanding the path of decoloniality in communication involves recognizing the implications that debate on post-development, pluriverse (Escobar 2012a, 2012b, 2012c), and the epistemologies of the South (Santos 2009, 2010) have in the quest to break down the boundaries sustaining inequalities, inequities, and social injustices. In other words, border tensions also refer to the tensions involved in breaking the abyssal line proposed in the sociology of absences and emergences (Santos 2006).

The methodological proposal began with the arguments outlined from the decoloniality of communication and the reflections of Linda Smith (1999), a Maori Indigenous researcher, who advocates for orienting research toward the fundamental challenges of communities and their struggles for self-determination and control of their destinies. Based on this discussion, a qualitative methodology utilizing the praxeological method was proposed and developed in four stages. The methodological design and its implementation were carried out in collaboration with the communications committee of the *resguardo*. The catalyst for energizing the process was producing a radio series that would document the history of the *resguardo*, constructed and narrated by the committee participants. Through extended conversations, social mapping, and storytelling, the narratives of the grandparents were collected to build the series. The collected information was systematized and analyzed using a matrix to investigate the presence of monocultures and diverse forms of justice in the discourses and practices of the interviewed grandparents.

As a central conclusion, we emphasize the necessity of rethinking communication and development from a decolonial perspective, which involves acknowledging the impact that various monocultures have had in rendering diverse forms of life and experiences invisible. The case of constructing the history of the Ticoya *resguardo* dismantles tensions and abyssal boundaries, allowing voices and actors that have been marginalized for centuries to emerge. Here, communicative justice is presented as a key element that transcends the discussion of the right to communication; it entails a political commitment to unveil the local, everyday, and territory as the essence of the pluriverse.

2. Theoretical Debate

Two fundamental elements come into play in this article: the importance of grandfathers and grandmothers in Indigenous communities and the centrality of orality in their cultures. Both aspects have been worked on from different fields. Regarding orality and Indigenous peoples, two lines of work are evident. The first focuses on research on orality and linguistics (Avoseh 2013; Delgado 2019; Creegan Miller 2020; Jacinto Santos 2021; Domenici 2022; Sheedy 2024). A second line, closer to this research proposal, is where orality allows a holistic understanding of the world for a people or community. Orality fuses cultural (Ong 1994), spiritual, and territorial elements that guarantee community survival by being transmitted from generation to generation. (Carrin 2022; Morton 2023; Vázquez Hernández 2024; Mandal and Singh 2023; Jacinto Santos 2021; Domenici 2022; Sheedy 2024). The role of grandparents in the care, maintenance, and production of identity processes through the transmission of cultural knowledge to new generations is fundamental (Buckingham and Hutchinson 2022; Klein 2011), especially in the maintenance of their languages and ecological practices or care for the environment (Van Lopik 2012).

Building on the contributions of linguistics and socio-anthropology, this research brings a unique focus to the debate on orality and the role of grandparents in communities from communication, development, and social change (CDCS). The research identifies the place of the Indigenous and orality in the trajectory of the three paradigms in the field of CDSC (Servaes 1999; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008; Waisbord 2020) to point out how the emergence of the decoloniality of communication incorporates new debates into the CDCS field.

The first dominant communication paradigm is focused on information and social marketing in mass media (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008) within the framework of a linear vision of developmental and modernizing, as Huntington (2005) points out, with a vision of development from a colonizing and civilizing project of societies culturally different from Western civilization. A perspective from which it is considered is that the so-called Third World countries require a new culture to advance to a modern stage. In this framework, the local or ancestral cultures are "considered wrong, local knowledge is viewed as obstacle and unnecessary in development interventions that prevented the adoption of modern attitudes and behaviors" (Waisbord 2020, p. 128). "Hence, culture and social structure, the essence of society, are seen as the primary impediments to its

"progress"" (Servaes 1999, p. 270). Unifying the dynamics of nation-states as an ideal of development (Escobar 2012a) implied that predominantly oral cultures and local languages were part of this obstacle.

> Frequently, Indigenous tongues were banned, their cultures and ways of life rejected, and their assimilation accelerated through educational, linguistic and cultural policies. Dispossession of land and resources, save for rare exceptions and to this day, was also continued, as well as discrimination of their cultures, religions and identities. (Stavenhagen 2008, p. 12. Own translation)

The second trend arises from questioning development and recognizing extra-economic aspects in environmental debates, giving rise to concepts such as ecodevelopment (Sachs 1974) and sustainable development (Brundtland Commission 1987). Discussions related to territorial conditions also emerge at various levels—local, regional, and national—introducing concepts like endo-development or endogenous development (Friedmann and Douglass 1978; Planque 1985; Vásquez 2007), regional development, and decentralization (Boisier 1982, 1987). In communicative terms, this trend is identified as the participatory model, which views communication as a process of dialogue and action (Waisbord 2014). This model advocates for democratizing communication through participatory dialogue (Díaz Bordenave 1976, 1982, 1985), proposing a vision of communication as a complex and horizontal social dynamic (Beltrán 1976, pp. 127–29), and a dialogic communicology of liberation and emancipation from oppression (Boal 2008; Bruner 1990, 2002; Freire 2012). The theory of cultural dependence and the struggle for cultural heritage, including Indigenous perspectives, highlights the tensions between the homogenization imposed by nation-states and cultural identities (Alfaro 1985). The theory of cultural dependence reinforces proposals for active social participation (Reyes Matta 1977, 1981).

Alternative communication introduces a communicology of praxis (Kaplún 1978, 1983), emphasizing knowledge for action and a new logic of meaning that prioritizes local context and history. This is connected to the emergence of communication for another development, as noted by Rosa María Alfaro (1993), or addressing the question "which communication for which development", as proposed by Pasquali (1996).

A third trend is identified as communication for social change (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008) and the multiplicity paradigm (Servaes 2000, 2011). This perspective emphasizes understanding communication models through the multidimensionality of sociocultural variables (Servaes 1999) and the importance of cultural matrices in sociocultural mediations (Martín-Barbero 2003).

Recent proposals have incorporated ecological and decolonial perspectives into debates on communication, development, and social change (Barranquero 2011, 2012; Barranquero and Sáez-Baeza 2015). These include self-determination, the self-organization of peoples, post-development (Escobar 2012b, 2012c), and their right to autonomy (Bengoa 2016, p. 187). This perspective suggests alternative ways of understanding communication, (post)development, and social change that are more closely related to local senses, ontologies, and epistemologies of Indigenous cultures (Contreras 2014, 2016). Situated knowledge is proposed as a means to decolonize communication "implies a new utopian path in the fight against epistemic segregation and whose purpose is to restore communication that humanizes" (Torrico 2018, p. 80).

Significant contributions to understanding decoloniality in communication include: (1) the exploration of Latin American communication knowledge within the critical framework of Elacom (Latin American School of Communication) and its decolonizing potential (Valencia Rincón 2012; Torrico 2016, 2017, 2018; Olarte 2016; Herrera-Huérfano et al. 2016; Cebrelli and Arancibia 2017; Ganter and Ortega 2019); (2) the examination of colonial communicative practices, such as the imposition of cultural logics through religion and language, and their social and political impact (Gómez 2016; Padilla 2018); and (3) the analysis of subaltern discursive practices among Indigenous groups, Afro-descendants, and other popular cultures, revealing forms of resistance and re-existence, as well as the epistemes and ontologies underlying these practices (Contreras 2014, 2016; Valdez et al.

2019; González-Tanco 2016; Maldonado 2018; Cebrelli and Arancibia 2018; Larrea and Saladrigas 2018; Mavisoy 2018).

This research, situated at the intersection of discussions on communication, development, and social change from recent debates on decoloniality, seeks to understand how constructing the oral and intercultural local history of the Ticoya *resguardo* reflects a commitment to cognitive and communicative justice. These dimensions of justice are understood as efforts to expand "worlds and knowledges constructed over different ontological commitments, epistemic configurations, and practices of being, knowing, and making/doing" (Escobar 2012b, p. 49) and as dimensions to "design the cultural, civilizational, and ecological transitions necessary to confront the civilizational crisis", recognizing post-development and transitions toward the pluriverse beyond the Western culture imposed through modern reason (Escobar 2018, p. xi).

One criticism of modern reason is its failure to recognize the inexhaustible richness of the world and the diverse ways of inhabiting and engaging with it (Santos 2006). Modern reason positions itself as unique and exclusive, rendering it incapable of acknowledging other epistemological forms. We are confronted with a myopic, hierarchical reason that invisibilizes and denies alternative ways of being, effectively rendering them non-existent. To challenge this rationality and seek strategies for its deconstruction, the Sociology of Absences (Santos 2006) emerges. This approach is characterized by its transgressive and insurgent nature, aiming to reveal what has long been dismissed as non-existent, incredible, or discardable. It identifies five modes of absence or monocultures.

The imposition of modern reason is evidenced through the five monocultures: (1) the monoculture of modern and scientific knowledge, (2) the monoculture of the naturalization of differences (religion, race, ethnicity, gender), (3) the monoculture of globality/universality, (4) the monoculture of linear time, and (5) the monoculture of capitalist productivity centered on economic productivity, as outlined in the epistemologies of the south (Santos 2009, 2010).

The construction of this intercultural history, drawing from the diverse voices of the grandfathers and grandmothers of the Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua cultures, responds to the need for alternative ways of thinking within the framework of cognitive justice—not as an esoteric plea, but as a practical idea, an appeal from marginal and traditional societies seeking to contribute to Western science and its concepts of complexity, time, and sustainability (Visvanathan 2006, p. 167. Own translation).

In response to the monoculture of scientific knowledge (Santos 2009), which is written and linear, it is proposed to give contextual credibility to knowledge about the territory's history from its inhabitants and their stories, aligning with cognitive justice (Visvanathan 2006).

The effort to construct a narrative about the territory of the Ticoya *resguardo* was undertaken with an acknowledgment of the subaltern position of Indigenous groups in Latin America and Colombia. The starting point was the understanding of communication as a participatory space (Díaz Bordenave 1976, 1982, 1985; Gumucio-Dagron 2011), where symbolic interactions occur and cultural meanings are constructed (Rizo 2007, 2012), producing the social fabric of a community (Magallanes-Blanco and Ramos 2017; Magallanes-Blanco 2022). An intercultural understanding of communication encompasses the complexity of social life within a diversity of cultural practices and frameworks (García-Canclini 1982, 1987, 1989; Martín-Barbero 2002, 2003, 2012), highlighting struggles for cultural heritage and tensions between cultural identity and homogenization (Alfaro 1985).

Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui (2008) emphasizes that orality, as a historical practice, holds decolonial potential, enabling a shift beyond traditional historical narratives; this opens a space for debating the perspectives from which "legitimate" knowledge about Indigenous communities is constructed.

Indigenous historiographical practices, conversely, reveal deep layers of collective memory: the submerged iceberg of precolonial history, transmitted through myth to new generations, fostering a vision of an autonomous historical process and the hope to regain

control over a historical destiny disrupted by colonial processes (Rivera-Cusicanqui 2008, p. 171. Own translation).

Within the framework of the decolonization of communication, as proposed by previous research, orality is established as a strategy for the survival of communities resisting dispossession, memory loss, and identity erosion (Carrin 2022), and as a means to counteract Westernization and state modernization processes (Morton 2023). In other words, the decolonization of communication should contribute to developing pathways to address the monocultures of Western culture and align communicative practices with post-development perspectives.

In the framework of decolonization of communication, as proposed by some previous research, orality is established as a strategy for the survival of communities struggling against dispossession, loss of memory, and identity (Carrin 2022) and as a strategy to circumvent the processes of westernization and modernization of the State (Morton 2023). Decolonization of communication should contribute to constructed paths to face the monocultures of Western culture and is related to the communicative practice with the post-development.

Our research allowed us to incorporate orality as a historical decolonial source. We hope that in doing so, the memories of the Indigenous peoples' grandfathers and grandmothers can pave the way for future resistance exercises that may consolidate orality as a legitimate form of knowledge insofar as it expresses the cosmovisions of peoples capable of narrating themselves in dialogue with other forms of knowledge and other proposals in the context of the pluriverse.

3. Methodological Development

The methodological proposal of the research engaged in ongoing dialogue with the arguments and pursuits of cognitive justice as articulated by Linda Smith (1999) in her seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. The research design was oriented toward addressing the fundamental challenges communities face, including survival, cultural preservation, language, struggles for self-determination, and the reclamation of control over their destinies (Smith 1999). Based on this premise, a qualitative approach employing the praxeological method was utilized. This method is characterized by an action–reflection–action dynamic, "where knowledge is constructed through the integration of thought and participatory action within the community, where theory illuminates and energizes action and practice (is conceived as) a process of social interaction to contextualize and solve problems collaboratively "(Juliao 2002, p. 31). The design of the participatory methodology actively engaged the community in the research process and facilitated the project's integration by documenting the formation of the *resguardo* through its oral traditions, primarily those preserved by the elders. The process was further energized by producing a radio series that documented the history of the *resguardo*, as constructed and narrated by members of the *resguardo*'s communications committee.

The implementation of praxeology in our research was structured in four distinct yet interrelated stages: seeing, interpreting, acting, and creative return. These stages provided a clear structure for the development of our method in the field with the communities.

The seeing stage began with an inventory diagnosis through a local publication search, with the participation of the members of the radio committee of the *resguardo*. This allowed us to identify which stories have been built around the territory of Ticoya *Reguardo* and recognize from which place of enunciation those historical narratives have been built. We found one grey piece of literature written by the first mayor of the municipality, Puerto Nariño (the policeman, non-Indigenous), regarding the "civilization" of the local place through the statal figure of the municipality.

At the same time, we developed a participatory social mapping workshop to identify the representative places, events, and significant subjects within the community's collective memories. Seven of the 23 communities in the territory that comprise the Ticoya *resguardo* were identified to collect landmarks and talk with the community's grandfathers and grandmothers through storytelling (Table 1).

Table 1. Community selection arguments.

Community Selection	Argument from Social Mapping Workshop
Tipisca	This is an important community because it is located in a border zone with Peru near Tierra Amarilla and has a high Yagua population.
Atacuari	It is an important community because it is a border zone; it is the only border community populated by Cocamas, a minority in the *resguardo*. Together with Tipisca, these communities are located on the Loretayacú River.
Patrullero	It is a relevant community because it moved to the mainland in recent years. It used to be an island with very particular dynamics for carrying out its agricultural processes.
San Martín	It is the oldest community and the first settlement that marked the center–periphery relationship with the political and administrative center of the reservation, Puerto Nariño.
Tarapoto	This community has a preponderant place in the stories of origin. The Omaguas—ancestors of the Ticunas—come from the Cotué, and their first place of arrival is El Tarapoto. The community lives on the shores of the lake, sacred territory before the law of origin of the Ticunas.
Ticoya	This community is relevant because it is the political and administrative center of the *resguardo* and is located in the urban area of the municipality of Puerto Nariño.
Siete de agosto y Boyahuasú	These communities are located in the farthest area of the reservation on the Amazon River, at the extreme limit of the trapezoid, where trade moves due to its proximity to Caballo Cocha (Peru).

The interpretation stage of the praxeological method was not developed at a specific moment precisely because of its intention; it was carried out throughout the entire process and fed by social mapping, observation exercises, daily dialogues, and interviews for storytelling.

The action stage focused on the collection of storytelling with the grandparents in the different communities selected. This mainly was guided by the communication committee members because, as Smith states, "the relevance of the stories is not that they tell something, but that they contribute to a collective story... The intrinsic of storytelling is to focus on dialogues and conversations between Indigenous people to understand themselves" (Smith 1999, p. 145). A total of 15 interviews were conducted during the visits to the seven communities. In parallel, and as part of this stage, a radio series entitled *Gente de Río*[3] about the history of the *resguardo* was created and produced. This process was carried out through production and narration workshops with the members of the *resguardo*'s communications committee.

Finally, in the fourth stage of creative devolution, socialization through a *minga* was organized to share with the whole community the history of the *resguardo* built from the experiences, transits, rhythms, and times stored in the memories of the *resguardo*'s grandparents. Once again, the excuse of the radio brought together a whole community to listen to each other and to meet with family stories that were articulated among them to tell a collective story. The creative feedback stage sought to serve "a dream, desire, and anticipation function. . .of initiatives and new outlets for action. . ." (Juliao 2002, p. 103. Own translation), and then, the *resguardo*'s committee of communication discussed the mechanisms for the diffusion of *Gente de Río* through public loudspeakers and spaces such as the scholar institutions. These proposals used what the community calls *La radio sin radio*[4] (The radio without a radio).

This research project and the production of the radio series *Gente del Río* is the continuity of the research and interaction processes that began with other projects in 2012. A request from the *curacas*[5] of the communities and the president of the *resguardo* to the *Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios* gave us elements to formulate the project and continue

with the training in radio production for the members of the communities, contribute to the consolidation of the communications committee of the *resguardo*, and generate radio productions for the maintenance of their cultures and history, as indicated in the letter. Additionally, the *resguardo*'s request to the researchers guaranteed entry to the territory with the support and permission of the administrative and traditional authorities.

In coherence with our theoretical framework, the research bets built with and from the communities imply a joint action based on the dialogue of knowledge, understood as the implementation of the ecology of knowledge of Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his reflections on the epistemologies of the South, according to which "the search for credibility for non-scientific knowledge does not imply the discrediting of scientific knowledge. It simply implies its counter-hegemonic use" (Santos 2009, p. 115). In this case, the counter-hegemonic use of historiographic knowledge as scientific knowledge was sought by constructing an oral historical narrative from the voices and knowledge of grandfathers and grandmothers of the territory as cognitive and communicative justice.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results presented here are derived from an analysis of the oral narratives provided by the grandfathers and grandmothers, as well as the scripts prepared by the *resguardo*'s communications committee for the three chapters of the radio series. This analysis was systematized using a matrix to categorize the stories in relation to concepts of monocultures, injustices, and justice.

The research experience and the process of constructing the oral history of the Ticoya *resguardo* offer valuable insights into the connections between the Communication for Development and Social Change (CDCS) field and the perspectives of the pluriverse and post-development as part of a decolonial approach to communication. The findings are explored through three key reflections: the break from linear temporality in the narratives, the localization of the sense of territory beyond state boundaries, and the identity of the *Gente de Río* as reflected in their daily practices, such as the use of native languages, traditional agricultural methods (*chagra*), and the knowledge shared in *malokas*[6] and *mingas*[7] of thought.

4.1. The Break from Linear Temporality

The Ticoya *Resguardo* has been constituting itself for longer than one might think, independently of whatever denomination it has been given. Before the communities were "legalized" by the Colombian State, they had gathered and organized themselves; they have always had political practices and figures of authority in charge of managing resources, collective actions, celebrations, and other everyday life affairs. Accordingly, if one hopes to build an oral history of the *resguardo*, one must disregard the boundaries set up by the State and assume the kind of flexibility that allows one to cross broad chronological demarcations signaled by diffuse and non-linear referents. The articulation of these referents narrates the *resguardo*'s relations with the State, their internal interactions, how they have inhabited the territory, and how all of this is consigned to their oralities.

Oral memory is manifested in the voices of grandfathers and grandmothers through the storytelling sessions, with their silences, gaps, length in the stories, the slowness of their speech, the emphasis on events, people, and places, and even their names in their own language. These referents delimit a time-events framework, in which the historical narration does not follow the path of temporal linearity but establishes a nucleus of significant events and places that inhabit the collective memory of the community.

Understanding a narrative within a multidirectional dispersion of time-events referred to also involves the notion of an open-dimensional space-time bereft of pre-established directional frameworks and strict and rigid laws that determine events (Valera-Villegas 2008, p. 6. Own translation).

This multidirectional dispersion of time-events, analyzed in the orality of the grandparents, configured the organization of the three chapters of *Gente de Río* from three time-events:

the creation of the *resguardo*, the spaces and inhabitants of the first communities, and the mobility described in the arrivals and decisions of the grandfathers and grandmothers to stay. This order was given to the narratives by the communications committee of the *resguardo* ropes with the rigidity of a chronology. It does not appeal to the identification of the history of events or facts concatenated diachronically but to the synchrony of senses of experience and place.

Based on the collective memories and the oral history of *Resguardo* Ticoya in the Amazon, we can underscore that:

Thus, we do not have history but diversely profound histories [...] However, the existence of these horizons does not constitute a linear succession permanently outrunning itself and advancing toward a "destiny": what we have are inherently conflicting referents, live parcels of the past that inhabit the present and block the emergence of totalizing and homogenizing mechanisms (Rivera-Cusicanqui 2008, p. 20. Own translation).

The construction of an oral history of the Ticoya *Resguardo* must acknowledge that this construction takes place beyond the boundaries of historical linearity, private space, and official authorship. This represents the first break with the monoculture of linear time of Western culture (Santos 2009). The referents that allow for the construction of the history at hand are the rhythm originating in the flow of the river, the spatial dynamics of collective property inherent in the *resguardo*, in coherence with the proposals on post-development according to which "local knowledge is a place-based mode of consciousness, a place-specific way of endowing the world with meaning" (Escobar 2012c, p. 121).

4.2. The Sense of Territory beyond Borders

When asked about the constitution of the *resguardo*, few of its inhabitants refer to its legal conformation; their sense of territory is bound to narrations about the families that lived in each community. These communities had their denominations and traditional authorities—the first *curacas*. They allude to their territory as inhabited and denominated since before its establishment through the figure of *resguardo*. The establishment of the Ticoya *Resguardo* is perceived as a landmark that has influenced how its inhabitants interact with the non-Indigenous world, their access to public funds and resources, and their interaction with the Colombian State.

The sense of territory relates to how the communities were constituted through familiar units, three or four houses, where few families began to grow before the establishment of the *resguardo* and municipality. Those who joined these communities came from Peru or Brazil; they decided to stay because of work, in the pursuit of starting a family, or because of the availability of common life-sustaining resources. The grandfather, Albino Ríos (in personal communication, 4 May 2017), remembers that in 1970 when he arrived, he was paid 300 Soles. Like him, many referred to the work in the lumber mills as a driving factor in moving from one community to another, independently of the geographic nation-state borders drawn to separate Peru, Brazil, and Colombia.

Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas have moved across this territory through the years, decades, and centuries, because their territory, as a symbolic entity, is the jungle and the river; beyond the *resguardo* or the municipality, as institutional figures and denominations.

One of the senses of the territory in opposition to the institutional vision is related to the perception of the dynamics of the river. Thus, during the fieldwork, it was found that from the Territorial Organizational Plan (*Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial—POT*), government institutions considered these communities at high risk during the annual flooding season (April to June). Due to this, the State assigned houses for the communities, located near the municipal head of Puerto Nariño, a highland at a safe distance from the river and seven hours by little boat (*peque-peque*) from the place where the families were initially settled.

The perception of the local administrative figures about the "floods" contrasts with the communities' representation and sense of the river as a fundamental component of their territory. For the communities, life follows the rhythm and flow of the river during high tide and low tide, whereas for the State, the same territory is a "zone of high risk."

The dialogues with the grandparents reflect that everything in the Amazonian trapeze moves to the rhythm of the river and its cycles of low and high waters. The river's rhythm determines a permanent adaptation to the dynamics of each cycle. The Indigenous communities of the Amazonian trapeze have experience and wisdom about adaptation, allowing their people to survive in the jungle for centuries. This is marked by the cycles of fishing, planting, and other practices derived from their relationship with the environment, which is a relationship based on living in harmony. This is what they declare in their life plan:

The territory is both support and principle of life, where the cultural and the environmental are integrated: it allows to inhabit, live and grow in family and community, produces food sustenance, offers medicine, is the birthplace of water, lakes and fish, where the dead are buried and sacred sites are found; it is the place where we live with other immortal beings that are the basis of spirituality as Indigenous (2008, p. 44).

The *resguardo* legal existence began in 1990. From the communities' perspective, the organizational process within the *resguardo* followed the simultaneous consolidation of the Colombian Indigenous movement. The strengthening of this movement was marked by the creation, in 1982, of the National Indigenous Organization (Organización Nacional Indígena—ONIC). From the perspective of the Colombian State, the creation of the *resguardo* followed the formal organization of communities in the borderlands, which, by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, constituted an institutional measure to guarantee legal protection to territories under threat of being colonized by illegal groups and being forced to enter into the drug trade (cocaine and marihuana).

Within global monoculture, we recognize the dominating dimension of "the global" due to the political forms of an organization centered around the nation-state and guided by a modern, literate, and developmentally aspirational civilizational project. As a consequence, local and territorial organizational dynamics are invisibilized by globally oriented prerogatives. National and global organizational models and frameworks are superimposed on the recognition of everyday forms of social organization within micro-social dynamics.

Due to the legal standing of the *resguardo*, there is tension between the municipal administration and the resguardo's own administrative association—ATICOYA—which has led to disputes over the decision-making processes within the territory. These institutional tensions represent what Vieco (2014) calls a tension between an official national history (that of the municipality) and a local history (that of the *resguardo*). It is the relation of the center of the periphery with the periphery of the periphery, from the persistence of colonial economic, cultural, and political structures and institutions that are used by national elites to exploit and marginalize their own population (González-Casanova 1965). The tensions are caused by the different interests between those who live in the urban center of Puerto Nariño (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and those who live in the more remote communities (majority Indigenous).

In everyday life, recognizing the territory as *resguardo* has contributed to the preservation, endurance, and maintenance of the Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua cultures. Especially since 2008, a year in which a series of exercises oriented at the recognition of the *resguardo* began to take place guided by the Cocama leader Emperatriz Cahuache, and the Corporation for the Defense of Biodiversity in the Amazon (Corporación para la Defensa de la Biodiversidad Amazónica—CODEBA). Within the territory of the *resguardo*, at the southern end of Colombia (see Figure 1), and along the Loretoyacu, Amacayacu, and Amazon rivers, lay the settlements of 23 communities; the continuity and permanence of the rivers and settlements are mirrored in the collective memories of their inhabitants.
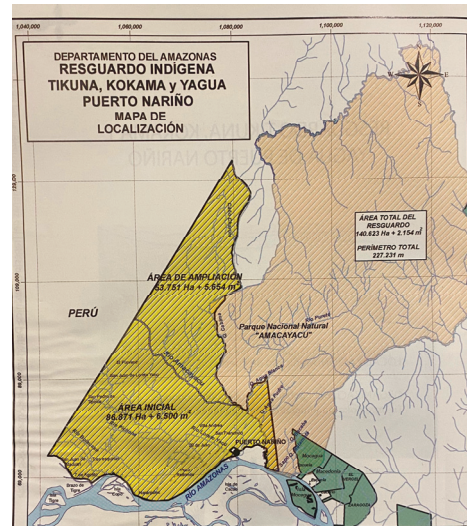
Figure 1. Map of the Indigenous *resguardo* Ticoya. Source: Altas de los *resguardos* indígenas del Trapecio amazónico, CODEBA-Corporación para la Defensa de la Biodiversidad Amazónica (2008, p. 52).

4.3. Identitarian Tensions of the River People

Finally, tensions arise from the intersection of collective identity and cultural configurations, as referenced by Grimson (2011). By conducting this research exercise with communities located close to international borders, our results highlight the existence of these identitarian tensions and the responsibility that comes with inhabiting a space in order to preserve it from the presence of the other. What is interesting is determining from where the other is constructed.

The place from which we relate to others and construct them is mediated by our understanding of how the State has impacted the configuration of Indigenous people's cultures and identities. This mediation has generated particular modes of coexistence within the territories. The presence of the State establishes national identities, which implies the necessity of defining the other, which allows the individual, based on a sense of belonging (Grimson 2011), to be a fellow citizen of the same country.

The cultural configurations that arise from the need to define an identity bound to a territory and a nationality undermine, invisibilize, and devalue the cultural configurations of those who cannot exclusively self-identify from said place. From the monoculture of naturalization of differences (Santos 2009, 2010), this type of process is favored, where priority is given to the homogenization of the population, eliminating any hint of ethnic difference, consolidating the idea of national citizens willing to enter into dispute with non-national others. This monoculture has at its core a colonizing and civilizing project that sweeps away communities that are culturally different from those of the West (Huntington 2005).

Through this lens, it becomes visible that the cultural configurations of the Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas are constantly subjected to processes of inequality, invisibilization, and denial in the hegemonic construction of history, since they do not coincide or share interests with the national identity.

The Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas are settled in three different countries: Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. Their ethnic configurations have been permeated by the borders of the three countries. Thus, the Ticunas are not just Ticunas anymore, but rather Colombian Ticunas or Brazilian Ticunas, which, in living close to the national borders, represent the presence of citizens on the edges. The recognition of oneself as belonging to the same ethnic group, while having a different nationality from others within said group, because of one's

geographical location, leads to an understanding of national borders as porous and fluid, and to conceive of one's identity as untethered from official national territories.

Grandmother Silvia Bastos understands her presence in the territory as important for the country. She explains that her grandfather fought for their land, and that, if her community moves, it is possible that the Peruvians will take over the territory:

> [...] my grandfather used to say that this land, here, was Peru right up to Leticia, and, after, they fought in the conflict which made the land become Colombia. That is why they ended up staying here, and that is why my deceased grandfather used to tell us: "the day I die, grandchildren, you will stay here, and I do not want you to ever leave this land, because it was for this land that I went and suffered in the conflict"... I am never leaving this place, because my grandfather told us that, so that we took care of the land; because he suffered in times of conflict. (S. Bastos, personal communication, 2 May 2017)

In the narrative of Grandmother Silvia Bastos, the tension between national and cultural identity is evident. The grandmother constructs the other as different, not in cultural terms, but in national terms. That is to say, the logic of the nation-state given from the monoculture of naturalization of differences (Santos 2009, 2010) has constructed a discourse of the other as an enemy from whom I must take care of my territory, denying the most evident and clear, the ethnic identity that has been shared for many years before the consolidation of the national states.

This idea of the other as an "enemy" has also been molded from the monoculture of capitalism productivity (Santos 2009, 2010), since it deprives individuality, and competition, the division of yours and mine is strongly built, denying any commitment to the community and ours.

The rumors that Peru had intentions to reclaim the territory it once considered its own—during the Peruvian occupation of Leticia in the early 1930s—still reverberate in many of the narratives:

> What we want is not to leave this place, this land, border territory, borderland, [...] a Peruvian lady, running for the presidency, you know what she said? This is the truth and God is listening; she said: "On the day I win, I will take Leticia back, like we did before". That is why I am scared to leave this place and leave this land. Can you imagine? If we leave, they will come [he refers to the Peruvians] and, who is going to get them out? That is what we are afraid of: to take the land back, we will have to fight like we did before. (C. Benítez, personal communication, 2 May 2017)

The "enemy", Peru, is the birthplace of many of them and their close kin, whom they visit frequently, and because of this, they have easier access to some consumer goods and medical services in the country from which they believe they are defending themselves.

However, and despite constructed fears, the Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas maintain relations of *paisanismo*—relations of kinship—that are separate from national identities. The given practices among the Indigenous people of the three countries, unlike the discourses, are friendly, collaborative and exchanges of different types, and are based on their cultural identities. It is as if those imaginary lines of the nation-state are not capable of untying the cultural dynamics woven throughout hundreds of years by the modes of being Indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon. *Paisanismo* relations are practices that appeal to the ecology of recognition and make visible forms of sociocultural and spiritual justice by prioritizing community relations, cooperation, and solidarity (Santos 2009, 2010). The discourse about a "Peruvian" enemy belongs to the State, but it is not practiced among the inhabitants who, for the most part, share common cultural identities.

Consequently, Yagua children from Tierra Amarilla (Peru) go to school in Tipisca (Colombia); Ticoya youths celebrate the local festivities in Caballo de Cocha (Peru); all of the communities along the Amazon River have access to only one radio station, that of Caballo Cocha; and there are no migration checkpoints nor ID requirements to prevent the use the

fluvial transportation services that connect Tabatinga (Brazil), Leticia (Colombia), Puerto Nariño (Colombia) and Caballo Cocha (Peru) on a daily basis. The constant changes in the populational configuration of the territory, and the interactions of the ethnic groups among themselves and with the different states, give way to tensions regarding their identities—tensions that reflect the appropriation and transformation of practices, knowledge, and customs, among others.

Building the oral history of a *resguardo* that borders with another country involves contrasting official borders with those that have been historically acknowledged free from national imperatives nor imaginary lines; the reason for this is that the people whose lives are sustained by the river, move through the river. This history, made into memory from subalternity, as Rivera-Cusicanqui (2008) highlights, came into dialogue with a kind of cultural asymmetry that runs through the speakers' tongues. Hence, in this exercise, we came to encounter the oral memories of some Ticunas, Cocanas, and Yaguas, for whom their mother tongue is an Indigenous tongue, and others, despite sharing the same Indigenous identity, for whom their mother tongue is Spanish or Portuguese. If we understand that a tongue contains within itself an entire universe of cultural meaning, we can also acknowledge that within the territory of the Amazon there is a cultural and identitarian wealth and diversity. This wealth and diversity sustains the fluidity and rhythm of everyday intercultural exchanges, which ebb and flow in consonance with the dynamics of the rivers and the territory during periods of high tide and low tide.

Building the oral history of a *resguardo* that borders another country involves comparing official national boundaries with those historically recognized as existing beyond national imperatives or arbitrary lines. This is because the people whose lives are intertwined with the river navigate its course daily. According to Rivera-Cusicanqui (2008), this history, rooted in subalternity, intersects with a form of cultural asymmetry inherent in the languages of the speakers. Consequently, this study revealed oral memories from some Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua individuals whose mother tongue is an Indigenous language, while others, despite sharing the same Indigenous identity, speak Spanish or Portuguese as their mother tongue. Recognizing that a language encompasses a complete universe of cultural meaning allows us to appreciate the cultural and identity richness and diversity within the Amazon territory. This richness and diversity facilitate the fluidity and rhythm of daily intercultural exchanges, which ebb and flow in harmony with the rivers' dynamics and the territory during periods of high tide and low tide.

5. Conclusions

Exploring alternative approaches to communication, development, and social change requires challenging the hegemonic parameters that have constructed the borders and tensions discussed above. These boundaries create abysmal frontiers that obscure the inexhaustible richness of the world and the diverse ways of inhabiting and engaging with it (Santos 2006).

Eliminating the abysmal lines that deny and obscure other ways of being involves rethinking and questioning the perspective that regards literacy and archivists as the sole vessels of histories and memories of social groups and territories. It is essential to evaluate this perspective to accommodate a diversity of voices and actors, from their oralities, which can offer a broader sense and meaning beyond a linear historical narrative. Adopting a post-development perspective, which considers the dynamics of the interstices between borders, involves recovering other discourses that highlight alternative ways of understanding spatial configurations and, consequently, cultural identities. This approach may also facilitate non-human interactions (i.e., with the river), such as those occurring within the local territory in everyday life.

Oral narratives about interstate confrontations led us to recognize the border as a physical boundary or demarcation, separating the territory and its inhabitants from the "others". This dichotomy reveals how the *resguardo* is connected to the larger territory defined by the border in terms of both separation and unity. On one hand, there is a

separation from those who ended up on the opposite side of the national divide and were assigned different citizenship. On the other hand, unity is fostered by the shared cultural identities of the Ticuna, Cocama, Yagua, and other ethnic groups inhabiting this region of the Amazon.

Thus, the border emerges as both a geographical and administrative boundary that delineates a territory. As an institutionalized space, the *resguardo* is characterized by the economic and administrative logic of the national territory regarding resource use and appropriation—reflecting a monoculture of capitalist productivity. The territory, as a repository of collective memory, is perceived as a cohesive whole from which daily dynamics emerge; these dynamics, in turn, sustain the local culture amidst tensions with externally imposed practices of Western education and commerce. Consequently, everyday practices such as *paisanismo* are not engaged in the migration dynamics between national territories and, therefore, are not meaningfully differentiated by the peoples of either nation. On the contrary, identity is more profoundly shaped by interactions among kinfolk within the shared territory and by the customs and practices of the three ethnic groups inhabiting the area: Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua. The notion of sovereignty contrasts with kinship-based cultural configurations expressed through holidays, sports events, celebrations, and daily rituals. This contrast arises because kinfolk share common identity origins independent of national affiliations, advocating for relational practices grounded in sociocultural and spiritual justice, thereby bridging the incommensurable gaps created by the monoculture of naturalizing differences.

Similarly, the storytelling sessions fostered intergenerational dialogues between the *sabedores* and the younger members of the *resguardo's* communications committee. The voices of the grandfathers and grandmothers were prominently featured in the oral narratives. The creation of the *resguardo's* history, as presented in the radio series *Gente de Río*, facilitated the recognition of cultural and institutional elements that were in tension within the diverse histories that interpret and give meaning to the territory. The narrative, both gathered and analyzed in this document and showcased in the radio series *Gente de Río*, represents an effort to decolonize the past and to keep the community's collective memory vibrant, oral, and plural. This effort is grounded in an interpretation of the continuities and events that have shaped the current existence and situation of the Ticoya *Resguardo*. The intergenerational dialogue is a component of cognitive justice, giving central importance to the grandparents' narratives and experiences. Their stories embody the culture that seeks to be preserved in the memory and daily practices of future generations. Oral culture and the ability to transmit this memory across generations resist the monoculture of modern knowledge, the privileging of writing as the sole method of knowledge transmission, the construction of a singular national history, and, above all, the denial of the existence of multiple cosmovisions and epistemologies.

Communicative justice involves constructing the history of the *resguardo* through the oral traditions and memories of grandmothers and grandfathers, thereby bridging the gap of absences by proposing narratives that reflect the logic of each context, grounded in local and everyday cultural forms. This form of justice emerges from the creation of local meanings through their languages, their ways of understanding and relating to their territory, and their practices of *paisanismo*, while resisting global dynamics that homogenize identities through hegemonic impositions.

In summary, conceptualizing decolonial communication involves transcending the mere right to communication; it requires a political commitment to dismantling, surpassing, and deconstructing the borders that produce tensions and erasures. Decolonial communication cannot be conceived without communicative justice, where the local context, territory, daily practices, and languages themselves reveal the essence of the pluriverse.

Notes

[1] Results of the research project: Intercultural communication, collective memories and orality: a history of the Ticoya reservation in the Colombian Amazon, financed by the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios-UNIMINUTO.

[2] The *resguardo* is a special legal and socio-political institution formed by one or more Indigenous communities that organize themselves autonomously to manage the territory and community life, through their own normative systems.

[3] The series is available for listening at https://davidfayadsanz.wixsite.com/amazonas (accessed on 4 August 2024).

[4] This is the title the Indigenous Committee of Communications gave to their own radiophonic project, by which they make reference to their experience in producing audio content shared by other means than by radiophonic frequencies. For more on the *Radio without a radio*, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvMIgjDQ04A (accessed on 4 August 2024) to the documentary and https://x.com/rtvcnoticias/status/1767309681167327404?s=46 (accessed on 4 August 2024) to the interview on the *Radio without a radio* (both links are included in the cover letter during the double-blind evaluation process).

[5] *Curacas* are the political and administrative leaders of every individual community.

[6] *Maloka* is a traditional circular construction of communal rituals used by Indigenous peoples in the Amazonian regions of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. The maloca is not simply a physical place; it is a central ritual space in the Indigenous cosmovision, where the community and nature are in perfect harmony.

[7] A *minga* is a form of organization and assembly meeting, based on collective work. Initially conceived as a means to organize collective activities, such as the sowing of the *chagra*, communities currently refer to *mingas* of thought in which they gather to deliberate and make collective decisions.

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Article

Cultural Studies with Communities in South Africa: Implications for Participatory Development Communication and Social Change Research

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Abstract: This article theorizes the role of local and indigenous culture in its intersection with development initiatives. It argues that Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC), through a cultural studies framework, strengthens the potentiality of democratization and participation within community-based development and social change settings. We advocate that applied cultural studies can facilitate agency (through voice and self-representation) in social interventions. This is a cultural studies approach that has been recontextualised from the Birmingham origin as read through Marxist development studies, first adapted and mobilized during the anti-apartheid struggle in developing cultural strategy, and more recently with efforts to indigenise research practices with research participants in the southern Kalahari. We draw on an example of the community-owned, state-funded, and privately operated !Xaus Lodge cultural tourism asset. We illustrate how CDSC strategies, influenced by applied cultural studies, can work with an agentic imperative to effect development and mutual understanding in a defined geographical area, where multiple stakeholder agendas, cultural backgrounds, and ontologies are to be negotiated.

Keywords: agency; applied cultural studies; communication for development and social change; identity; negotiation of meaning; community participation; South Africa

1. Introduction

In the fieldwork and scholarship of Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC) at the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS), University of KwaZulu-Natal, we argue that 'theory is worth fighting for' (Hall 1992, p. 286). This exhortation works if theory furthers social strengthening and recognizes that nothing is ever static. As such, our research practice is informed by 'going on theorizing' rather than being 'interested in Theory' for theory's sake (Grossberg 1996, p. 150). The dynamic nature of local and indigenous culture and its intersection with development initiatives is evident in our case study: a community-owned, state-funded, and privately operated !Xaus Lodge, which is a cultural tourism asset in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, in southern Africa.

We argue that CDSC, through a cultural studies framework, strengthens the potential of democratization and participation within community-based development and social change settings. Our discussion draws on the Birmingham School that paved the way for cultural studies' critical engagement with articulations of power and resistance. It simultaneously interrupts this tradition to explain an (African-oriented) applied cultural studies that moves the researcher beyond the philosophical environment of academia towards applied research, to actively engage with communities and their real-life, ontological conditions and issues.

1.1. Cultural Studies Context

Cultural studies was initially developed in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Birmingham University) that was founded in 1964 by Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart. Drawing on various theoretical influences such as Marxism, constructivism, poststructuralism, feminism, and critical race theory, it explored and theorized issues of identity and the processes of subject formation. The cultural practices associated with these processes include analyses of the politics of representation and power dynamics. The structural, discursive, and ideological forces that position people are examined in relation to how people participate in the construction of their everyday lives. These are the core issues with which we are also interested, especially in how people perform their agency, or capacity to act, as this autonomy is central to participatory CDSC.

Applied cultural studies enables agency (through voice and self-representation) in social interventions. Put differently, it could be considered cultural studies for social change. Our account of this applied cultural studies is illustrated via its adaptation and mobilization in two distinct South African settings and periods. Firstly, during the anti-apartheid struggle, cultural studies assisted with developing cultural and media resistance strategies that, along with social theory, were the basis of the anti-apartheid critique and praxis (see Tomaselli 2000). This was cultural studies recontextualized from the Birmingham origin as read through Marxist development studies (see Rodney 1972; Poulantzas 1975; Mattelart 1976) with practical dramaturgical applications (White 2009) and interventions by the then Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which worked with civil and social justice organizations in the 1980s. The application of engaged methods that inscribed the concerns of the struggling communities was the driving force of theory building.

Post-1994, in democratic South Africa, the Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies changed focus to how our research could positively impact development and social strengthening amongst marginalized communities, particularly in the southern Kalahari across South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia. Participatory development communication strategies were created alongside those we had previously established via applied cultural studies in the 1980s to examine how identity and development influence each other. Continuing the search for methodologies that inscribe the concerns of our local research participants, we adapted Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies (Denzin et al. 2008) to sensitize our methods further to respect local ways of making sense and to understand the indeterminacy of sense-making to development encounters that include multiple stakeholders.

These contextual, theoretical, and methodological influences on our agentic, participatory approach to CDSC strategies are schematically presented in Figure 1 below.

1. 1960s Birmingham, UK, Cultural Studies—deconstruction, Marxist Development Studies.
2. 1980s–90s Anti-Apartheid struggle, South Africa, Cultural Studies—critique and praxis.
3. Post-democracy 1994, South Africa, Applied Cultural Studies—including Participatory Development Communication strategies.
4. Early 2000s Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies, African-oriented applied cultural studies—embracing complexities, listening, and reflecting.

1.2. Objectives

Two bodies of knowledge, CDSC and cultural studies, have influenced our approach. We navigate the parameters of CDSC from top-down approaches that tend towards instrumentalist and interventionist communication, overlooking community concerns, to a discussion of contributions to the field that are useful in valorising community concerns. Cultural studies is then discussed, signalling its strengths and challenges to engender an agentic form of CDSC. While metropolitan theory is valid, adaptation to local contours must engage local theories dialectically (Tomaselli 2012). The origin and merits of applied cultural studies, influenced by African articulations of cultural studies, is then explained.

Our objective is to illustrate how CDSC strategies, influenced by indigenised applied cultural studies, can work with an agentic imperative to effect development and mutual understanding in a defined geographical area, where multiple stakeholder agendas, cultural backgrounds, and ontologies are to be negotiated. These negotiations were studied using the participatory action research (PAR) methodology adopted in the !Xaus Lodge study. Therefore, within this section, the methodological design and process are delineated in a specific sense, as opposed to the broader methodological commentary provided in the previous section.

The article concludes with thoughts on the benefit of applied cultural studies to CDSC in illuminating and acting on community concerns.
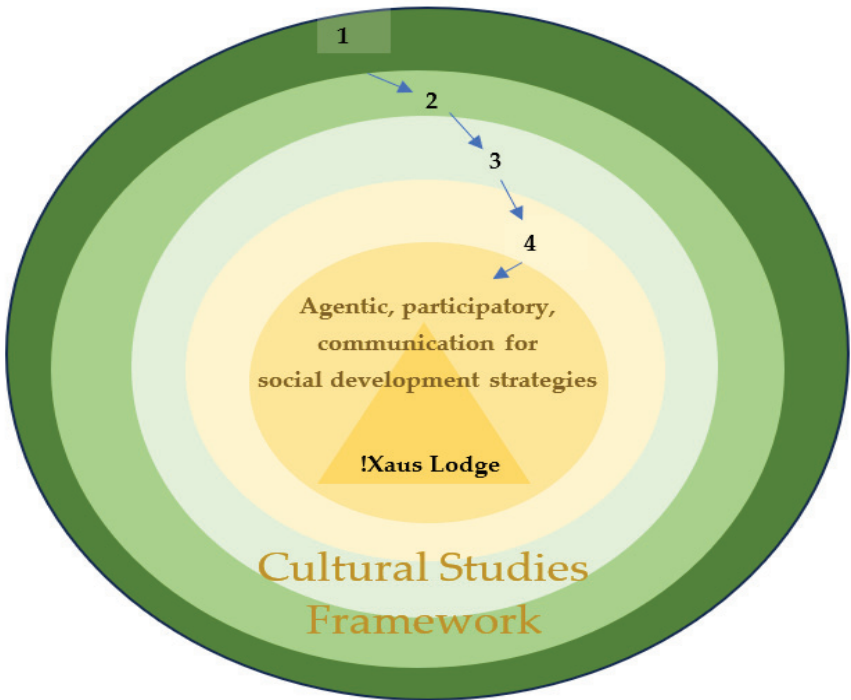
Figure 1. Development of an applied cultural studies framework and its relationship with CDSC research in South Africa: !Xaus Lodge case study.

2. Communication for Development and Social Change

Articulations of CDSC have shifted since its inception in the 1950s. The field is typically conceptualized and operationalized according to two main communication styles associated with two paradigms[1]. Firstly, top-down communication began in the modernization paradigm with the principal agenda of the exogenous introduction of technologies and innovations for economic growth (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964; Rogers 1962), otherwise dubbed 'the dominant paradigm'. Secondly, dialogic communication is associated with the participatory paradigm that valorises interactive processes whereby beneficiaries actively participate in their own development and poverty reduction[2]. Each has its origins, associated global and local stakeholders, communication models, media use, and normative concepts and theories. Each paradigm theorizes and advocates a distinct form of development communication, yet approaches can straddle the paradigms in practice.

The article does not provide a dedicated section that covers the range of participation forms with which CDSC engages, as this has been well documented with its evolution

through many years of theoretical and empirical work. However, it does engage principles and practice of participation in relevant sections throughout the article.

The following discussion elucidates how agency and culture (and structure) are located in these CDSC approaches to communicating development for/with communities.

2.1. Locating Agency

The conceptualization of agency to which we subscribe is based on the capacity of people to order their world and to create, produce, and live according to one's meaning systems (Giddens 1984). It is the power to effectively define oneself instead of being defined by others (Voth 2001, p. 852). The exertion of agency requires engagement with determining structures, discourses, and prevailing conditions (Dutta 2011) in both symbolic and material terms. The symbolic takes the form of voice and self-representation in attaining material agency through economic empowerment or another form of social strengthening. Somewhat cautious of the 'Lerner-esque' agenda to replace, alter, or modify 'in the name of development', our work is guided by social justice and strengthening social and development initiatives to enhance the community's social fabric and capacities. "Social strengthening" may be a preferable term where 'change' is not the primary objective.

In the mobilization of participatory CDSC, agency ideally rests with community members who, in the name of self-determination, define their own goals based on their lived experiences and needs. This ownership fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment if coupled with building capacities, skills, and resources to achieve these goals effectively. Colin Sparks (2007) defines this CDSC approach as 'radical participation' to which Thomas Tufte (2017, p. 48) adds that it is a 'normative stand that argues clearly for a bottom-up perspective in pursuit of social justice and human rights in pro-poor communication'.

We subscribe to these ideas of agency as empowerment with the ultimate goal being social justice and strengthening, but we are also cognizant of its challenges (see Grant and Dicks 2014; Mazonde and Thomas 2007; Nicetic and van de Fliert 2014; Grant 2019; Manyozo 2017). There are also cases where 'participation' is simply part of the discourse and not a pragmatic aspect of the programme or where expectations for all stakeholders go unmet or were never ascertained in the first place.

The much-critiqued modernization paradigm lives on in the increasing neo-liberalization of development agendas and development resources founded on hierarchies of power, privilege, and knowledge production (Fanon 1967; Mbembe 2001; Dutta 2011, 2021). Although politically correct discourses are adopted in international and national policy, agency still rests with multinational funding bodies who often mobilize linear communication in not only setting the agenda but also in determining project objectives and accountability procedures, thus 'ordering the world' (Giddens 1984) for beneficiary communities (see, for example, Enghel and Noske-Turner 2018). The adoption of popular discourses (like participation, decolonization, etc.) without community engagement and action results in a 'diminishment of the complexity through which we might otherwise understand the world' (Chetty 2023, p. 386). Similarly, Tufte (2017, p. 124) warns that although the technicality associated with top-down strategic communication 'allows a highly systematic approach, and thus the ability to track observable outcomes. . .—it has difficulties capturing synergies, off-track outcomes, intangible change processes and longer-term outcomes beyond the planned period of monitoring'. We hope to demonstrate that it is from methodologies that embrace complexity and socio-cultural and political dynamics and the expression thereof that agency can start to take ground.

Barriers to agency are not only exogenous but can also be community gatekeepers, gender norms, and traditional practices that deny the broader community the agency to speak for themselves and identify solutions (see Gumede et al. 2023). These internal contexts deny the democratic culture that Carpentier et al. (2019, p. 23) argue is imperative for an 'inherently ethical' form of participation.

This article presents our applied cultural studies-influenced CDSC approach, which lends itself to redressing this denial of agency. However, first, it explores what is meant

by culture, which Dutta (2011, p. 8) argues is instructive to explore in its intersection with structure to understand the conditions for marginality and the opportunities for agency.

2.2. Culture and Structure

In early mid-twentieth century development communication interventions, local culture (and associated forms of indigenous knowledge and language) was initially denigrated as superstition that impeded the success of development programmes in the Global South. Within the more recent participatory policy and approaches, culture is seen as an enabler in understanding the development context and how cultural beliefs, knowledge, and expressions can facilitate development and social change. Our approach recognizes this latter imperative. Culture is both material (expressed in the form of artefacts, traditional dress, etc.) and intangible (in the form of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills), and it is dynamic, responding to the environment, interaction with other peoples, and social phenomena. Development and social strengthening initiatives require methodologies that recognize this transience to avoid the pitfalls of essentialist and homogenising assumptions when working with communities, as we demonstrate in the last section of this article.

Culture, therefore, also entails the frameworks of meaning-making and interpretation in local and global contexts that are in flux (see Dutta 2011). Similarly, foregrounding the interrelationship between 'culture' and 'structure', Jan Servaes (2020, p. 8) explains that cultures can be defined as social settings where a particular reference framework has taken concrete form or been institutionalised. It orients and structures the interaction and communication of people within this historical context. The classic distinction between structure and culture as an empirical duality becomes meaningless. All structures are cultural products, and all cultures give structure to them. This intrinsic bond with a society in which actions are full of value makes all social facts cultural goods. Understanding these social facts can be facilitated through participatory communication strategies that seek to explore local communicative ecologies as linked to forms of culture (Williams 1961, p. 62).

2.3. Interdisciplinarity

Over twenty years ago, Wilkins and Mody (2001) recognized that development communication scholarship was advancing beyond its economic development theory and media effects theory to consider the value of social theory, political, economic inquiry, and cultural studies. They argued that the inclusion of this interdisciplinarity is necessary to reshape development communication 'to consider the importance of political-economic conditions, organizational contexts, communication processes, and more in the process of social change' (Wilkins and Mody 2001, p. 386). This observation is extended below by accounting for how cultural studies, as rearticulated in the South African context, joined with Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methods, can inscribe the concerns and voices of community partners and address the complexity of the development encounter into both operationalizing development and writing/theorizing about it, where agency is afforded to and enacted by multiple stakeholders.

3. Cultural Studies: Indigenised and Applied

This section introduces the theoretical agenda of early cultural studies, including what we find helpful and what has been adapted to create (African-oriented) applied cultural studies methodologically grounded in Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies. Threaded in the discussion are points of connection with CDSC to illuminate how cultural studies may benefit CDSC in grappling with and theorizing the development encounter.

3.1. Cultural Studies: Exporting Concepts

The Birmingham School paved the way for cultural studies' critical engagement with articulations of power centred on issues of representation (Hall 1980a, 1980b, 1993, 2013; Hall et al. 1978; Hoggart 1957; Williams 1961, 1977). It is difficult to provide a composite

list of cultural studies principles and protocols that could be beneficial to CDSC, as cultural studies is far-reaching, being noted as an 'inter-discipline' (Ang 2013) with the capacity to 'export' concepts and theories to other disciplines (Lowe 2023, p. 110). This article highlights concepts that have been useful 'exports' in our CDSC fieldwork and scholarship.

Cultural studies is currently at risk to succumbing to neoliberal academia's demanding audit culture, retreating into an ivory tower, instead of engaging at the coal face to 'benefit multiple publics or facilitate knowledge transfer beyond the academy' (Lowe 2023, p. 110). The key to avoid this lack of praxis is the mobilization of research methodologies that facilitate the engagement of issues affecting on-the-ground communities and the wider public, simultaneously aware of the promise of classic cultural studies to critically examine the intersections of the global and local (see Striphas 2019). John Lowe (2023) particularly highlights the value of Raymond Williams' (1977) cultural materialism and the concept of 'structures of feeling', to be elaborated on in the !Xaus Lodge discussion below.

Wright and Maton (2004, p. 78) remind us that 'cultural studies grew out of a search for approaches to literary texts in adult education classes that were more relevant to the histories, concerns and perspectives of working-class students' (Wright and Maton 2004, p. 76). As a foundational influence on participatory communication for social change, Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy is similar in that, based on conscientization, education/development should restore to people the right to produce knowledge based on their lived experience, values, and local knowledge. Our approach, discussed below, is explained through this agentic imperative.

3.2. Embracing the Complexities of Cultural/Communicative Sites

We welcome a Gramscian approach that 'rejects reductionism in favour of an understanding of complexity in unity or unity through complexity' (Hall 2016, p. 185), engaging the autonomy and specificity of development (and political) struggles and the groups that engage in them. We therefore embrace a cultural studies understanding of culture as a site of negotiation (Hall 1980a). In the context of a community-based development initiative, for example, different stakeholders bring with them varying epistemological and ontological frameworks that need to be brought into conversation in order to communicate expectations and plans and to implement suitable processes. These fluctuating frameworks of meaning-making (see also Dutta 2011 discussed above) need to be studied and written into the academic and development record if CDSC is going to live up to Servaes's (2020, p. 12) definition as 'the nurturing of knowledge aimed at creating a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned'.

While Birmingham may have provided the basic template from the historical experience of England, similar theories, but often different emancipatory strategies, emerged in different parts of the world. Latin American cultural studies (García-Canclini 1995; Martín-Barbero 1993, 2006) also influence our class-based analyses of social movements and cultural dynamics to investigate the transformations of social (and development) experience. As struggles played out, however, these relations adapted, changed, and often, as Fanon warned, resulted in new repressive hegemonies.

3.3. Cultural Studies in Southern Africa

African variants of cultural studies are seldom acknowledged, except by those within or from the continent (Falkof 2023; Wright and Maton 2004; Nuttall 2006; Tomaselli and Wright 2008; Wright and Xiao 2020). With its emergence in the late 1970s, we were asking the same questions as British cultural studies, deriving from our different and respective class struggles, each engaging with material issues and addressing issues of democratization. British cultural studies examined the big picture in developing theories of resistance and domination out of Western epistemological histories.

During apartheid, our ground-up theory of resistance responded to requests from real communities under siege (*UmAfrika*, End Conscription Campaign, the Catholic Bishops Conference and Westville Residents Support Group), looking to establish partnerships

to address local and, sometimes, national oppressions (see Tomaselli et al. 1987). Where the early Birmingham researchers considered themselves as the organic theory-building intellectuals, we considered ourselves as the Gramscian technical intellectuals, the CDSC pragmatists bringing the ideas and tactics of our community participants to the surface, into a dialogue with theory and policy making.

When Birmingham cultural studies became practical and community-based, it lost its theoretical legitimacy, and the Centre was closed—no matter the good work being done at small-scale levels within the city. Its declining publication output was foolishly interpreted by academic auditors as an indicator of failure rather than of increasing community relevance. The Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies managed to avoid that trap by theorizing our community-orientated interventions as discussed below.

In an editorial for a special issue on African cultural studies, Tomaselli and Wright (2008, p. 173) explain:

> Our preference is for a transnational cultural studies. . .The reality, however, is that cultural studies has evolved and continues to evolve primarily along regional lines and however uncomfortable that might make some of us, there is no way to put the genie of say British cultural studies back in the bottle of cultural studies history. Thus, there are national versions of cultural studies in a few countries (e.g., one can discern different kinds of South African cultural studies) as well as a much looser discursive formation that can be labelled African cultural studies.

However, the form of cultural studies we discuss in this article does not signify its relevance only within Africa's borders, this is why a preferable description is applied cultural studies, which locates agency with the local research participants with whom we research and who are often stakeholders in development initiatives.

3.4. Applied Cultural Studies and Rethinking Indigeneity

Our commitment to public engagement continued into post-1994 South Africa once apartheid ended. The political advent of democracy did not wipe away the historical, political, racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions, nor the structural inequalities and abject poverty faced by most of the population. These tensions and hardships needed examination to facilitate social cohesion and strategies to assist sustainability for the many development initiatives catalysed by the new African National Congress (ANC) liberation government. Cultural studies allowed us to 'venture beyond the constraining modes of racialised cultural history, to view culture as a shifting, fluid and central element of an attempted national identity that is wildly contested and wildly diverse. . . [It offered] the potential to think our way through and past those tensions by understanding the sedimented structures of power that keep them afloat' (Falkof 2023, pp. 19–20). This 'thinking and doing' governed the longstanding Rethinking Indigeneity project led by Keyan Tomaselli. The project adopts an inclusive and relational approach where research blends international and African intellectual work that is held in conversation with indigenous realities and knowledge. It grapples with how indigenous knowledge sovereignty wrestles with the ubiquitous condition of 'coloniality' given the structural demands of globalization: first, with the colonial as much as the postcolonial periods; and second, within the interdependence of the metropoles and peripheries, first and third worlds, examining extractive versus participatory, and empowering research (see Sehume 2020).

The Rethinking Indigeneity project's inception in 1995 is marked by studies of representation with an interest in media-induced tourism resulting from films that traded in cultural myths, such as Jamie Uy's *Gods Must be Crazy* (1980). The project then evolved to phases that deconstructed and questioned the constructedness of the representation process by speaking with the people who performed in these films and cultural tourism ventures. We navigated our way to methods as we engaged the unexpected and attempted to make sense of what we observed, identifying issues from the field. From 2003, one such issue was 'development'.

'From Observation to Development', a Rethinking Indigeneity project phase, actively sought to identify ways in which we could make our research useful to local research participants. In 1999, the ‡Khomani San, residing in the Northern Cape of South Africa, were successful in their land claim and had also been the recipients of substantial international and national funding, as well as media attention. Yet they remained poverty-stricken, living on the margins of mainstream society in a community fraught with tension. Much of this tension stemmed from the processes of the land claim that sought to authenticate claimants based on whether they could prove 'real San identity'. Studies within the Rethinking Indigeneity project, therefore, examined this relationship between identity and development, seeking to include in the academic and public records contemporary contextual experiences of their conditions of existence to supplement/speak to/subvert received knowledge (in the form of government reports and conceptual development models).

3.5. Applied Cultural Studies, Participatory Action Research, Listening, and Reflexivity

We mobilized participatory development communication in these 'development-oriented phases' both in the fieldwork and as part of the guiding conceptual framework.

Methodology is the linking thread that integrates the Rethinking Indigeneity project's topics of development, public health communication, livelihoods, indigeneity, cultural tourism, identity, and representation. Broadly, the studies employ Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies that advocates all inquiry as both political and moral. It uses methods critically for explicit social justice purposes. 'It values the transformative power of Indigenous, subjugated knowledge. . .and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering' (Denzin et al. 2008, p. 2). Beyond this humanizing impetus, we needed methods that allowed us to examine the complexity of emergent transcultural identities of Indigenous and local communities who juggle the pre-modern, modern, and post-postmodern epochs.

Our methods are, in the first instance, all premised on *listening*, and this is achieved via techniques such as in-depth interviews that allow for the emergence of 'development narratives' that champion storytelling to foreground the fluidity of identity and agency in local participants to speak to their own conditions and solutions. The Rethinking Indigeneity project's recognition of the richness of co-constructed knowledge grew into various studies that adopted creative methodologies that mobilize self-reflection, dialogue, and multivocality to explore a variety of development and social strengthening subject matter (see Dyll 2020). For example, community health concerns and solutions through the creation of bodymaps and grassroots comics as subject-generated media to illustrate what community partners identify as pressing issues, instead of having their needs and wants prescribed by outside experts (Grant and Dicks 2014), and local interpretation of material culture through walking methodologies and photovoice (see Lange et al. 2013; Mbili 2024). Photovoice also emphasizes self-representation as community partners take an active stance in representing their own development issues, or in supplementing (and perhaps disrupting) received knowledge through the inclusion of their own interpretation of their heritage.

Secondly, the methodologies employed in the Rethinking Indigeneity project are often *reflexive* and, at times autoethnographic, where our positionalities as researchers are engaged (see Lange 2003). Analysing the encounter between the researcher and researched is the crux of this reflection, and it facilitates the process of listening and learning, firmly entrenched in Freire's (1970) conscientization from which we draw. Because applied cultural studies and participatory CDSC engage with material issues, findings are often incorporated in public policy and programme designs with implications for the public/communities (see Lowe 2023, p. 113). It is, therefore, our responsibility to reflexively interrogate our knowledge production and document how local research partners challenge the usual Researcher/Researched relations. It enables researchers/development practitioners to self-reflexively interrogate and modify their own assumptions and practices in adapting to the needs and expectations of their research participants/intended beneficiaries, and

to record their understandings of how they fit into, accept, shape, or resist, determining processes and structures. 'This contributes to a type of reflexive Indigenous ethnography where members of a community may interpret their own cultures through those who have the means to get the information "out there"—the researchers who reflexively analyse these nuances in the field, putting theory to the test' (Tomaselli et al. 2008, p. 364).

4. !Xaus Lodge: CDSC and Applied Cultural Studies in Action

The next phase of the Rethinking Indigeneity project centred on the establishment of !Xaus Lodge, concretizing the exploration of identity, development, and political economy into a single case study. It investigated how different stakeholders and their associated power mechanisms facilitated or hindered the development of the community-owned lodge. Integral to this was the examination of multiple stakeholders' expectations, agendas, and belief systems, in both their convergences and divergences, that resulted in a model to guide the partnership. Participatory action research was applied to shape business decisions to recover the failing state-development project that had been dumped on two different rurally remote communities. The remainder of the article reflects on the study of !Xaus Lodge that theoretically and methodologically illustrates the merging of participatory development communication with cultural studies concepts, resulting in the praxis of facilitating the negotiations involved in the establishment of a government-built, community-owned, and privately operated tourism asset.

4.1. !Xaus Lodge, Tourism, and Development

!Xaus is a state-sponsored and privately-operated tourism lodge located on the South African side of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park on land restituted to the community owners in the successful 1999 land claim. Built by the Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism, the co-owners are the ‡Khomani San and Mier[3] communities, who reside close to the Park's border, and the operator is Transfrontier Parks Destinations.

Tourism-as-development literature warn of the limited economic impacts of tourism development under conditions of dependence where there is a lack of community involvement (Rogerson and Visser 2004). The restituted land in and outside the Park became riddled with rotting tourism-oriented infrastructure and ventures or torn apart for firewood or the like. Similarly, the lodge had been built, but there was no buy-in by the community partners who reported that they had not been consulted by the government.

In 2007, Transfrontier Parks Destinations signed the contract with the lodge's Joint Management Board[4] and set out to make it a viable economic asset, as well as to create employment and a space for cultural expression, with the inclusion of cultural tourism elements decided on by the ‡Khomani and Mier.

4.2. Experiential Situated Knowledge

Local knowledge is often overlooked in the development encounter, or if sought, it is quantified in such a way that is unrecognizable to local participants. Apart from economic participation, there are often challenges in establishing a mutual understanding in the many layers of development partnerships. In the context of !Xaus, this was between the community, government, and private operator, as well as between the two different owner groups. Different epistemological and ontological frameworks were brought to the partnership: (1) situated knowledge regarding local circumstances and belief systems; (2) the operator's commercial and management imperative; and (3) the state's timebound development agenda.

As researchers, we were aware of the indeterminacy of translation and associated power relations in how these different forms of knowledge were both encoded and decoded (Hall 1993) by their respective constituencies. Hence, each of the partner's expectations of the Lodge (both the sacred and profane) needed to be understood by all. 'Lived experience' communicated to us via development agendas, economic planning, stories, and dreams were thus analysed. This experiential situated knowledge is often distilled from, and

innately connected, to land. Development happens on land through it being changed, planted, harvested, bulldozed, and built up, and land is inextricably linked to identity. The land–identity nexus, in simple terms, speaks about indigenous socioeconomic rights, or the lack thereof. The integration between nature, culture, and development was, therefore, considered in our conversations with the different partners and the analysis.

4.3. Longitudinal Participatory Action Research and 'Structures of Feeling'

In terms of research methodology, the study of !Xaus adopted a longitudinal participatory action research design. Known to both the operator and the ‡Khomani, we were invited to examine and shape the establishment and management processes involved in transforming a failed poverty alleviation-built tourism asset into a commercial product with a range of benefits for the community owners (see Dyll-Myklebust 2012). Between 2007 and 2012, we conducted a series of field trips to the lodge site and surrounding areas where the community owners resided. The longitudinal design enabled the examination of !Xaus as a 'pre-tourist site' in relation to its operational stage. 'Before' was studied in relation to 'after', and the processes involved between the two phases were studied and shaped via participatory action research in relation to the lodge partners' objectives and needs.

Data collection during this episodic immersion was based on participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Participant observation occurred over two phases, firstly during the stakeholder meetings and training sessions of the establishment phase, and secondly over the management, day-to-day activities/work and marketing of the operational phase. We observed and subsequently analysed the communicative practices between the lodge management, staff (who were also the owners) and guests. We assumed the role of observer-as-participant in that we declared ourselves as researchers but participated in, for example, meetings, trainings, guided walks with ‡Khomani, and guests, game drives, and the traditionally inspired meals made by the Mier staff.

Our coding was structured according to the type of interaction, stakeholders involved, what was said, how it was said, reasons provided for certain requests, and beliefs and actions taken. This method was useful in gathering data on the use of structure and agency at the lodge, deliberately noting communicative practices that were open, participatory, and horizontal on the one hand, and those that were more controlled and managed hierarchically. Instances of communication as a process of convergence and divergence (Kincaid 2002) were coded in terms of how the multiple stakeholders interpreted a specific issue.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from each of the stakeholder groups[5] based on purposive, opportunistic sampling due to their affiliation or knowledge of !Xaus Lodge, which grew through snowball sampling, resulting in approximately twenty interviews. In the establishment phase, the interviews were conducted in Andriesvale where the stakeholder meetings took place, as well as where ‡Khomani crafters (interested in relocating to !Xaus Lodge) sold their craft on the side of the road, and Rietfontein, where the Mier Municipal building is located. The interviews during the operational phases primarily took place at the lodge site, as and when it was convenient for the lodge staff (management, Mier and ‡Khomani) and the guests. In the establishment phase, all stakeholders were asked to share their experience/knowledge of why and how the lodge was constructed (including power dynamics at play), their expectations for the type of tourism and activities to be offered, economic potential, and their preferred forms of communication. Once operational, they were asked about their experience in their roles and responsibilities associated with the lodge, challenges, opportunities, communicative practices that were working and those that were not, and their vision for the future (individually and the lodge).

For the action research process, observations and interpretations garnered from previous fieldtrips were included in subsequent semi-structured interview questions so as to build on a comprehensive understanding of a pertinent issue and establish a course of action for communication to facilitate convergence, should divergence remain on that issue.

Not only were co-constructed communicative solutions for lodge operations offered as part of the action research process, but the research undertook what was dubbed action marketing research (Dyll-Myklebust and Finlay 2012).

Data were collected via a semiotic and reception analysis of the lodge's marketing materials to advise on the lodge's strategic positioning in relation to issues of identity and representation. The semiotic analysis revealed the lodge operator's cultural assumptions and marketing strategy. The reception analysis was mobilized via three techniques: (1) three focus groups drawn from the !Xaus target market (held off site), (2) lodge guests were provided with a copy of the promotion materials and a questionnaire that they could complete in their own time during their stay, and (3) Mier and ‡Khomani staffers were interviewed. The questions centred on the veracity of the marketing material in relation to the actual lodge experiences and what participants perceived to be miscommunicated as well as entirely missing from the material. The encoded/decoded similarities and divergences were compared. The divergences were discussed with the lodge partners, and solutions were found to address them. This culminated in an informational booklet provided in the Xaus chalets from 2009 detailing the background and purpose of the lodge. The website and the brochure were later revised, and guests were, thus, provided with a more nuanced understanding of the environment and community through the community owner's input on self-representation.

All interviewees were provided with and signed an informed consent form explaining the study objectives, what would be asked of them in the interview, that they could withdraw at any time, and that they could choose to remain anonymous. Many of the participants responded that they wanted their names included 'to be written into the record'. Interviews resulted in the collection of evolving 'development narratives' (see Dyll-Myklebust 2014) that often took the form of stories imbued with structures of feeling.

Williams' 'structures of feeling' is a cultural studies concept that is often applied in representational culture and analysis, such as literature and film. However, it can also be a useful guiding idea in a development encounter. This is particularly so when a goal is to identify the development concerns, expectations, preferred processes, and vision of the future of a development initiative by multiple stakeholders, where there could likely be contested narratives and (mis)understandings resulting from historical injustice. This was the case at !Xaus. Often, the meanings of the present were based on the past, for both the official narratives and interpretations (SANParks, Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism) and those of the local and lived interpretations by stakeholders not aligned to the dominant discourses (the Mier, the ‡Khomani). What is also useful about the concept is the value in going beyond intellectualist accounts of meaning-making, which obscures much of what the public perceives and experiences. Development research in local settings should consider not only the profane but also the sacred and the spiritual (see Smith 2008).

4.4. Intersection of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis intersected as the analysis was initiated from the start of the longitudinal study to direct the next phase of data collection (interview and observations). Systematically conducting the analysis as data are collected boosts participatory action research's effectiveness as it guides the researcher toward examining the avenues of understanding, making it a method of discovery that grounds theory in reality (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

The data were analysed and problematised with reference to participatory development communication, as well as pro-poor tourism principles and practices. The business negotiations, structural decisions, and symbolic considerations in establishing !Xaus Lodge were analysed vis-à-vis Kincaid and Figueroa's (2009) Communication for Participatory Development model because it acknowledges the importance of dialogue and collective action as well as the reality of conflict, power relations, and different styles of leadership between stakeholders in initiating development. However, we did not seek to insert the data into each of the phases of the Communication for Participatory Development model

(Kincaid and Figueroa 2009) to present a 'neat story'. Instead, we used it as a guide that we also problematized and adapted to factors found in the !Xaus context. Based on the findings, we developed a generalized Public–Private–Community Partnership development communication model that is sensitive to multiple ontologies.

4.5. Articulating a Development Initiative as a Site of Negotiation

The Public–Private–Community Partnership model presents the ways in which a development culture is a site of negotiation of meaning (Hall 1980a). Ideally, it is a 'site of convergent interests' (Hall 1980a, p. 59). But how does one achieve this convergence in a development initiative characterised by multiple stakeholder interests? A starting point is to conduct research that foregrounds articulations of histories and expectations associated with power. 'Articulation' as a cultural studies concept is a useful guide as it reminds us that 'the whole [. . .] is formed by a complex structure, displayed by differences and similarities operating under a power structured relationship, that is subject to change with changes in the structure of social formation' (Hall 1980b, pp. 325–26)[6]. Including the stakeholder's negotiation of interpretation champions multivocality in the mutual goal of establishing an economically viable tourism asset. Grounded in the reality of tension, the Public–Private–Community Partnership model accounts for the ways in which discrepancies and divergences may emerge between and amongst the stakeholders and how participatory forms of communication and praxis can be used to facilitate convergence so that the development process may continue to the point of becoming operational. It also accounts for processes once a tourism asset is operational, for example, deciding on the forms of marketing communication and the inclusion of local businesses to encourage economically beneficial multiplier effects to the wider community (see Dyll-Myklebust 2012). It, therefore, aligns with Tufte's (2017, p. 148) call for communication in organizations and institutions that do not only valorise the need for precise texts and emphasis on simple and understandable messages, but to also offer 'space for negotiation of the message' that increases 'interactivity and dialogic processes'.

The model also looks to the future: for example, the bricolage of meanings assigned by each stakeholder in the phase named 'value for continual improvement'. The model looks to set up a lodge to the point where there is value for continual improvement, 'understood as the transformation of a community into a "learning organization" that continuously seeks ways to advance' (Kincaid and Figueroa 2009, p. 1320). Maintaining stable operations requires further dialogue, negotiations, strategic communication, and dedication to an adaptive management approach that embraces multiple values and expectations. This idea aligns with Hall's (2016, p. 122) cultural studies notion of contingency, 'which requires us to think the contingent, non-necessary connections between and among different social practices and social groups'. This is possible in that we are evolving beings, dealing with contradictory identities, constructed and reconstructed in multiple ways from varied sources, discourses, and places that may or may not intersect. There is no point at which one arrives at a stable final destination, where there could be 'solace of closure' (see Hall and Grossberg 2019) because 'around us history is constantly breaking in unpredictable ways' (Hall 1991, p. 43).

The Public–Private–Community Partnership model indicates that success in CDSC should not only be determined by a venture becoming commercially viable, but also by its capacity to stimulate socio-economic empowerment, build local social and entrepreneurial skills, and champion local people and strategies that consider local landscapes, metaphors, and stories. Our findings revealed the centrality of local cosmology in understanding a development initiative. This cosmology signifies the fluidity of the Northern Cape people's identity in merging traditional San spirituality (which combines indigenous and Western beliefs), Khoe and Nama beliefs, as well as structured Western religion (see Lange and Dyll-Myklebust 2015).

Once Transfrontier Parks Destinations became involved in the lodge establishment; the structures of feeling evoked in the interviews with community owners articulated the

lodge as a symbol of reconciling past conflict amongst SANParks and the two communities. A creator god within San cosmology is Kaggen who holds shamanistic associations. 'It is said that Mantis could become any animal he wanted, but most of all he liked becoming an eland bull' (Leeming [1937] 2010, p. 75). Interviewees referred to Kaggen/Mantis or 'the spirit' giving its blessing to the lodge development as a form of 'redemption'. Belinda Kruiper, of Khoisan descent, who married into the ‡Khomani explained that

> The people see it as a good opportunity, and by the end of it they want to see a healthy thing running for the community. . ..When we go to scout and recce the lodge, the animals acknowledge us. . ..When we left and Hannes Steinkamp stayed behind as one of the Mier guys to look after the lodge for that week he came back straight to my house and said: *Daar's 'n eland-bul wat hier loop en hier is nie spore nie. Die eland loop en as ek op sy spoor gaan is daar nie. Hier's groot goed aan die gebeur*[7]. So there's spiritual eland that's moving and in the Bushman lore the eland is the most sacred animal and it's the bull. So it seems like in the ancestral body they are blessing all of this (interview, 22 August 2007).

Expressions of and connections with spirituality are part of one's identity, which must be considered when entering into a development initiative. And what about the profane?

4.6. Negotiation Between Economic Structure and Participatory Agency

Capitalism is often spurned as it is deemed to be imperialist and exploitative. But to avoid 'Ag shame tourism'[8] (O'Leary 2011), it is advisable to not represent community partners as victims but rather for them to be part of social entrepreneurship and as viable land investors by including their objectives, employment, and entrepreneurial activities. Jessica Noske-Turner (2023, p. 46) 'proposes communication for social *changemaking* as a term that captures the emergence of a "new spirit" in MCDSC[9], whereby popularized discourses such as "creative capitalism" and "enlightened capitalism" are absorbed and proposed as an ideal mechanism for social change within this field'. This spirit could be facilitated by the Public–Private–Community Partnership model. As changemakers in becoming entrepreneurial-minded in a development initiative, social entrepreneurship confers agency in certain contexts, involving 'an intrinsic justification that a capitalist spirit should be put to work for social purposes and that this represents a common good for development' (Noske-Turner 2023, p. 49).

As the second analytical framework that informed the model, pro-poor tourism is a poverty reduction approach that calls for the use of industry to generate sustainable development for local communities involved in tourism development projects by including them in the design and implementation of these projects (see Ashley et al. 2001). Pro-poor tourism acknowledges that participation alone is insufficient, and the approach offers practical solutions to the seeming contradiction between structure (working within established frameworks) and agency (allowing communities to determine their destinies). Communities should participate within the structures provided by the business sector for the benefit of all parties rather than simply receiving benefits (Ashley and Haysom 2006; Wang 2001).

Where are agency and empowerment in this process?

4.7. Forms of Empowerment in the Public–Private–Community Partnership Model

Empowerment can take on different forms within a project: first, as a process suggesting that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering; secondly, as an outcome whereby such processes result in a degree of empowered (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995). A distinction between empowering processes and outcomes is critical to ascertain the type of empowerment involved within a development project. Empowerment as a process is frequently seen in community-based tourism-as-development initiatives whereby community members drive the development. However, community-based tourism ventures are seldom commercially viable since they do not have the skills and resources that a private

operator can bring to a partnership (Rogerson and Visser 2004; Wang 2001). Thus, economic empowerment as an outcome is seldom realised.

Two forms of empowerment are evident in the Public–Private–Community Partnership model. These are first empowerment-as-a-process whereby all partners enter dialogue to discuss issues and provide feedback. Further, all partners are treated as experts in one area or another—if not business skills, then with regards to local knowledge. Lastly opportunities for training and skills development are provided. The second form of empowerment is outcomes-based. This takes the form of economic empowerment, leading marginalised communities to participate in the modern economy. This dual form of agency was commended by Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism's Senior Manager Johann van Schalkwyk (23 March 2019), who, many years after !Xaus became operational, noted in a letter to us:

> Your research on !Xaus Lodge serves as a constant reminder to the Depart-
> ment to ensure that we properly analyse community expectations and how
> they negotiate the processes involved in establishing and operating commer-
> cial tourism development projects. . . .Through your writings we are sensitised to
> pitfalls of lodge/accommodation development in communities such as Mier, the
> Richtersveld and Riemvasmaak where such development initiatives and inter-
> ventions may have an impact on the community identity . . .[It] also sensitised us
> to not do tourism development in such a manner that it limits other economic
> opportunities presented to communities, as they strive to optimise the use of the
> reclaimed land to ensure their sustainability and prosperity.

The Public–Private–Community Partnership model has also been adapted to other Transfrontier Parks Destinations projects, most of which are linked to similarly ill-advised provincial poverty alleviation projects. These tracking case studies endorse a development model that works when local owner-communities are effectively integrated into the model's operations and where the multiplier effects can be directly measured not only in terms of symbolic and participatory value but also in terms of financial returns to the geographical communities they are intended to benefit (see Sathiyah 2013; Sheik 2014; Tomaselli 2017, https://www.tfpd.co.za).

The different sites at which the Researching Indigeneity project applied the model in working with Transfrontier Parks Destinations and local stakeholders all attest to the workability of CDSC when linked to cultural studies analytical frameworks, measurably benefiting local people who are often the owners of these ventures. Instead of seeing such projects as top-down exploitation, we strive to provide a new lens that reveals how ground-up participation in public-private partnerships can address poverty, isolation, and alienation. The model brings about a change in relationships of power and brings local organizations into the negotiation, planning, and benefits through self-representation.

5. In Closing: How Can Applied Cultural Studies Positively Influence Participatory CDSC?

All too often, development projects assume context and set agendas without consider-ation of local knowledge and practices. As an export discipline, cultural studies, coupled with Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies, can bolster our understanding of the constructions of identity and meaning-making in development. In this way, applied cul-tural studies can positively influence CDSC's practice and theorizing of public engagement and understanding of the relationship between identity and development.

CDSC, as a practice and field of study, is tactical and praxis-based. Its impacts are measurable. Participatory CDSC, if operationalized in democratizing contexts, can be sensitive to community needs and empower both in its processes and results. Cultural studies theories can assist in further lodging agency with communities if we allow the theory to adapt to the material conditions faced by researchers/development practitioners and the communities with whom they work. We provide an example of how this worked during apartheid South Africa and the start of what could be termed African cultural

studies. However, it is not only applicable within Africa's borders, so a preferable term is applied cultural studies.

Cultural studies provides the affirmative intellectual tools to engage and manoeuvre through the inherited contradictions faced in varying development circumstances and initiatives. The article demonstrates this through the !Xaus Lodge participatory action research study that was informed by cultural studies concepts. Culture as a site of negotiation relies on structures of feeling in understanding how the past plays a significant role in the present, and in how stakeholders may voice their resistance to or expectations of a development initiative. The constructedness of communication and the fact that each stakeholder encodes and decodes development messages/agendas/plans encourages careful consideration of how different stakeholders approach an initiative with their frameworks of knowledge and belief systems. The theory and method of articulation is useful in understanding a social formation (as would be seen in multiple stakeholder development initiatives) 'without falling into the twin traps of reductionism and essentialism' (Slack 1996, p. 112).

Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies provides the practical tools. Overlapping with participatory communication, this methodology's moral, political, and humanizing impetus provides the actual strategies to facilitate development and social strengthening at local levels, premised on listening and the co-construction of knowledge with communities through creative methods (such as grassroots comics, storytelling, photovoice, and bodymapping).

The praxis continues in our adaptation of cultural studies and Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies, in adopting reflexivity in several ways: first, our responses to emergent issues; secondly, in the interrogation of our positionality in the development/research encounter; and thirdly, in our theoretical flexibility whereby the received theories by which we are guided may be called into question once faced with realities on the ground.

Hall's observation is that theorizing should be about 'wrestling with angels' as context is paramount and not about the purity of theoretical positions (Hall 1992, p. 280). We are all subjects of determining structures that must be constantly navigated to secure the best options under conditions not necessarily of our own making. A reflexive praxis can help.

The demands of neoliberalizing academia are noted as pushing cultural studies back into the ivory tower. However, this would be a loss. While it has arguably failed to impact society in any measurable way, applied cultural studies can make significant impact with utility for disciplines that are already praxis-based, as it adds to the equation the ideas and language to address development problems with its 'stress on the importance of the symbolic dimensions in producing current power structures and identifications' (Lehtonen 2016, p. 216). Cultural studies concepts can add to a grammar of communication that 'caters for communication principles that open rather than close dialogues; that generate questions and reflection rather than answers and clarity, and that mobilize and engage rather than satisfy and comfort' (Tufte 2017, p. 149).

While the structures, and those who manage them, may be determining, they are constantly being changed, resisted, appropriated, and overturned. The residual, even contending discourses within them, can be negotiated and rearticulated by ordinary people to their benefit. The mechanisms enabling change draw on the grounded strategies of social strengthening provided by CDSC, amongst others. These rely on tactical partnerships between diverse collaborating agencies working within affirmative theories such as those proffered by applied cultural studies that identify resistance and change as a principle of history.

Notes

1   A third significant paradigm is the neo-Marxist dependency/disassociation paradigm (Baran 1967; Gunder 1967, 1998; Dussel 1998; Wallerstein 1974), but due to space limits and the purpose of this article we limit ourselves to discuss the two most distinct modes.

2   See (Jacobson 2003; Freire 1970; Dagron 2001; Harris and Baú 2014; Manyozo 2023; Melkote and Steeves 2001; Lie 2003; Quarry and Ramirez 2009; Servaes and Malikhao 2020; Tacchi and Lennie 2014; Thomas and van de Fliert 2014; Waisbord 2014; Wilkins et al. 2014). Along with its earlier appearances as "another development" as articulated by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in the late 1970s, and the "multiplicity paradigm" in the 1990s (Servaes 1989, 1995).

3   The Mier are Khoe descendants who identify as a 'coloured' community. 'Coloured' is a disputed term in South Africa. "It emerged early in colonial history to identify people of mixed European and African ancestry. Later it emerged as a specific cultural and linguistic identity that is dominant in the Western Cape Province" (Crawhall 2001, p. 28).

4   A Joint Management Board was established with the principal parties: the ‡Khomani Communal Property Association acting on behalf of ‡Khomani community, the Mier Local Municipality acting on behalf of the Mier community, and South African National Parks (SANParks).

5   Community representatives in the ≠Khomani CPA and the Mier Municipality as well as members of the broader communities not necessarily participating at !Xaus Lodge, such as the crafters in Andriesvale; the !Xaus Lodge operator and manager; SANParks; local development agencies such as the Northern Cape Economic Development Agency, SASI, and the tourists at !Xaus Lodge.

6   Jennifer Slack (1996, p. 112) explores "articulation" as working on three levels: "Epistemologically articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions as fragments in the constitutions of what we take to be unities. Politically, articulation is way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of domination and subordination. Strategically articulation provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context". All these levels are discussed in this article and are critical in the planning and analysis of participatory development.

7   The following is the English translation of the Afrikaans sentence included in the direct quote: "There's an eland bull walking about, but there are not tracks. The eland walks and when I go on its trail, there are no tracks. There are big things happening".

8   "Ag" is an Afrikaans expression that translates to "Oh my" in English. The term "Ag shame" typically conveys pity/sympathy/cuteness.

9   Media and communication for development and social change.

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Article

Subversive Recipes for Communication for Development and Social Change in Times of Digital Capitalism

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Abstract: The era of digital capitalism poses conundrums for communication for development and social change scholarship and practice. On one hand, mainstream social media platforms are an increasingly ubiquitous element of the everyday media practices of growing portions of the global population. On the other, the profit-driven architectures can make these hostile spaces for progressive social change dialogues. While a burgeoning literature exists on the uses of social media as part of hashtag-activism and social movements, much less critical consideration has been given to NGOs' and civil society organizations' uses of capitalist-driven social media platforms in their development and social change efforts, and the challenges and compromises they navigate in this, consciously or not. This paper argues that meaningful uses of social media platforms for social change requires cultivating a hacker mindset in order to find tactics to subvert, resist, and appropriate platform logics, combined with an ecological sensibility to understanding media and communication. This paper analyzes how metaphors, specifically of a recipe, can offer a productive, praxis-oriented framework for fostering these sensibilities. The paper draws on insights from workshops with IT for Change, a civil society organization in India, which is both a leader in critiquing the political and economic power of Big Tech especially in the Global South, and beginning to use Instagram for its work on adolescent empowerment.

Keywords: communication for development; communication for social change; non-government organizations; social media; platformization; digital capitalism; India; participatory methods

1. Introduction

Ahead of a visit as part of a research partnership, the communication team of the Indian NGO IT for Change (ITfC) asked if the exchange could include a workshop on the current thinking about using social media for social change. The team was already using Instagram and other platforms, and was particularly interested in exploring how these platforms can be used to best further the organization's agendas. ITfC is a non-profit based in Bengaluru, Karnataka, which, since its inception in 2000, has worked primarily in the areas of promoting feminist and Global South perspectives in understanding digital technologies, critiquing Big Tech, advocating for gender sensitivity to reduce different forms of gender-based violence, and integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) within education systems and rural communities to empower marginalized women and girls. The focus of its work has been on understanding what digital technologies, informed by gender-sensitivity and social justice, can make possible. The communication team supports both the research and education sections of the organization. In asking the question of how to best use social media, the ITfC communication team were highly attuned to the profit interests of Big Tech and the algorithmic power they wield, but like many civil society NGOs, find a practical need to deploy these tools in their work.

This question points to a gap in our scholarship in the communication for development and social change (CDSC) field, and a paradox for practice. CDSC practices are taking

place in an environment where Big Tech platforms have increasing presence and power over flows of media and communication (Rodríguez et al. 2014; Enghel 2015; Thomas 2018). These spaces have become a basic element of the work of many NGOs, with varying levels of criticality, and with different purposes and objectives. Purposes range from reputation and branding communication, to advocacy, campaigning, behavior change communication, and community media. While there are many contradictions associated with using corporatized, profit-driven, extractivist social media platforms for progressive social justice purposes, there are simultaneously pragmatic reasons for using them, given their increasing ubiquity in everyday life. Engaging with the experience of ITfC is, therefore, particularly useful for advancing theorization of the use of social media platforms for social change, and for improving practices within the CDSC field at large.

This paper, co-authored by three ITfC practitioners and an academic researcher, aims to engage with and productively reflect on the tensions outlined. We reflect on what we learned together from workshops using creative methods to critically analyze and reflect on ITfC's social media for social change practice. We argue that meaningful uses of social media platforms for social change requires cultivating a 'hacker mindset' in order to find tactics to subvert, resist, and appropriate platform logics, combined with an ecological sensibility for understanding media and communication. This paper proposes metaphors, specifically of a recipe, as a productive and novel praxis-oriented conceptual tool for fostering these sensibilities.

2. Communicative, Digital, Informational Capitalism, and Social Change

Social media platforms, familiar sites of everyday communication for billions around the world, are enabled by and a tool for the commodification of networks, information, and communication. Digital capitalism is the political–economic transition towards an internet that principally serves the interests of corporations driven by neoliberalism (Schiller 1999). Although there are differences in some of the dominant conceptualizations of digital capitalism (Pace 2018), it is useful to understand it as both a continuation of capitalism as an economic and social structure (Fuchs 2022) and also as a radically new 'epoch' driven by social and technological change underpinned by neoliberal policies (Schiller 1999; Pace 2018). Data commodification is one of the key mechanisms, with the relationship between the corporate drive towards data extraction being linked to the historical co-dependence between colonialism, capitalism, and natural resource extraction (Couldry and Mejias 2019). These processes are increasingly 'platformized', referring to the power of intermediary digital infrastructures to not just facilitate but also to shape socioeconomic, cultural, and political cultural production and interaction (Nieborg and Poell 2018; van Dijck et al. 2018). Platforms emerged as a business model for accessing, owning, and commodifying data, emerging as "a new business model, capable of extracting and controlling immense amounts of data, and with this shift, we have seen the rise of large monopolistic firms" (Srnicek 2017, p. 6). The power of monopolistic corporate actors under digital capitalism is not just in their surveillance and commercialization opportunities, but also, according to Dean (2009, 2019), in the discursive depoliticization of society under communicative capitalism. Dean's communicative capitalism refers to the ways that the fantasies of ideals such as access, inclusion and participation, coinciding with corporatization, financialization, and privatization, capture progressive resistance and accelerate global capitalism (Dean 2009, 2019). Platformization within the broader context of digital and communicative capitalism is a vital conceptual framework for analyzing contemporary contexts and practices of social change communication, both within NGOs and civil society organizations and in activists and social movement spaces. The literature addressing commodification, platformization, and social media in these two contexts is now considered.

2.1. NGOs, Social Media, and Communication for Development and Social Change

There has been something of a 'blindspot' in theorizing and addressing the challenges of communicative and digital capitalism in the field of CDSC (Rodríguez et al. 2014; Enghel 2015). Indeed, Kim and Lee's (2023) meta-analysis of literature from the closely related field of ICT for Development over the 2009–2019 period, which updates earlier meta-analyses (e.g., Fair and Shah 1997; Ogan et al. 2009), attests that the majority of studies (75.3%) did not engage in any way with issues of globalization, privatization, and political economic imperatives at all, and few engaged in detail. Kim and Lee's study also found that only 9.3% of the total sample looked at social media, indicating a serious lack of attention to this intersection of factors.

When NGOs use social media, current research indicates that they typically use it as a one-way information dissemination tool (Comfort and Hester 2019). Comfort and Hester state that "The very qualities of the social media platform that allows it to give voice to counter-publics makes it a difficult to control arena" which, although possibly being attractive for activists, "intimidates professionalized and more cautious NGOs" (Comfort and Hester 2019, p. 282). Similar findings, indicating a predominance of the use of social media for organizational communication, have emerged in studies of Spanish NGOs' uses of social media (Iranzo and Farné 2014), uses by bilateral agencies (Kim and Wilkins 2021), and when comparing social media usage by Spanish and Chilean NGOs (Montes 2024). In this vein, Danyi and Chaudhri's (2020) chapter in the *Handbook of Communication for Development and Social Change* discusses social media strategies for NGOs, drawing heavily on PR how-to guides and focusing on leveraging social media in aid of the reputation and branding of NGOs.

There are examples of empirical studies that examine the efficacy of social media for social and behavior change messaging. A meta-analysis of research published from 2017 to 2021 on the use of social media for 'knowledge sharing' included 57 such papers in the review (Ihsaniyati et al. 2023), where the majority focused on the health and education sectors. Studies of social media health promotion efforts have been found to depend on expert-driven information transmission and limited participatory engagement approaches (Fayoyin 2016), in keeping with a default to a one-way information dissemination approach to social media by NGOs (Comfort and Hester 2019). Other studies simply show how approaches like the Sabido methodology for edutainment can be appropriated for transmedia storytelling, including via social media (Sengupta et al. 2020; Rajendram et al. 2021). In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that these studies offer little to no mention of the privatized, commodified nature of the platforms being used, or reflect on any implications for their audiences or their own organizations, suggesting they assume social media platforms to be neutral tools, equal to any other option in the toolbox. From these types of studies it is apparent that there are low levels of criticality by NGOs using these platforms.

Notably, much of the key work arguing for the need for CDSC theory to approach digital media critically has tended to turn attention to social movements (e.g., Thomas 2018; Farné et al. 2022; Enghel 2023). For example, Farné, Cerqueira, and Nos-Aldás argue that an "activist communication perspective" that includes attention to communication practices in both structured (e.g., NGO) and fluid (e.g., social movement) spaces in civil society represents an advance in the field. In this context, they argue for "communication and activist literacies" that:

> are understood as the ability to make effective communication for social change that contributes to transgressing oppressive hegemonic frames and promoting alternative discourses that engage citizens for equality and social justice. (Farné et al. 2022, p. 308)

However, while activist social movements' contexts and literatures indeed offer a constructive 'laboratory' for new thinking in CDSC, especially as it relates to the digital (Tufte 2017; Thomas 2018), there is a need to close the loop and consider how those experiences and theories can inform and challenge the practices on development and

social change NGOs. Currently there are very few articles or chapters that bridge the study areas of activism, CDSC, and social media usage and challenges in relation to civil society and NGO practices. Some examples that indicate the potential value of this, for instance, include reflections of the opportunities of memes and humor and other forms of (trans)media storytelling suited to social media for civil society NGO CDSC (Nos Aldás 2015; Campos 2023), and work that conceptualizes algorithms and hashtags as 'non-human actors' that civil society actors interact with in their communication efforts (Etter and Albu 2021). Before turning to our case, we review in more detail some of the literature on activist uses and appropriations of social media, which was used to orient the ITfC workshop discussions.

2.2. Activist Appropriations of Social Media Platforms

There is a growing literature exploring the practices of activists under digital and communicative capitalism, including forms of algorithmic appropriation aimed at gaining some agency over algorithms (Treré and Bonini 2022) and to subvert datafication, including for purposes other than those intended by Big Tech (Beraldo and Milan 2019). This literature was crucial to inspiring our thinking around ITfC's own uses and appropriations of social media for gender equality and social justice.

Algorithms process and filter content, "determining who and what gains visibility on social media" (Cotter 2019, p. 89). The precise ways that the platforms' algorithms work are highly opaque, described as a 'black box' or 'secret sauce' (Treré 2018; Reviglio and Agosti 2020; Cotter 2021). Examples of some of the data elements feeding into the ranking and filtering on different platforms may include recency, originality, levels of engagement by users, language of the content, the number of followers of the creator, the history of interactions between creators and other users, and trending topics and hashtags (Velkova and Kaun 2021; Fouquaert and Mechant 2022; Mahoney 2022; Sued et al. 2022), but also the trails of data we leave when we "shop, browse, watch, play, and interact online" (Cotter 2019, p. 898). Using social media for activism and social change clearly opens a series of paradoxes, contradictions, and traps. Not only are activists subjected to data surveillance, but the algorithms also work on the users as a "disciplining apparatus" (Bucher 2012), where users are coaxed to "play the visibility game" (Cotter 2019). The platforms' datafication techniques feedback data (likes, shares, analytics) to individuals and organizations (Treré and Bonini 2022), and these underpinning logics cultivate and reward practices of self-branding, competition, and popularity, resulting in complex dilemmas that activists negotiate. Particularly interesting analyses of this collision have emerged in studies of "platformized feminism" (Barbala 2022) where the algorithm of platforms such as Instagram "rewards images which display and validate neoliberal ideals and constructions of femininity" (Mahoney 2022, p. 522), where 'influencer activists' are "forced to adhere to the neoliberal logics of individualism and self-governance encoded in platform affordances" (Semenzin 2022, p. 120).

When activists choose to use mainstream social media, they are in many ways "stuck with the algorithm", both in terms of the way it is unavoidably built into the platform and getting stuck in their efforts due to the lack of transparency of the algorithm (Sorce 2023, p. 215). However, activists can respond by developing competence with vernaculars (shared conventions and grammars) and algorithmic resistance (Sued et al. 2022). Tactics to appropriate algorithms for activist purposes require building knowledge of how the algorithms work, often through trial and error (Treré 2018; Treré and Bonini 2022). Treré and Bonini (2022) outline a typology of three types of algorithmic activism: amplification, evasion, and hijacking. Amplification is the deployment of tactics to use algorithms to spread information, and gain visibility and narrative capacity (ibid). The authors give the example of 'hacking' the twitter algorithm through using a massive internal communication process to coordinate timings for using the new hashtags to trigger a new trending topic. A more basic example is discussed by Sorce (2023) in relation to the Fridays For the Future movement, which used tactics learned through trial and error, such as putting hashtags in

comments rather than in the posts, and networked efforts to like posts, to enhance visibility. Evasion refers to tactics to avoid censorship, for example, replacing letters with characters ('v@xine') and posting links in comments rather than posts, since posts are more subject to censoring (Treré and Bonini 2022). Other examples include feminists placing emojis in front of intimate body parts, and changing the gender option on their profile from female to male (Barbala 2022). Hijacking refers to disrupting and subverting another person's or company's social media, for example, by flooding right-wing hashtags with K-Pop (Treré and Bonini 2022).

3. Case and Context: The Emergence of *Kishori Adda* on Instagram

Our reflection and analysis in this paper focuses on a social media handle that was part of the ITfC's adolescent girl empowerment program. Since 2019, *Hosa Hejje Hosa Dishe* (H2HD—translated into 'New Step in New Direction') has been working with adolescent girls in government and government-aided schools in the south Indian state of Karnataka. The program envisions building their life skills to empower them with greater aspiration, articulation, and agency. H2HD has also worked with school teachers to sensitize them towards the specific needs of adolescents, and therefore, improve their responsiveness towards their students.

When it comes to understanding trends in smartphone use by adolescent girls in peri-urban and rural India, statistical overviews and euphoric claims of 'empowerment' have tended to present a misleading picture, ignoring the reality that "women's access to devices and connections continues to be limited or heavily policed" (Gurumurthy and Bharthur 2024, p. 285). That said, from a practitioner perspective, it was clear that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced a rapid change. Classrooms made a massive shift to the online space. Access to smartphones and other technological devices were now a necessity for school-goers across the country. This led to a manifold increase in the number of young people who were active on the internet. Especially for adolescent girls, the internet posed a double-edged sword. While it became a platform for self-expression, it also exposed them to an unprecedented degree of risks such as cyber violence and misinformation.

In 2021, H2HD conducted an online course 'Facilitating Adolescent Empowerment for Social Justice' for teachers. Through the six cohorts of teachers, a common concern that arose was the unbridled access their students had to the internet. While the concern brought to light an important phenomenon, it also reflected the dominant mindset towards young people accessing the internet. Although the smartphone is radical in that it makes self-expression possible for adolescent girls, access to it is determined largely by the adults around them (Gurumurthy and Bharthur 2024; Tacchi and Chandola 2015). The girls who use smartphones and access the internet through them often face heightened monitoring, judgment, and outright permission denial from parents, teachers, and older siblings.

An internal focus group discussion with adolescent girls on social media usage revealed that the girls enjoyed the spaces of expression offered by the internet. By creating content, uploading photos and videos, sharing memes, and watching films the girls sought the internet for leisure as well. However, they also shared the challenges in navigating the digital space. They shared that they received unsolicited messages and faced different kinds of harassment online that led to them censoring themselves or refraining from using the internet. The discussion also reflected the lack of help and support to navigate such a complex space.

In the realm of articulation and expression as necessary for empowerment, safety on the internet therefore proved to be an undeniable aspect. While the life skills curriculum of the H2HD program includes a module on cyber safety, the need for an alternate space to counter the violence of mainstream online spaces was urgent. This led to the creation of the *Kishori Adda* handle on Instagram.

Kishori Adda

Kishori Adda (@kishoriadda, which translates to 'Adolescent Girl Hangout') is a handle co-created by the H2HD program team along with adolescent girls. Based on the internal focus group discussion, Instagram was the most popularly accessed social media platform, and hence, chosen to host it. The themes of the posts cut across gender, health, aspiration, and identity—all areas of interest expressed by the girls. The discussion also highlighted the formats they most enjoyed watching—reels, carousels, and stories—and the page employs all three. Keeping in mind that leisure is an important aspect of the internet experience, the page balances information with memes based on pop culture and interactive quizzes. Since its launch in March 2023, the page has seen a steady growth in engagements and followers, with 149,590 impressions as of March 2024.

As with other social media handles, campaigns are an important part of Kishori Adda. The handle ran its first social media campaign, *Samanatheya Sambramada Abhiyana* (The Joyous Celebration of Equality), in October 2023. It explored the relevance of equality for adolescent girls, and brought together diverse perspectives of equality such as lived experiences of inequality, aspirations for a more equal world, the constitutional right to equality, and historic movements for social justice. The campaign had over 16,000 impressions, with participation from adolescent girls, educators, parents, lawyers, and the program team. The second campaign is scheduled for the end of February based on the theme of overcoming patriarchy.

The second campaign, *Purushapradhanate Meeri Horadu Kishori* (Overcome Patriarchy and March On, Kishori), took place in March 2024. With 9072 impressions, it featured adolescent girls sharing their understanding of patriarchy, and building a support group for themselves to overcome it. Girls from residential schools spoke about overcoming patriarchy by studying away from their homes. The campaign also featured a public health doctor highlighting the role nutrition and health play in the lives of adolescent girls to achieve their dreams, and a development professional who discussed the impact of patriarchy on men and masculinity.

4. Methodology and Approach

The research used a methodology informed by visual, participatory, action-based, and creative methods (Foster 2015; Tacchi 2015; Gubrium and Harper 2016; Kara 2020), seeking to generate contextual and rich understandings through collaboration, creativity, and reflection. This paper is part of a larger research project that used symbols, metaphors, and other modes of poetic thinking. The approach takes inspiration from Eisner's (1991, p. 227) notion of metaphoric precision, which proposes that "nothing is more precise than the artistic use of language" (Foster 2015, p. 64). Metaphors and allegories can be useful for uncovering and recovering non-Western ways of knowing, in ways that refuse "the dualism between the real and the unreal, between realities and fictions" (Law 2004, p. 139). Metaphors have been successfully used in interviews in the context of health and development projects (Fletcher 2013), and in workshops (Dalton 2020). Alongside some traditional data gathering methods, such as interviews and participant observation, the core data for this paper come from a creative workshop focused on answering the question: how can civil society NGOs use social media platforms for social change? This question emerged from practice-based experiences of Authors 2, 3, and 4, and intersects with wider scholarly debates (Rodríguez et al. 2014; Enghel 2015; Thomas 2018).

Author 1 generated the concept for the three creative arts-based workshops during her 14 day visit to ITfC as part of an 18-month collaboration. The workshop focused on here involved the wider ITfC communication team, including two people who are also part of the H2HD team, and focused on the Kishori Adda Instagram account, and specifically, the *Samanatheya Sambramada Abhiyana* (Joyous Celebration of Equality) campaign, a 10-day gender-equality campaign targeting adolescents that was running live at the time of the workshop.

The workshop began with a short discussion of some of the concepts and tensions discussed in the literature on NGO and activist uses of social media. The ITfC workshop participants were then tasked with looking at their social media posts and thinking metaphorically about what kind of 'meal' it is, and with trying to reverse engineer a 'recipe'. This tool for a reflexive engagement with a social media post and the organization's wider practices took inspiration from Treré's (2018) brief metaphorical explanation of how algorithms work, that algorithms are a bit like a recipe: the 'meal' is the end product of a set of ingredients, with a step-by-step process that explains the quantities, order and timing of mixing and cooking the ingredients (Treré 2018, pp. 165–166). In the workshop, we combined the recipe metaphor with an ecological approach to communication. The notion of communicative ecology here is wider than 'media ecology' (Scolari 2012; Treré 2018), and is understood to encompass the dynamic interplay of media, tools, or platforms, and their affordances and constraints, the nature of the content or information itself, and the social and cultural context (Slater 2014; Tacchi et al. 2019). Within the recipe metaphor, the ecological approach can expand our attention to considering the nature of the ingredients and tools (their provenance, social/cultural meanings, and signifiers), the tools or technologies involved, and their connections with social and cultural customs relating to food and meals, and the social practices around the meal itself: habits, rituals, customs, and sociality. In this way, the meals and the recipe were devised to capture the interaction of the content, the technological or platform dimensions, and the social dimensions of communicative ecologies, and to articulate the intentions and results of the interactions with the algorithms and audiences.

5. Recipes for Five Meals

A total of five meals and recipes were created: two were created in the workshop, and a further three were developed in follow-up discussions. Each meal and accompanying recipe serves as a heuristic for analyzing one element of the overall campaign, bringing attention the NGO's interaction with non-human actors (such as algorithms and hashtags) as well as human and social dimensions of communicative ecologies in their efforts to resist and subvert the platform logics and use social media for social change. We begin by sharing the five recipes, including the ingredients (content), the method (platform tactics and vernaculars), and the serving suggestion and meal description (the sociality), before analyzing the insights with attention to key communicative ecology dimensions.

5.1. Recipe 1—Yaakavva Yaakavva (Why Mother, Why Is It So?), 'A Comfort Meal' (Figure 1)
5.1.1. Ingredients

- A moving human voice;
- Traditional/community song with a simple tune;
- Powerful, emotive lyrics that tell a vulnerable story about a collective experience;
- Lyrics that are rooted in the feeling of being discriminated against, not a moral message that people might be 'numbed' to;
- Bright, attractive colors;
- Stripped back presentation, without clutter and sensory overload;
- English subtitles;
- Trending hashtags;
- Stickers and gifs to signify the post is not a static image.
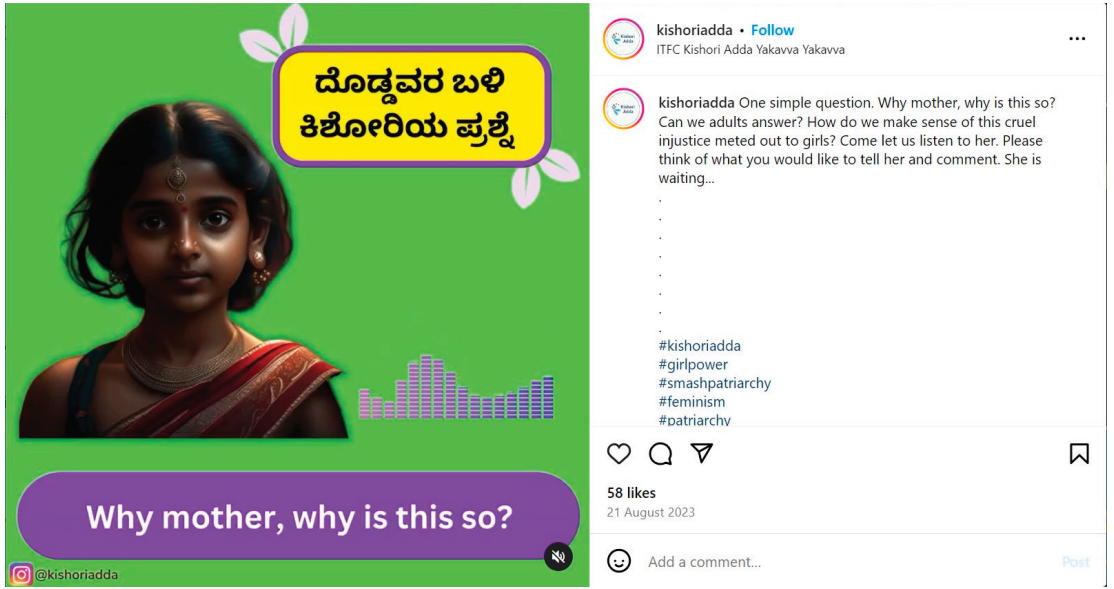
Figure 1. Screenshot of the Yaakavva Yaakavva (which translates to Why mother, why is it so?) post on the @Kishoriadda Instagram handle.

5.1.2. Methods

1. As the primary content is in the audio format, choose the reel format. The reel is chosen over the standard video format as the current Instagram algorithm prioritizes reels.
2. Use bright, attractive colors in the design; sticking to the Kishori Adda aesthetic that appeals to adolescent girls. Also, for the post to stand out in any follower's feed, so the engagement increases thereby triggering the algorithm to boost the post to more audiences.
3. Add a gif of a sound wave that plays on loop throughout the duration of the song. This is another sign of audio content in the post.
4. Add English subtitles to the song which offers the extra reach to non-Kannada-speaking audiences, and therefore, increase the extra shares and likes to amplify the post in more people's timelines.
5. Add an English caption and popular/trending hashtags as the algorithm favors text in English.
6. Share the reel via stories with a 'Sound on' sticker, so the audiences who watch stories know there is some interesting audio we want to draw their attention to.
7. As soon as the post is shared, 'like' it from all staff accounts, as early engagement triggers the algorithm to help share the post.
8. 'Share' the post with followers of staff members, who will therefore engage with the post with their 'likes' and comments.

5.1.3. Serving Suggestion

Non-provoking in any manner, this reel can be shared with or viewed by parents and other adults who monitor the content adolescent girls view or engage with on the internet.

The 'Yaakavva Yaakavva' reel is a comfort meal. It combines the elements of the powerful lyrics and simple tune of a community song, with a moving, human voice. The central ingredient of this meal is a Kannada song, 'Yaakavva Yaakavva', passed down through generations of women, its lyrics asking why a girl cannot have the kind of life

her brother has. It expresses the anguish she feels in being discriminated against. All adolescent girls—the primary audience of Kishori Adda—experience patriarchy, but may not have a chance to express how it makes them feel. When they watch this reel and hear the song, it may resonate with their own questions. It could offer them solidarity in being heard, and in addressing the loneliness they might be feeling. The comfort meal metaphor is apt also because the song is not a transfer of knowledge about the system of patriarchy, but centers the feelings of a young girl. The quality of the song, its unique focus, and the design of the reel make it comforting as well as pleasant to look at.

5.2. Recipe 2—Piranha Quiz, 'A Healthy Snack' (Figure 2)

5.2.1. Ingredients

- Trivia titbit that is interesting but not widely known;
- Simple and engaging language to explain the trivia;
- Attractive colors in the design;
- Trending music;
- English caption;
- Trending hashtags.
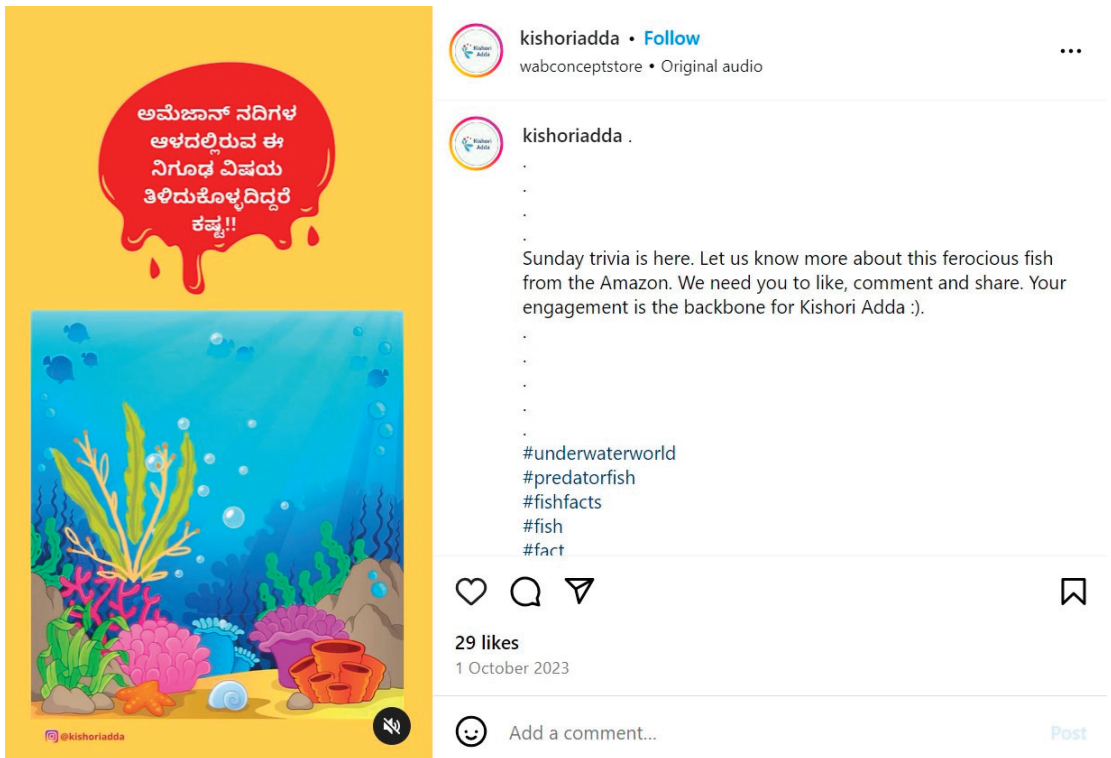
Figure 2. Screenshot of the piranha quiz post on the @Kishoriadda handle.

5.2.2. Method

1. Since reels are better promoted by the Instagram algorithm over static carousels, the format of the reel is chosen for the content.
2. Strike a balance between text and visuals in every slide to avoid visual clutter.
3. As the slides are part of a video, set an appropriate duration for each slide so the audience can read every one of them.

4. Add music that is popular on Instagram as the algorithm will boost content that uses these music clips.
5. Write the caption in English and add relevant hashtags to harness the algorithm to give more traction to the reel.
6. Share the reel via stories for the audience who check stories, so they visit the post.
7. When the post is shared, staff members should engage with it through 'likes', 'shares', and 'comments', to trigger the Instagram algorithm as well as draw in the members' followers to engage with the post.

Amidst meals of varied portions, a snack brings the much-needed lightness without messing with the palate or appetite. The reel about piranha fish was that snack. It served as a break amidst the more serious content that focusses on themes gender, identity, technology, health, and aspiration. Designed attractively with trending music, this reel kept up the regular audience engagement by still offering new 'information' but packaged in a lighter, more fun way.

5.3. Recipe 3—Trolling, 'A Table Spread/Buffet' (Figure 3)

5.3.1. Ingredients

- Viral content from 'troll pages' in Kannada;
- Ideas of gender, violence, and safety;
- Tips for girls to resort to if they experience trolling (such as helplines and reaching out to the cyber-crime police);
- Lucid language;
- Minimalist, attractive design;
- English captions;
- Trending hashtags.

Figure 3. Screenshot of the trolling post on the @Kishoriadda Instagram handle.
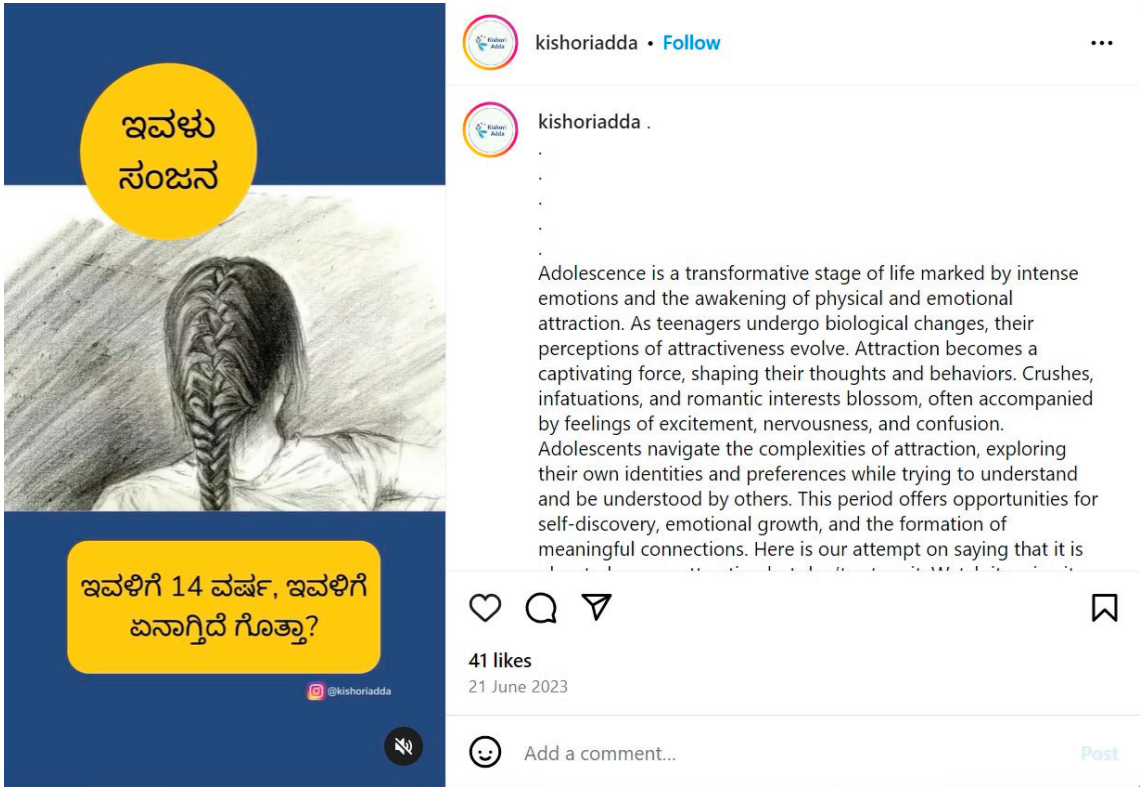
5.3.2. Method

1. As this post is going to discuss trolling through perspectives on gender, violence, and safety, a format that allows for such elaborate explanation—the carousel—is chosen.
2. A minimalist design to balance the heavy text is essential in order to avoid visual clutter. The aesthetic is still colorful—keeping with Kishori Adda's style.
3. The language used is simple and easy to understand. Also, it does not sound threatening, which might scare adolescent girls and stop them from using the internet.
4. Arrange the content so that it has a logical flow of argument, and identify how much text goes on every slide. Following the metaphor of the spread or buffet, the portion on every slide could vary but every slide tries to be a unit of information in itself.
5. Add images of content from pop culture that were part of viral troll pages so the girls are able to relate to such a complex idea.
6. The final slide has redressal tips if anyone faces trolling on the internet. This is essential for young girls to empower their journeys in the online space.
7. Write a caption in English and use relevant hashtags to trigger the algorithm to spread the post.
8. Share the post on the stories so the audience are directed to the post.
9. Ask staff members to 'like' the post and 'share' it among their friend circles to increase engagement.

The carousel post on trolling can be compared to a spread or buffet. Delving into a serious issue faced by adolescent girls online, the post unpacks what trolling means and looks at its gender, violence, and safety aspects. As active users of the internet and social media, adolescent girls know what trolling is but this post offers new lenses for them to better understand the phenomenon. Using examples of viral content from popular Kannada 'troll pages', the complex nexus of gender, violence, and safety is explained in a relevant manner for the girls to understand easily. The metaphor of the spread or buffet is also tied to the format of the carousel in two ways. One, each slide of the carousel is designed like a paragraph. Some slides may have more text than another one. Like the varied portions of food in a spread, the slides are not uniform in their design, but are connected to the larger theme of the post. Two, the audience can take their own time to read each slide and swipe through, unlike a reel in which slides are set to a specific duration. As in a spread, if every slide is a dish in the spread, the audience takes their time to relish it.

5.4. Recipe 4—Attraction, 'A Refreshing Lemonade' (Figure 4)

5.4.1. Ingredients

- The idea of attractions;
- A story format;
- Images of popular Kannada actor Yash;
- Lucid language;
- Attractive design;
- Trending music on Instagram;
- English caption;
- Trending hashtags.

Figure 4. Screenshot of the attraction post on the @Kishoriadda Instagram handle.

5.4.2. Method

1. As the content is bite-sized, and reels are favored by the algorithm and the girls, choose the reel format.
2. Use images and stickers that are fun and relatable to also set the tone of the post.
3. Write a catchy question in the first slide to make the girls curious to watch the rest of the reel.
4. Image of Yash—a Kannada actor who is a heart-throb, especially among young women.
5. Ensure the language is not judging or talking down to girls for feeling attracted to celebrities or their classmates. It is a reminder to prioritize their education and health as necessary.
6. Balance the amount of text and design elements in every slide, as each of them are set to last for a specific duration on the screen.
7. Use a song that is popular in reels across Instagram so the algorithm helps to push the post more widely.
8. Add an English caption, and trending hashtags, so the algorithm will again help promote the post.
9. Share the post in stories with a sticker saying 'New Reel' so people click on the reel to watch it.
10. Encourage the team members, members in the organization and friends to 'like' and 'share' the post so its engagement grows.

A refreshing lemonade that is a light, quick drink with a tinge of sourness. Designed in the reel format, the post on attractions during adolescence addresses feeling drawn

to celebrities and classmates as normal. Unlike the usual reactions girls face of shaming, censoring, and denial to accessing technology or public spaces, the post normalizes these feelings but also advises girls not to act on every spark they feel for someone. The reel is in an engaging story format, uses examples of popular Kannada actors and features trending music on Instagram. The slight sourness a lemonade gives its drinker can be compared to the awkwardness girls might feel because of the openness with which attraction is discussed here. Often, these conversations are secrets between friends.

5.5. Recipe 5—Vamps in Television Serials, 'A Sandwich' (Figure 5)

5.5.1. Ingredients

- Female character tropes from popular Kannada soap operas;
- Lucid language;
- Bright colors;
- Viral music;
- English caption;
- Trending music.

Figure 5. Screenshot of the vamps in television serials post on the @Kishoriadda Instagram handle.

5.5.2. Method

1. As reels are the most sought-after format on Instagram, plan the content to suit this format.
2. Using images of popular female characters from television serials in Kannada to explain the concept of tropes—conspiring mother-in-law, cunning daughter-in-law, and jealous girlfriend.
3. Tie the above tropes to the larger system of patriarchy and how portrayals of women are significant in shaping cultural attitudes towards them. It is important to explain this simply, so adolescent girls understand these stereotypes as harmful.
4. Design the content in vibrant colors to make it pop out on the Instagram feed.
5. Add a viral song that is popularly used on Instagram to complete the reel.
6. Add an English caption and trending hashtags for the algorithm to boost the post.
7. Share the post via stories so people who miss it on their feeds see that new content has been shared on the handle.
8. Encourage members in the team and larger organization and personal contacts to 'like' and 'share' the post so its engagement increases.

A sandwich is a meal one sinks one's teeth into. The joy of the sandwich lies in going to the heart of it. While the bread slices are part of a larger loaf of bread, the filling can change with each sandwich. The reel on decoding female character tropes in soap operas works similarly. While it is discussing the larger issue of patriarchy, it specifically looks at one of its manifestations. Featuring characters from popular Kannada soaps, this attractive reel encourages girls to observe the patriarchy in their own daily lives.

6. Analysis: Social Media Vernaculars and Platform Tactics

6.1. Content Dimensions

One of the strengths of the recipe metaphor is that it shows how interconnected the choices of ingredients, or content dimensions, are with the tools and technologies involved in the assembly and production of the meal, as well as the consumption. The content, or the 'ingredients', on Kishori Adda is created with an eye to both the adolescent girls and their tastes and interests, and the filtering and ranking processes of the Instagram algorithms. The content is co-created with adolescent girls, drawing from some of the offline Kishori Clubs, and the team's decisions on content, aesthetics, and format are based on what the girls have expressed. This commitment to engaging in co-creation draws on the organization's experience with community media, adapted to the social media space. This enables the content to strike a balance between introducing girls to concepts of gender, patriarchy, safety, and identity, while ensuring the content is attractive and relevant.

The content draws on vernaculars of social media, such as memes (Sued et al. 2022; Campos 2023), and the local pop cultures, often subverting the original meaning to engage in topics of patriarchy and equality. The reel on vamps (recipe 5, the sandwich) is an example of this. This post, featuring characters and scenes from mainstream TV serials, is intended to build critical literacies and support girls to engage in critical reading of the patriarchal tropes in media, for example, how qualities of goodness are associated with male protagonists while qualities of malice and cruelty are associated with female antagonists. The post encourages girls to pay attention to what they watch, and thus, creates a space that encourages reflection in everyday life. In the neoliberal, patriarchal space of Instagram, this itself can be seen as a feminist act, akin to Mahoney's (2022) example of visibilizing diverse bodies that challenge normative, gendered beauty standards.

6.2. Social Dimensions

The Kishori Adda content is created sensitive to the social contexts of its consumption, social dynamics that are both online and offline. One example of this is practices of evading censorship. While tactics like replacing letters with characters (v@ccine, r*pe) may work for evading platform censorship (Barbala 2022; Treré and Bonini 2022), the recipes highlight an awareness that the access adolescent girls have to social media is often mediated and

regulated by adults in their lives, and adult censorship is more powerful in this context than algorithmic censorship. For example, in Yaakavva Yaakavva (recipe 1, the comfort meal), the lyrics of the song reflect the helplessness of a young girl, but do not encourage girls to break free from their homes or societal norms. The song is addressed to a mother figure ('avva' meaning 'mother'), creating an atmosphere of intimacy. Often, mothers are not the most powerful figures in familial and social settings, and therefore, the song does not trigger any conflict from more powerful figures such as fathers or older brothers who might be mediating the access of girls to social media. Similarly, discussing attractions can be a red flag for parents. The reel (recipe 4, lemonade) uses the image of Yash—a Kannada film star who is known to be a heartthrob among teenagers—but also encourages girls to pay attention to their studies and their health, so the post passes the approval of the adults as well as being engaging for girls.

Teachers are also important in the social dimensions of Kishori Adda. Teachers have opportunities to share the posts with adolescent girls in the classroom. The H2HD team shares links to relevant posts with teachers, or sends them downloaded versions of the same, to use during their engagement with students in the classroom. There are interactions here with the technological dimensions, discussed in more detail below, since teachers will display the Kishori Adda posts through the technical infrastructure accessible to them, or go on to share it in forums such as WhatsApp groups. Engaging with teachers, and other organizations working with young people, helps to widen its reach.

The handle ran its first social media campaign in October 2023 on the significance and relevance of equality for adolescent girls. The team reached out to their personal contacts who had many followers or were part of networks that could draw in more followers to engage with the campaign by sharing the posts. Other organizations—even if they worked in different languages—were also contacted for the same. Without any remuneration, these collaborations were a result of their faith in the work via the social media handle, their commitment to adolescent girl empowerment, and the larger good will that the team members and the organization as a whole had within these networks. Such interactions also highlight that collaborative online spaces need not always be driven by a capitalist mindset; shared ideals and passions also create the possibility of such collaborations.

6.3. Platform Dimensions

We have seen already that the algorithm is just one factor in a holistic view of social media for social change practices, but perhaps one of the most valuable aspects of the recipe metaphor was in brining attention to the advanced levels of platform literacy and agency required. Thinking about each post as a kind of food or meal itself reveals the program team's understandings that meals of different sizes and types play a role in feeding the platform's algorithm and their audiences' needs. The piranha quiz reel (recipe 2) is a good example of this, with its snacky quality, intended to grab attention, which, with associations with junk food, invites comparisons to "junk news" (Venturini 2019). Like junk news, there is an element in the piranha post of seeking to keep high levels of user impressions and keep engagement high, but unlike ads, clickbait, and fake or emotive articles driven by profit-making or trolling aims, the piranha reel was clarified as a 'healthy snack', offering interesting information as well as the pleasure of watching an attractively designed reel. Including a 'snacky' post can also be read as a resistance to neoliberal and patriarchal discourses, in that it recognizes that leisure, and leisure for women and girls, is as important. It is the combination of 'light' and 'intense' posts (like the 'comfort meal') that helps ensure the audience does not feel burdened by constantly being told about social issues and has a variety of content to engage with. Furthermore the regularity of posting is also part of the "visibility game" (Cotter 2019), since this is rewarded by the Instagram algorithm.

Some of the tactics are about "repairing" (Velkova and Kaun 2021) the algorithmic biases of Instagram. The team is aware that by virtue of the post being in the non-dominant language of Kannada, rather than in English or Hindi, and designed in the language and

aesthetic of a specific audience, it is less likely to be promoted by the Instagram algorithm. Yet, the Kannada language is vital for the primary audience. To navigate this setback from the algorithm, the main content is always in Kannada, but with English subtitles, captions, and hashtags. Furthermore, hashtags and captions are worded carefully to evade possible censorship, and trending hashtags and music are also deliberately chosen for purposes of amplification. In the landscape of Indian content on the internet, where there are hardly any pages in the Kannada language similar to Kishori Adda, the choice becomes political, representing a correction and resistance to the "'brokenness' of an algorithmic system" (Velkova and Kaun 2021, p. 536).

The "datafied feedback", the provision of statistics to users on their impressions, likes, and comments (Treré and Bonini 2022), is, on the one hand, one of the mechanisms of "disciplining power" (Bucher 2017) of platforms to orient spaces towards patriarchal, neoliberal norms (Mahoney 2022; Semenzin 2022), and, on the other, one of the key ways all users learn about the algorithm and develop tactics and repertoires. The program team performs a weekly analysis of the social media handle to understand what kind of posts have worked best with the algorithm, and therefore, plan the content for the following weeks. Even without the weekly meeting, the immediate success of the Yaakavva Yaakavva post (recipe 1, comfort meal) was obvious. It was the first post to draw in over 2000 views in a few days. But rather than working because of conformity to neoliberal norms, as the recipe illustrates, this piece worked because of the power and cultural resonance of the content: featuring a traditional song with feminist lyrics, sung acapella by one of the adolescent girls engaged in the school program. Furthermore, the team is not only reliant on the platform-generated data. The program team also assesses the impact of the posts by directly interacting with adolescent girls during regular classroom engagements. Through this process, they discovered that while the algorithm prioritizes certain formats over others (e.g., reels over single static images or carousels), the adolescent girls preferred carousels and single static images. Part of playing the visibility game here, therefore, means that over a six-day schedule, the Kishori Adda team posts reels on two days to satisfy the algorithm, and on the other days, a single static image, a carousel, and a series of stories are uploaded.

Contrary to the risks of the "platformization of feminism" (Barbala 2022), developing compliance with and enabling a normalization of neoliberal and capitalist norms, Kishori Adda manages to remain a space of counter speech. It acknowledges the agency of adolescent girls by taking into account what interests them to present engaging content, valued over and above the algorithmic rewards. It creates spaces for expressions of emotion and vulnerability though posts like Yaakavva Yaakavva (recipe 1), featuring a young girl singing about discrimination, which might attract bullying or trolling in other mainstream spaces. The reel on trolling (recipe 3, the buffet) empowers the girls with the awareness of the forces operating under such a commonly experienced phenomenon, reassuring them that getting trolled is not their fault, and encouraging them to continue using the internet for their articulation and leisure, resisting the traditional patriarchal approach of telling them to stop using the internet. In this way, Kishori Adda carves out a space within commodified, datafied, neoliberal platforms that in fact empowers adolescent girls to engage in social media and other online spaces.

7. Conclusions

The datafication and commodification of public and private interactions under digital and communicative capitalism via social media platforms works to constrain their potential for social change. Just as scholars have discussed the emergence of platformized feminisim, there is a risk of platformized social change communication from an uncritical, unreflective use of social media platforms, disciplined by the datafied feedback towards producing depoliticized, popular content to play the visibility game, contributing to the problems of corporatization of NGOs (Thomas 2018) and a default to uni-linear, often PR and branding modes, of social media use (Iranzo and Farné 2014; Comfort and Hester 2019; Montes 2024). Skepticism about the social change potential in the NGO space has contributed to a trend

in the CDSC literature to look at social movements for lessons on how to grapple with the opportunities to use social media for social change (Obregón and Tufte 2017; Tufte 2017; Thomas 2018; Farné et al. 2022), and few have engaged with questions of how this is or might be fostered in civil society NGOs. This paper has attempted to close the loop on that gap, engaging with the literature and theories emerging from activist and social movement studies and exploring ways of applying these to the NGO CDSC context. This is important, because, as cautioned by Enghel (2015) and Rodríguez et al. (2014), there has been far too little consideration of the challenges posed for CDSC under communicative and digital capitalism.

We argue that processes of reflection, resistance, and subversion are required in order to work against these logics if civil society NGOs are to successfully repurpose these spaces for social change. We developed a novel method cultivating this 'hacker mindset' through engaging in analytical reflection of social media posts. The metaphor-based creative method of 'reverse engineering a recipe' offers a mode of participatory, collaborative, and action-based analysis that is as rich as it is precise, and as playful as it is serious. It is a praxis-oriented framework for bringing awareness to the paradoxes and conundrums inherent in using communication spaces driven by neoliberal, patriarchal logics of mainstream, privatized social media platforms for social justice purposes. It enabled us to identify and refine tactics for subverting dominant cultural representations and build critical literacies; resisting and repairing algorithmic biases, including through skilled mixing of languages and types of posts; building offline solidarities, co-creation, and feedback processes; and evading both algorithmic and societal censorship to create spaces for counter speech on gender equality. The recipe metaphor presents a very different lens for critically reflecting on the organizations' tactics and politics compared with the datafied metrics that the platform feeds to NGOs. Using the framework of the recipe that includes ingredients, method, and a meal description, the algorithm is located within the broader communicative ecology, highlighting the interconnectedness of the content, technological, and social dimensions.

This analysis is limited to reflecting on the practices of one organization, one which is already steeped in political practices of resisting digital capitalism. However, we suggest that this experience is also precisely why ITfC offers such a valuable perspective from which to reimagine uses of social media for social change. This kind of reflection can contribute to more meaningful and more critically aware CDSC practices using mainstream social media platforms across the field.

We conclude by extending the metaphor to convey its value and flexibility for other NGOs and their reflective practice. A recipe acknowledges the agency of the meal-maker, and the knowledge they have about the meal-eater and what will appeal to them. While a recipe comprises set ingredients and a methodical procedure, it is not fixed in stone. Depending on who cooks it, they might add or remove elements to suit their taste. Proportions may vary based on the occasion of the meal. These variations can also be made keeping in mind the person who will eat the food. Secondly, the metaphor of a meal highlights that not everything is instrumental in nature. A post may or may not meet nutritional needs, but it engages with the senses of smell, sight, and taste. It seeks to create an enjoyable experience for people eating the food. Third, it relates to social change practices, in that food is about community building and not bound by only transactional needs. For instance, one might share their favorite recipes with a friend so they may also partake in the experience of enjoying it, just as we have shared ours here.

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Article

Reconceptualizing ICTD: Prioritizing Place-Based Learning Experiences, Socio-Economic Realities, and Individual Aspirations of Young Students in India

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Abstract: This paper critically examines the neo-liberal conceptualization of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD), which imposes the linear and simplistic notions of empowerment and development on the users from the global South. Using the rapidly growing EdTech segment in India as a case, this paper observes that EdTech has been touted as a magic multiplier and a savior for countries like India that aspire to educate their large populations. This has prompted EdTech companies to pursue platformization and templatization to accomplish scalability and standardization in EdTech use. Based on immersive ethnographic research with youth from low-income families in three Indian cities—Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Vadodara—we argue that the practices of young people concerning EdTech resist standardization. Our analysis reveals that three major factors—challenges of access and autonomy, continued relevance of place-based learning and in-person interactions, and uneven quality and rigor—influence low-income students and families to not completely buy the promise of access, equity, and quality that EdTech companies and governments advance. We explore the significance of the socio-economic and cultural contexts of young learners in the global South context and argue that they aspire for personalization, place-based experiences, guidance/mentorship, high grades, and in-person interactions instead of standardization. They do not fully benefit by the experimentation, DIY practices, and tech-lead learning opportunities and resources offered by EdTech platforms in their current state.

Keywords: EdTech; ICTD; India; low-income youth; global South

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, communication for development has taken a predominantly digital turn, with the emergence of a celebratory view of digital technologies as a panacea for various problems facing the countries of the global South. With the introduction of mobile health, FinTech, and EdTech, governments and masses alike have started expecting miracles in erasing poverty, illiteracy, and diseases using various technological solutions, and investing a huge portion of national as well as personal resources into these new technologies. This celebratory discourse around digital technologies reminds us of a similar euphoria in the early 2000s following the introduction of the diffusion of technology approach that was offered to newly independent countries struggling to address the deep inequities and socio-economic challenges caused by years of colonization, and later the concept of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD) in the 1990s, following the neo-liberal ideology of the times.

In a parallel development, critical scholars have time and again called for bottom-up, context-sensitive, and humane approaches to using technology for development. It is easy to overlook these voices amongst the euphoric cries of tech companies, governments, and elite users. It is equally easy to take an ahistorical perspective while endorsing

techno-determinism in communication for development. This paper, while acknowledging that technology does have the potential to support development, reflects on the tensions generated by neo-liberal and critical approaches to ICTD.

The paper critically examines the neo-liberal conceptualization of ICTD that imposes linear and simplistic notions of empowerment and development on users from the global South. Using the rapidly growing EdTech segment in India as a case and based on immersive ethnographic research with youth in three Indian cities—Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Vadodara—we argue that the practices of young people concerning EdTech resist standardization. Our analysis reveals that three major factors—challenges of access and autonomy, continued relevance of place-based learning and human touch, and uneven quality and rigor—influence low-income students and families to not completely buy the promise of access, equity, and quality that EdTech companies and governments advance. We argue that young people in the global South aspire for personalization in EdTech use that is not an outcome of algorithmic authority, but a reflection of culturally responsive digital practices and learning needs and aspirations.

2. Historical Overview of ICTD

In this section, we present a critical reflection on the role of ICT in development and an overview of the evolution of key arguments and concepts in the field amidst global geo-political and socio-economic changes. We examine dominant conceptualizations of the role of ICTD: technologically deterministic, top-down, celebratory discourse, and the common assumption that ICTD will act as a savior of underdeveloped masses in the global South. In analyzing and critiquing the potential of these discourses, we call attention to a more contextual, bottom-up, and human-centric conceptualization of ICTD.

Before the term ICTD gained currency in the 1990s, the idea that technology can facilitate, and even spearhead, development had already been accepted. While this optimistic view of technology has not changed much, our notions and definitions of development have evolved to prioritize cultural understanding, empathy, and a grounded approach to designing interventions. A major reason for this was the birth and spread of post-colonial and decolonial thinking, and the popularization of indigenous epistemes and ontologies. In the 1940s and 50s, several colonized nations achieved independence, and they started questioning and criticizing the linear notions of development, i.e., progressing from an underdeveloped to a developed nation. These post-colonies demonstrated how linear notions of development enabled colonial powers to retain moral, political, and epistemological authority over countries in the global South. During this time, technology (primarily telecommunications and agriculture-related) was considered a major tool in modernization and development processes. For example, Daniel Lerner, in his famous work 'Passing of the Traditional Society' (Lerner 1958), considered media participation an important pillar of modernization.

Post-colonial and decolonial thinking and practices encouraged a few critical scholars, social workers, and political actors to foresee the need to recalibrate the influence of ICTD and reflect on the evolving notions of development based on the economic, social, and cultural contexts of a country. Even still, technological optimism was the dominant rationality, and ICT projects in countries from the global South could not attain their full developmental potential, and worse, led to the marginalization of low-income groups in the global South (Lin et al. 2015; Walsham 2017). Over the past decade, scholars have made long strides in reanalyzing their approach to using ICT for development and appreciating why past projects or interventions could not achieve substantial results. They are championing the urgent need to design long-term, contextually relevant, and culturally sensitive processes for development (Andersson and Hatakka 2013). They are also advocating for an approach in ICTD that requires it to be dynamic and flexible to reconfiguration according to relevant and complex socio-cultural problems (Avgerou 2010; Bhatia et al. 2024). Before we elaborate on a human-centered, culturally relevant approach to ICTD in the context of

educational technologies in India, it is important to highlight two dominant but differing trends in this field:

1. Universalism: ICTD research saw an influence of universalistic research traditions in the early 2000s (Avgerou and Madon 2004). Such an approach focuses on techno-economic reasoning of innovation within ICT processes while detaching it from the social context of the actors who are the beneficiaries of the process. By focusing on best practices (Fulk and Desanctis 1999), such an approach focuses on an all-encompassing rationality and universal goals for ICTD (Porter and Millar 2009). Based on the principles of generalization and flat replicability, this approach endorses the transfer and diffusion perspective, i.e., technological innovations can be transferred from developed economies and eventually adjusted to the conditions of the developing economies through diffusion. This approach to ICTD looks at the material and cognitive entities comprising technologies in isolation, detached from the social context and lived realities of people and communities in other countries where the technology is introduced. Accordingly, technologies and knowledge processes are easily transferrable and can be deployed in any given society to make suitable developmental changes. It does not foreground or prioritize contexts of the recipient country nor antecedent factors such as economic conditions, technological competence of people, and their attitudes towards technology, all of which could influence the acceptance and use of ICTD (Davis 1989; Rogers 1995).

2. Situated knowledge: This approach emphasizes the role of agency and meaning-making processes in different contexts in the potential of ICT to usher in development (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Suchman 1996). A primary principle of this approach is to appreciate how technologies have to be embedded in society and how they must respond to different contexts and lived realities. By contesting the transfer and diffusion perspective and criticizing it for its oversimplification, the social embeddedness perspective looks at the process of ICTD innovation in situ and tries to understand the lived realities of local actors, including their aspirations, motivations, everyday practices, and knowledge processes and practices, to appreciate what is locally meaningful and relevant. Such an approach helps to better shed light on how particular ICT innovations may emerge out of local contexts where local actors can design and mold these innovations to align them with their routines and everyday lives (Avgerou 2003).

The field is witnessing some strategic and systematic upturns, and more scholars are investing critical energies in re-evaluating their use of ICTD in research, advocacy, and governance. Critical studies scholars have observed epistemic violence "exerted both through knowledge and against it" (Galván-Álvarez 2010) as a serious issue implicit in a Western-centric approach of the global North and previously colonial powers. Epistemic violence operates through the systematic silencing of marginalized voices, and constitutes, as Mignolo (2013) notes, an integral part of the processes of colonial domination. By giving authority to the voice of the colonizer, epistemic violence results in the forced devoicing of the colonized, producing systematic injustice against them (Milan and Treré 2019). This results in the establishment of a narrative that erases the stories of the colonized, canceling their perspectives from history.

3. Recognizing the Complexities within ICTD Research

Development is a contested notion, and it has been subject to a long theoretical debate. Moreover, development policy and action are entangled with conflicting interests and power relations in contemporary global and national politics, and the international development agencies' policies for economic growth and institutional reform are widely contested in developing countries. In his book, Arturo Escobar (2011) presented a trenchant and detailed critique of development and development theory. This seminal thesis was based on Foucault's method of analyzing discourse, and presented a historical reconstruction of the notion of development and how it has shaped thinking and policy around the world.

Escobar analyzed development discourse through three axes, which may be stated as three questions: (1) How is the development discourse constructed, and through what forms of knowledge are the concepts and theories arrived at? (2) What is the system of power that regulates its practice? and (3) How is the subjectivity of people fostered by the discourse through which people come to see themselves as developed or underdeveloped? Escobar's concerns are with how the discourse of development is created, how it is sustained through regimes of power, and how its subjects view themselves through the "colonized reality" that is thus created.

As the term development has started to become redefined, its reflection can be seen in the way ICTD is articulated and researched. After the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals (MDPs), the focus of ICTD research began to obtain a more holistic view of development beyond economic growth. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework, and Amartya Sen's human development perspective, articulated through his Capability Approach, have been frequently adopted in ICTD analysis (Andersson and Hatakka 2013; Zheng 2015). However, one of the major downsides of such arguments is that their focus has remained largely static, and there is an absence of discussion on neoliberalism, which is the dominant development model today, and its consequences. Most ICTD studies avoid engaging in discussions on what constitutes development. Some authors have taken a critical stance on the prevailing view of development that drives the discourse on the digital divide and foregrounds the role of ICT in creating a country's competitiveness capabilities in a global free market (Wade and Hulland 2004; Warschauer 2003). Others have pointed out the ongoing controversies regarding development, development policy, and the role attributed to ICT in various development policies (Avgerou 2003; Ciborra 2005). More recently, Walsham (2017) observed that the role of ICTD for marginalized communities in developing and underdeveloped economies is still being widely debated.

In recent years, some scholars from the global South have started studying ICTD in a nuanced way and have called for a re-examination of these technologies from the user perspective. They argue for immersive methodologies centering on lived realities in the global South (Arora and Rangaswamy 2013; Pathak-Shelat and DeShano 2014; Bhatia et al. 2024) and to pay attention to user aspirations instead of an imposed development agenda. For example, Arora and Rangaswamy (2013) argue that studies in the field of ICTD have relegated the enactments of leisure in the global South as anecdotal, which has partly occurred because much of such research is driven by developmental agendas with a strong historical bias towards socio-economic focus (Burrell and Anderson 2009). They emphasize the need to look at ICTs as leisure (entertainment/pleasure/play) artifacts in emerging markets. ICTs are also seen as tools of poverty alleviation and empowerment, leaving little room for alternative use of ICT, especially for marginalized communities. This ties into the paternalistic attitude of the West within ICTD research, which looks at people from the global South as simple-minded utilitarian beings who cannot use ICT artifacts for pleasure or leisure, but only for utilities that can be "beneficial" to them. Thus, people from the global South are looked at by the West as simple beings who just need to be economically liberated, and who are inert recipients of developmental action. More recently, several other scholars have called for the decolonization of ICTs. The production of knowledge in ICTD research has been characterized by an ongoing shift from dominantly Western-based to Indigenous theory formations. In her recent monograph examining children's engagement with digital technologies in urban slums of India, Bhatia (2024) argues that there is a need to rethink the role of ICT in low-income communities as more than a developmental project to save the poor from systems of discrimination and violence. She debunks universalizing theories and binary notions and provides complex narratives on novel ethnographic categories, such as romance, privacy, surveillance, shame, glamor, and creativity, in her exploration of children's quotidian digital experiences. She contends that a view of poor children's digital engagement emerges at multiple scales within low-income and digitally accessible environments, initiating new reflexivity about poverty and its influence on the potential of ICT in social identities, complete with risks and obligations (p. 13). Accordingly, there is

a growing need to put ICTD research into direct relation with theory formulated for and within the local context for elaboration (Davison and Díaz Andrade 2018), and relating to an explicitly decolonial discourse (Jimenez et al. 2022).

Zheng et al. (2018) argue for the need for ICTD research to evolve in the face of growing technological advancements and complex social dynamics and needs. They talk about the need for ICTD research to be situated in an assemblage with development, offering a better understanding of development processes, their ideological nature, the power structures and driving forces, and the mechanisms through which ICTs are embedded in and shape these processes. There is a growing understanding that ICTD should not be about achieving a designated level of technology adoption or diffusion, but a multifaceted, dynamic, and contentious socio-technical process. Our research agenda has to recognize that ICTD can result in unintended consequences or contradictory effects on development. Also, development is not a linear process, nor is there a one-size-fits-all solution, which is why it is important to embrace the multidimensionality and heterogeneity of development in ICTD. Critical and participatory research on ICT in developing countries acknowledges and addresses distinctions of context. The context where a new technology artifact and business model first takes shape (usually in an advanced economy) may be different from the context where this combined artifact and model is implanted or implemented as part of technological innovation in a developing country. Moreover, the socio-organizational settings of ICT development and use within sectors, countries, or regions may differ substantially from each other. Educational technology (EdTech) is an appropriate example of ICTD that should ideally be developed and designed to align with the learning motivations and technological practices and aspirations of student-teachers in context-specific and culturally relevant ways. Since before the onset of the pandemic, EdTech has been touted as a magic multiplier and a savior for countries like India that aspire to educate their large populations. This has prompted EdTech companies to pursue platformization and templatization to accomplish scalability and standardization in EdTech use. These new tendencies are in conflict with the diverse needs and profiles of Indian learners. In the following section, we will explore how the use of ICTD has expanded in the public education system in India, along with some of the dominant discourses around the role of EdTech in increasing the accessibility of education.

4. Platformization of Education for Development

In recent years, emerging educational markets in the global South have witnessed an expansion in the use of ICT for teaching and learning, given the proliferation of computers, smartphones, and Internet services, including affordable data packages. Early reports on ICT in education[1] emphasized that ICT will revolutionize teaching and learning through online communication, interactive online environments, and DIY educational practices. These reports also suggested that educational technologies would increase students' access to learning resources, thus enhancing their educational opportunities and experiences. There was also a common perception that interacting with digital devices would be so rewarding and entertaining that students may in time prefer computers over teachers and in-person interactions in classrooms (Arora 2019). Not only this, projects such as the hole-in-the-wall also stressed that computers and other EdTech devices and programs could reduce the time required to accomplish learning goals and increase students' satisfaction and academic performance, encouraging them to become self-starters and take initiative. By 2013, governments in several countries of the global South were investing resources to develop open materials and learning resources, especially massive open online courses (MOOCs), to support the learning needs and academic aspirations of their ever-growing population. Recent trends in the government initiatives to improve educational outcomes for underserved and marginalized student populations include the creation of "Digital Infrastructures for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which focuses on ICT education, various state government initiatives on virtual classes and digital learning, and computer/digital-aided classroom teaching supported by

different private sector entities and NGOs" (Nandi 2024). Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds, or SWAYAM, which means self in Sanskrit, is another government of India initiative that aims to "take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged. SWAYAM seeks to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy". In 2020, the Government of India (GOI) launched the National Education Policy to promote the integration of technology and education to enhance students' access to education, improve teaching capabilities and digital skilling, and embed artificial intelligence (AI) in classrooms. The policy is based on three guiding principles: access, equity, and quality. These state-led initiatives and huge private and public fundings to build educational technologies and EdTech platforms highlight that the government and corporations are increasingly optimistic about the role of ICTD in supporting the learning and teaching needs of students and teachers. Some of the dominant discourses on educational technologies emphasize that technological interventions can compensate for the lack of resources in the educational system, such as the high student–teacher ratio (46:1 in India), lack of professional training, meager salaries, and unstable learning infrastructures in schools (Nanda 2021).

Critical studies scholars who have analyzed the role of educational technologies, especially EdTech platforms in contexts of the global North, demonstrate the neoliberal and capitalist underpinnings of such technological interventions (Bowker et al. 2019; Decuypere and Broeck 2020). They criticize the technology-solutionism lens that identifies EdTech as comprising neutral developmental tools created to aid the existing education system and even replace it. According to the critical view, educational technologies are often founded on neoliberal principles of standardization and profit-making and are designed as a top-down intervention to resolve issues of inequities, inaccessibility, and lack of quality in the educational system.[2] It often replicates the design and infrastructure principles akin to traditional ICTD, where the West introduced and diffused new technologies into novel cultural contexts of the global South without paying attention to the antecedent factors and context influencing the adoption of these interventionist technologies. In a recent ethnographic exploration (Bhatia et al. 2024, p. 13) in India, the researchers argue that educational technologies are guided by "their logic of scaling their products for profitability, leading to standardization of curriculum, lack of teacher-student autonomy, compelling self-responsibility towards learning, and the subsequent erosion of socio-spatial relationships critical for developing place-based critical pedagogies. On the other hand, students and teachers use these platforms from within the socio-technical and cultural realities they inhabit".

Our past research has highlighted the diverse ways in which young learners negotiate with the imposed logic and structure of templatization and platformization through playful resilience (Bhatia and Pathak-Shelat 2023). These negotiations are personalized based on the interaction between their lived local realities and aspirations spurred by global cultural flows and development discourses.

In this paper, we argue that young people's learning practices, needs, and aspirations resist standardization and neoliberal conceptualization of education. The real-time uses of digital platforms and resources for education differ from the neoliberal and West-imposed expectations of introducing EdTech as an intervention to channel and propel development. Our data reveals divergence in three core areas. 1. Access: Propriety EdTech platforms make claims that their technological interventions will help bridge gaps in education among high- and low-income students. In practice, however, learners from low-income communities and teachers in public schools cannot afford to access these private EdTech platforms. 2. Equity: Low-income kids seek and prioritize conventional outcomes such as high grades and cannot carve out space, time, or resources for experimentation. As first-generation learners, they do not start on a level playing field. Most EdTech platforms (private and public) are designed based on the principle of individual responsibility and assume student initiative towards curating learning material using different sources. Young

kids from low-income families do not want that responsibility; instead, they seek guidance, hand-holding, and mentoring to secure high grades. 3. Quality: Students and their families trust place-based and interpersonal learning experiences more than technology-mediated interactions. We explore the significance of the socio-economic and cultural contexts of young learners in the global South context and argue that they aspire for personalization, place-based experiences, guidance/mentorship, hand-holding, high grades, and in-person interactions instead of standardized and tech-lead learning opportunities and resources offered by EdTech platforms in their current state. We do not claim that the traditional place-based system is always successful in meeting their aspirations, but in its current state, EdTech is also not able to address the gaps in the traditional system.

Before we discuss the methods and analysis, we need to note that our research is based on the ground realities in India. It examines EdTech from the lens of "what is" and not "what ought to be". While we value play and joy in learning and the autonomy and agency of the young students as desirable learning conditions, the over-burdened and highly competitive Indian education system prioritizes test scores, and the traditional setup is hierarchical, placing parents and teachers in a supervising role. Educational decisions are often collective family decisions. Additionally, even when fun and leisure are shown to have a positive influence on students' learning, the pressure to succeed in a highly unequal and competitive society compels students and parents to have an instrumental approach to education that does not offer much scope for critical thinking or play-based and experiential learning experiences for students from low-income families. Parents in India invest a great deal of resources in their children's education, often beyond their means. Therefore, they expect a certain tangible outcome. Even in these circumstances and limiting EdTech design, young people find their own creative strategies to engage with EdTech.

5. Methodology: Family Ethnography

This study identifies young people's unique learning practices in their interactions with EdTech. Young people develop novel negotiation strategies to challenge the standardization logic inherent to educational technologies. They are creative in their interactions with EdTech and constantly look for a personalized and self-curated experience. To identify non-standardized uses of EdTech, we examined young people's learning behaviors in non-formal contexts, such as their homes, in community areas, and their peer groups and family interactions. Our goal was to understand what students (age range: 14 to 18 years) do to negotiate their use of educational technologies, such as different EdTech platforms (DIKSHA, BYJU's, and Vedantu), and open-access learning resources, such as YouTube and Google. We conducted family ethnographies in homes, neighborhoods, and schools/classrooms of 23 students from low-income communities in Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Vadodara. Our approach to conducting family ethnographies derives theoretical force from the works of scholars such as Schänzel (2010) and Nash et al. (2018), who introduced the whole family approach. According to them, such an approach is used when ethnographers wish to understand how family dynamics, interpersonal interactions, peer conversations, and formal engagements collectively influence people's behaviors and experiences. We modified the family ethnography approach to include conversations and interviews with schoolteachers to understand how young people's DIY learning practices influence the meanings they ascribe to educational technologies. Our family ethnography approach also references the methodological work of scholars including Caru and Cova (2008), Murphy and Dingwall (2007), Parker (2007), and Shankar et al. (2001). One of the authors worked as a media educator in these low-income communities from 2015 to 2019, and her relationships with the students helped her cultivate deep and meaningful connections with the communities. She conducted media literacy workshops for schools and community members, and "hung out" with students in their community areas and homes, attended cultural festivals such as marriages, religious celebrations, and community get-togethers, and also helped students participate in intercommunity and intra/inter-city competitions (Bhatia and Pathak-Shelat 2019). For this research project, she re-entered the

field for data collection in December 2020 and continued conducting observations and interviews till January 2021. The bulk of the data corpus relies on on-site note-taking and ethnographic and in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and family members. We conducted at least three short interviews (25 min each) with all of the participants (n = 51). The sample included 23 students, 20 parents, and 8 teachers. We also conducted follow-up interviews online, one month after we completed our onsite immersion, to clarify some questions we encountered in our first round of analysis of the ethnographic data. Our observation notes include a description of young learners' use of educational technologies. These notes answer the following questions: Which EdTech did they use? When and how did the students use these technologies? And, what were some common DIY learning practices they designed in their engagements with EdTech? We observed their interactions with and on the following platforms for education: YouTube, DIKSHA, BYJU's, Vedantu, and Google. We did not pre-select these education technologies; instead, we observed young learners' everyday engagements, and finalized a list of online platforms they used regularly for educational purposes. An inductive approach led us to create a list of the above-stated online platforms for analysis.

We used two-level coding for data analysis (Carspecken 1996; Madison 2020). According to this method, we created two levels of coding: low-level codes included empirical and concrete ideas, and high-level codes included abstract or theoretical concepts. For instance, the code student experiences included data related to students' learning needs and aspirations, and how they ascribed meaning and uses to different educational platforms/resources. In the second phase, we grouped these low-level codes under a high-level theoretical theme titled ascribed meanings of EdTech. The second high-level code was titled DIY learning. It included data describing how learners and teachers describe and define DIY learning with the help of EdTech. The focus of this theme is to unravel the growing chasm between the structural realities of the educational system in India and the learning approach and styles promoted through EdTech.

In the next section, we will explore the two high-level themes in more detail.

6. Ascribed Meanings of EdTech

Through our ethnographic immersion and research design, we compared the design and interface of online educational resources and platforms with students' learning needs and aspirations to identify the growing chasm between the company's neoliberal logic to scale the accessibility of these educational platforms through standardization and students' continued efforts to ascribe new and novel meanings to these technologies. We analyzed the informational architecture of the educational platforms that students used, i.e., DIKSHA, BYJU's, Vedantu, Google, and YouTube, and compared it with two data points: how students articulated their engagements with these tools, and the meanings they ascribed to online educational platforms and open-access resources.

Our first submission involves critically analyzing the interface and design of these platforms. BYJU's and Vedantu are privately-owned corporate enterprises based on a freemium business model: students get a 15-day free trial period to explore the use and merit of these platforms, and then they can choose to pay a subscription fee to access the educational resources and experiences these platforms create and host. DIKSHA, on the other hand, is a public educational platform with e-content to supplement and support students' learning across different grades and educational boards in the states of India. While BYJU's, Vedantu, and DIKSHA can be accessed through applications on mobile phones, only BYJU's and Vedantu enable students to enroll for live 1:1 online classes for coaching and preparation for exams. Moreover, BYJU's and DIKSHA offer integrated school learning programs, which are e-resources teachers can use in classrooms to explain concepts and lessons. While these platforms are designed and promoted to be a "one-stop solution" for all learning needs and existing gaps in classroom instructions and school experiences, students' conceptualization of these platforms diverges from the neoliberal understanding of ICT for education. For example, all of these platforms were problematized

by our participants in three significant ways: 1. Courses or grade-level content on these platforms replicate concepts and lesson plans in school textbooks and claim to offer adult-guided problem solving, but they lack the cultural familiarity and human touch that participants value. 2. These platforms use 3-D animation and motion graphics to create a more immersive experience. Such an approach relies heavily on using visual effects and advanced technological intervention to compensate for and even substitute the aspiration for place-based experiences, such as classroom interactions, peer bonding, and culturally sensitive/responsive learning discussions, but these features are either inaccessible to our participants due to low resources, or are perceived as gimmicky. 3. While these platforms want to standardize education, they continue to promote their potential of peer relations, live problem-solving and coaching, and easy-to-comprehend educational materials, for which our participants want to be reliant on experiences stemming from place-based and classroom/teacher-centered educational environments, even when these environments have severe limitations.

According to Shloka, a 14-year-old middle school student in Vadodara, educational platforms are not a one-stop solution. "Many of these platforms teach us the same things that our teachers teach us in schools of tuition classes. All they do is make it look very *high-fi* with animation and visuals. I think the main teaching and learning happens in schools and tuition classes and then if you want to use your leisure time to study more, these platforms do that; add a little bit of fun and visuals to learning. You cannot use these to rank first in the class". Like Shloka, many other students defined educational platforms as a "time-pass" and something to fill their "fun and play time" with another learning-based activity. They mentioned that educational platforms and online content were interesting as a supplemental learning resource and compared them to a "recommended reading list". A common perception among students and teachers was that tech-aided learning materials/content were less serious than actual classroom learning facilitated at school or coaching centers. Students often describe educational platforms as play, fun, leisure, and even entertainment, all attributes that are perceived as not signifying the serious learning that is a prerequisite for high-grade and top-level performance in competitive board examinations in the 10th and 12th grades.

In our conversations with parents, many saw educational technology platforms as an excuse their children used to avoid doing the hard work. According to them, online learning platforms and resources could not substitute the role of a school or a tuition teacher in the academic lives of their children. In our interviews with a 15-year-old student Kajol and her mother Neeta, we heard them express trust in Kajol's tuition and school teachers. Unlike educational technology platforms or YouTube, Neeta could regularly message Kajol's teachers and inquire if Kajol was a well-behaved and high-performing student in her class. Neeta also followed Kajol's teachers on social media apps and established a semi-formal relationship with them to ensure that the teachers would take an interest in her daughter and provide her with more attention and guidance to ensure she excels in exams. She explained, "I do not trust these online companies with my Kajol's education. How do I monitor her if she is on the phone? I cannot constantly check if she is studying or looking at cute cat videos. When Kajol uses YouTube, she starts with videos about gravity or some scientific concept from her course and the next auto-played video is about dogs or ice-cream cones and there goes her attention". Educational technologies and platforms are often considered a distraction from serious and goal-oriented learning methods and practices. Many parents emphasized how educational technologies "sound fancy, but do not instill a sense of discipline or motivation for excellence in students" (Neeta). Instead, technologies distract young people and make them think they can multitask, often leading to poor performance and grades in competitive exams.

We interviewed five students in 10th grade preparing for their board exams in India. We asked them about their experiences using educational technologies and online learning resources and the meanings they ascribed to these technological interventions to improve their academic performance. Zeba, a 16-year-old student in the 10th grade in a public school

in Delhi said, "I cannot study in a disciplined manner unless there is a sword hanging on my head. So, if I am not scared of what my teacher will say if I score less, I will not study. Most of these platforms are just textbook materials more decorated or beautifully displayed. These platforms haven't cracked the trick of making learning easy and fun. Instead, my math teacher at school is funnier and he makes us laugh all the time while teaching us different theorems and other difficult concepts. It feels much better to show your report card to your school teacher than any online person you have not met once in your life".

Our analysis of how students, teachers, and parents perceive educational technologies, platforms, and online resources reveals two primary themes:

1. Most EdTech platforms and content are designed based on the assumption that unrestricted and easy access to these technologies will encourage students to overcome socioeconomic inequities and modernize their approach to education and learning. Instead, our observations and analysis indicate that in the absence of integration of critical thinking and self-directed learning in the educational system and infrastructure from an early stage, traditional approaches to learning are still considered robust educational methods, while technological interventions are deemed elitist, entertaining, and a viable supplement to the conventional student-teacher learning mode practices in schools and tuition classes.

2. ICT solutions for educational inequities or quality issues are often top-down and removed from the local and cultural realities of students and the communities they inhabit. Most EdTech platforms and online resources foreground a West-influenced approach to education: individualized, customized, and malleable. This approach might be significant in the contexts of the global North, but in countries like India where competition is high and higher education is still largely publicly funded and based on merit, students from low income families rely on tried-and-tested learning methods that prioritize high grades and replication. EdTech platforms and online resources cannot substitute the experiences offered in place-based learning environments through interpersonal interactions, peer bonding, and locally relevant strategies of teaching-learning even with their limitations.

    While ICT for education is designed to allow more creativity and experimentality among students, learners and their families in the low-income communities of India continue to consider digital technologies as frivolous, distracting, and a source of entertainment for rich children. Many parents were afraid that if their children started developing a new approach to learning because of digital technologies, their grades would suffer and they would miss out on critical career opportunities.

Though students were inclined to use EdTech platforms and online resources to develop an experimental learning experience, they used these resources to complement the place-based learning methods used in their schools and coaching classes. Even when the states and private companies have promoted these technologies as the progressively improving substitute for classroom teaching-learning, our ethnographic insights and participant interviews suggest that place-based learning continues to align more closely with the academic infrastructure and techne in India, thus preparing students better to fulfil their goal to become gainfully employed, their prime aspiration. Even when EdTech platforms and online resources argue for the need to make learning a creative and individualized endeavor, they continue to replicate conventional educational experiences through standardization to ensure the scalability and profitability of their content and services. As students ascribe novel meanings to EdTech and crave experiences that conventional classrooms do not offer, they also devise strategies to make their EdTech engagements more meaningful and more closely aligned with their individual aspirations, which are informed by the cultural and socioeconomic realities in their communities. In the next section, we will explore these unique strategies designed to localize their engagements with EdTech.

7. DIY Learning

Many students described EdTech as a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to learning. They compared propriety EdTech platforms such as BYJU's and Vedantu with open-access resources on YouTube. According to these students, propriety platforms are similar to luxury brands. As Ashish explained, "These companies sell the same content at a much higher price. I can find everything on YouTube that I want to do myself. And that is what these companies don't understand. I might DIY for fun. I won't do it when it comes to making career-defining decisions about what questions to practice to get a perfect score on the exam. My schoolteachers and tuition sir have spent years teaching this stuff—they know better than I do". Students like Ashish also negotiate around the positioning of ICT for education as creating a level playing field for all young people. As Bhatia explains (2024), "promoting digital technologies as an elixir to the daily socio-economic and cultural discrimination children experience effectively transfers the responsibility to initiate social change from the governments to vulnerable children. ICT for education encourages children to take more responsibility and design their personal curricula, and timetable, and set up goals and deadlines but these children do not receive the necessary resources to develop these skills early on. The design and infrastructure of ICT for education are built on the logic of self-responsibility, i.e., once students have access to these technological interventions, they will overcome existing inequities and become better and modern learners. When increasing digital access among children does not improve their living conditions in the slums, children are blamed for using their digital technologies for non-developmental purposes". The students we interviewed were reluctant to assume responsibility for their academic progress and relied wholeheartedly on the guidance and instruction of their teachers and parents. They were also unsure if they had the skills to design DIY curricula using diverse learning resources dispersed across different platforms on the Internet. School students who were in the 10th and 12th grades were particularly nervous about experimenting with learning styles or course materials because they wanted to excel in their board exams and score high grades, which are required for admission to a good college. Rekha, a 17-year-old girl in 11th grade at a public school in Delhi, explained: "These EdTech platforms expect me to be self-disciplined and confident about my ability to source the right material for studying. That is insane. I cannot even wake up in the morning on my own; my mother wakes me up. I understand that these platforms and online resources may let me experience more autonomy as a learner, but I thrive in situations where I have sustained continuous adult guidance and mentorship. I cannot score well unless I have a coach who has filtered all the relevant learning material, explained it to me in great detail as often as I need the explanation, and created a list of deadlines or even study goals. Even when schools and tuition classes have a lot of students, I can still rely on the question paper bank they create and practice those questions again and again to score high marks".

Students, parents, and teachers acknowledged the intent of DIY learning to encourage students to use their leisure time to study more and revise their standard course material in a different format and style. Even in such cases, EdTech use was far from completely autonomous for the student. Pathak-Shelat and DeShano (2014) observed that "Digital technologies are marketed as youth-oriented technologies giving "power" to youth (youth agency), but we observed a web of school and parental controls surrounding their use" (p. 10). Even a decade after this observation, there is much adult control surrounding the way youths use technology. According to Ravi, the father of a 14-year-old student in Delhi, EdTech can be a good tool to replace frivolous engagement on mobile phones with learning-centered entertainment. He encouraged his daughter, Ritu, to spend her free time using EdTech apps on his phone instead of watching television or relentlessly scrolling through reels on social media. EdTech, according to him, offers a great opportunity to channel young people's desire to be on the Internet towards learning-focused online activities. As he explained, "I have subscribed to BYJU's and I have downloaded the DIKSHA app on my phone. Ritu is allowed to spend 20 minutes on my smartphone every day and I encourage her to use these apps. These apps provide visuals for difficult concepts in math or science

and can retain student's attention. Also, she can create her list of to-watch videos from these apps or on YouTube based on what she is learning in her school or tuition". When we asked Ritu how and when she used EdTech platforms and online resources, she echoed her father and described EdTech as an antidote to "relentless scrolling on Instagram or Facebook". According to her, EdTech resources online were exciting because she could create her own watch list or reading list. Sometimes, she watched these resources and came up with interesting questions. When she raised these questions in her classes, her teachers would be impressed and praise her for putting in more effort and studying additional material.

Alternatively, some teachers we interviewed said that EdTech platforms and online learning resources could be misleading and confuse students about course content and how to prepare for their competitive board exams. They said that most EdTech content and learning strategies focused on standardizing learning and teaching, and so focused on conceptual clarity and short question-answer testing/evaluation methods. Exams in schools include questions that required long answers, explanations, and abstract-level thinking. Additionally, these platforms cannot provide answer sheets for theoretical courses or long-form essays. Neelam, a school principal in Ahmedabad, explained: "EdTech can make you think that you will perform well on exams with short questions, such as multiple choice questions, or math, or science equations. And then you use the same approach for subjects such as English or Gujarati and even social studies. In these subjects, students in the state board schools are required to write long answers, 2 or 3 pages long. Your YouTube video cannot teach you the different learning styles for different subjects. And EdTech cannot also evaluate these long answers".

Exploring the local contexts deeper, we asked Neelam and other teachers at three low-income public schools in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and Delhi to share their experiences with using DIKSHA for teaching and learning in school classrooms. All the teachers unanimously agreed that the DIKSHA app was difficult to use and did not include any novel resources (videos or animations) that were not easily available on YouTube. We observed as they scrolled through the app and illustrated how they created a DIY kit of teaching resources from the app. Most videos and practice exercises were open-sourced and were not of high quality. The app also did not include interactive learning material for all of the lesson plans at different grades. Many lesson plans were missing and did not cover the course material comprehensively, or lacked a detailed explanation of concepts. Even when the teachers could find relevant resources to use in their classrooms, there were other issues related to the technical infrastructure required to use the app and the learning and teaching e-content. Mahesh, a social studies teacher at a public school in Vadodara, explained: "We do not have fans in the schools, how can I expect to have a projector in every room? We have to design learning strategies that take into account such physical discomforts of the students when they have to study on a hot summer day. I use a lot of examples from their communities, I localize the stories I create to teach concepts, and I also rely on paper-based displays: big maps, or the physical atlas. They think developing technology is the end-all solution but it isn't. Many students don't have phones and if I rely on EdTech then I am putting these students at a disadvantage".

Our observations in public schools in low-income areas across cities corroborate Mahesh's experiences with EdTech for teaching and learning. Though students were genuinely curious about new technologies for learning, their curiosity was limited to a desire to play with technology and acquire familiarity. They used these technologies because they were novel and entertaining. The students, however, did not consider these technologies as "legitimate sources of knowledge" and continued to trust their teachers at schools and classrooms for serious academic guidance and mentorship. They were also aware of the structural inequities inherent to accessing these technologies for self-development and empowerment. Many students in low-income communities do not have the monetary resources to access EdTech, even when many of these online resources are open-access and state-funded. While students did not have any difficulty navigating the EdTech apps or looking for free resources online, they often found these increasingly

tech-enabled resources to be lacking a connection to their culture and reality. For instance, one student in a Gujarati medium school mentioned that it was difficult for him to find interesting and authentic online resources in Gujarati. He had a list of a few YouTubers who created content in his language, but again, such content was limited and could not be localized to speak to his reality and experiences. Open-access online resources, even in countries like India with a large population using diverse local languages, are still directed to meet the global standards of an English-speaking and international community of learners. According to students who center their local lives and place-based learning, EdTech interventions lack inclusive design and technical infrastructures to accommodate cultural realities, indigenous lifestyles, structural limitations, socioeconomic conditions, and the personal aspirations of young learners. Instead, EdTech for development standardizes teaching-learning practices, often at the expense of place-based learning, and reinforces the neoliberal definitions of development and progress.

8. Conclusions

Our study was conducted to understand how students negotiate their use of educational technologies, such as different EdTech platforms (DIKSHA, BYJU's, and Vedantu), and open-access learning resources, such as YouTube and Google. We conducted family ethnographies in the homes, neighborhoods, and schools/classrooms of 23 students from low-income communities in three cities in India: Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Vadodara.

Our findings reveal that though students were inclined to use EdTech platforms and online resources to develop an experimental learning experience, they used these resources to complement the place-based learning methods used in their schools and coaching classes. Even though the states and private companies have promoted these technologies as a progressively improving substitute for classroom teaching and learning, our ethnographic insights and participant interviews suggest that place-based learning continues to align more closely with the academic infrastructure and techne in India, thus preparing students better to fulfil their goal to become gainfully employed. Additionally, even though EdTech platforms and online resources argue for the need to make learning a creative and individualized endeavor, they continue to replicate conventional educational experiences through standardization to ensure the scalability and profitability of their content and services.

The findings from our research argue for the need to use EdTech platforms as one of the many tech tools to enhance the learning experience of students without replacing or downplaying the importance of the place-based and culturally-sensitive learning that takes place in classrooms and playgrounds of schools. We need to rethink how to design our technologies and how to personalize them, and create inclusive experiences for students and teachers. Creating educational technologies that are supportive of the culturally relevant practices and learning aspirations of students is paramount to recalibrating and reimagining the public education system. EdTech in its current form is based on principles of dissemination alone; EdTech platforms and companies need to step into the realm of understanding how these technologies are received by the users, and how to improved such human–technology interactions for inclusive experiences.

These findings are based on our study with only a specific group of children: urban, low-income, and in the age group of 14 to 18 years, enrolled in middle or high school. These children do not reflect the entire complexity and diversity of Indian learners. In another research project on DIY learning and online platforms, we did notice a more positive inclination towards creativity and experimentation when learners were in higher education (aged 18 years and above) and were looking to gain expertise in career fields that have newly evolved in the Indian market, such as graphic and UX designing (Bhatia et al. 2023). The group that we have studied, however, remains largely invisible in research and their experiences and concerns also merit attention.

The challenge of educating large and diverse masses, located across difficult terrains is a serious concern for several countries of the global South. The process of standardization

often excludes the user needs, experiences, and lived realities of niche groups, especially marginalized communities, thus making such platforms inaccessible to vulnerable people. When used sensitively, EdTech can become a supplementary resource in addressing this challenge. We argue that reconceptualizing development to account for students' and teachers' lived realities, cultural experiences, and personal aspirations will enable designing and deploying educational technologies to holistically address learning needs and practices. Integrating critical thinking, self-directional learning, and experimentation from an early stage in the mainstream educational system and infrastructure will help children derive more value from EdTech, as well as place-based learning. Such an approach to educational technologies for development should have three core principles: 1. Inclusive and bottom-up approach to development and deployment of educational technologies; 2. Centering learning practices and place-based needs of students-teachers; and 3. Prioritizing learners' everyday learning practices, economic conditions, and socio-cultural contexts. Our study points out that taking a situated approach to EdTech in development, rather than universalism, may help us channel their true potential.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Submission ID: 2021-0310). According to the IRB at UW-Madison, "A designated ED/SBS IRB member conducted an expedited review of the above-referenced initial application. The study was approved by the IRB member. The study qualified for expedited review pursuant to 45 CFR 46.110 and, if applicable, 21 CFR 56.110 and 38 CFR 16.110 in that the study presents no more than minimal risk involves: (5) Data, documents, records, or specimens; (6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings; (7) (a) Behavioral research; (7) (b) Social science methods".

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: No data is available to protect the privacy and security of the participants.

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Notes

1. Here, neoliberalism refers to an ideological framework that prioritizes market-driven approaches, competition, and privatization over public and communal interests in education technology. This critique highlights concerns such as the marketization of education, where EdTech platforms often prioritize profit margins over educational outcomes and equitable access, exacerbating educational inequalities by creating a digital divide. Additionally, neoliberalism encourages partnerships between educational institutions and private corporations, leading to the corporatization of education and influencing curriculum design and pedagogical approaches to align more with market needs than holistic educational values (Ball 2012; Giroux 2004; Hill and Kumar 2009). By critiquing EdTech platforms through the lens of neoliberalism, it becomes possible to address these issues and advocate for more equitable, democratic, and inclusive approaches to integrating technology into education.

2. As ethnographers, it is essential for us to acknowledge our subjectivity and the influence of our political and social identities. Throughout our field immersion and research work (including analysis), we offer a clear and comprehensive account of our positionality, enabling our participants and readers to assess how our personal perspectives may have shaped our engagement with them, the fieldwork, and the analysis. Addressing the researcher's positionality is often referred to as a reflexive turn in ethnography. This approach involves scrutinizing our roles, interactions, power dynamics, and other embodied actions as ethnographers in the field, and recognizing how our positionality affects our relationships with the research site and its participants. Immersing oneself in the field and the lives and communities of the participants is inherently a personal and subjective experience (Bhatia 2024). As ethnographers, we argue that our analysis and representations are always only "partial approximations" of our participants' lived experiences.

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Essay

Social Movements, Social Change, and International Cooperation: Strategic Insights from Latin America and the Caribbean

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Abstract: In the wake of the advancements made in civil and human rights in the twentieth century, social movements have come to be regarded as a driving force behind social change. Nevertheless, evidence demonstrates that social transformations driven by certain citizen mobilisations do not always prove beneficial to the most marginalised groups. In January 2023, acts of vandalism were perpetrated against the buildings of public institutions in Brasilia. Similarly, anti-democratic mobilisations have been observed in Colombia against the peace agreement with the FARC and in Chile against the proposed more inclusive constitution. Globally, anti-democracy and other movements that are in opposition to human rights are gaining ground, and their effects are having a detrimental impact on the environment in which organisations that are advocating for excluded sectors are operating. However, Latin American perspectives of social and behaviour change (SBC) emphasise engagement with social movements to contribute to social justice, creating alliances to amplify the voices of those most affected without interfering with the organic nature of citizen-led movements. This prompts the following inquiries: Can we categorize as social movements those with popular roots but espousing hegemonic interests? How can the Latin American tradition of social movement action and reflection inform strategies for social change? How can SBC strategies counteract anti-human rights movements and empower social movements prone to inclusion? This essay addresses these questions.

Keywords: social movements; social and behaviour change (SBC); anti-rights movements; international cooperation; communication for social change; Latin America and the Caribbean

1. Introduction

One of the key emerging issues in the design and implementation of social and behavioural change programmes and strategies is the role of social movements in the processes of societal change. In recent years, there has been a notable shift in focus towards the significance of communication and collective action within the context of social movements particularly within the framework of a new research agenda in communication for development and social change (Obregón and Tufte 2017). Indeed, the relationship with social movements and the possibility of involving them in programmatic efforts has become an increasing priority for various NGOs and international cooperation organisations (Bendaña 2006; SUN Movement Secretariat 2014; Bloom et al. 2016; UNICEF 2023).

In examining the dynamics of societal change and the role of diverse actors in the design of strategies and programmes aimed at social and behavioural changes, the role of social movements is becoming increasingly significant. As Stompka (1993) observes, society is in a state constant flux. The intentional processes aimed at social change that are promoted by external agents do not operate on static realities but rather on constantly evolving ones. In each society, territory, or community and across a range of social change agendas, there are social actors, including social movements, that are actively driving

change (Vega 2013). For example, Touraine (1977) positions social movements as the central protagonists of societal transformation, viewing them as key agents in the process through which society continuously recreates itself.

Given their capacity for agency, the majority of studies on social movements and social change have focused on the various strategies they employ, including their mobilisation capacity (Andersen and Taylor 2007) and their forms of communication, which encompass the role of communication technologies, their messages, and their narratives (Ganz 2010; Polletta 2016; Cadavid et al. 2017).

Furthermore, studies on social movements and social change have typically assumed that social movements are a primary driver of social change in favour of human rights and social justice (Castells 2012; Milan 2013; Peruzzo 2014; Barranquero Carretero and Meda González 2015; Barbas and Postill 2017).

Nevertheless, several scholars have proposed reconsidering the epistemological bias that associates social movements with progressivism. This reconsideration suggests that conservative and pro-capitalist movements also implement strategies to impact political decisions and impose their worldviews on society. Pleyers (2019) notes a shift in the political orientation of social movements since 2016, prompted by global events such as the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, the authoritarian turn in Turkey, the coup against Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, and the "No" victory in Colombia's peace referendum.

The advent of anti-rights movements within these movements presents a considerable challenge to social change programmes that are focused on issues such as children's and young people's rights and women's rights. A number of studies have identified the strategies and consequences of conservative movements' social actions, which have had a significant counter-impact on the areas where NGOs and cooperation agencies operate. Examples of this phenomenon include anti-vaccine movements (Fernández-Niño and Baquero 2019; Orlandi et al. 2022); anti-rights campaigns such as "Do not Mess with My Children" (Rivera 2017; Balieiro 2018); and the "No" movement in Colombia's peace plebiscite (Arroyave and Romero-Moreno 2023).

It is evident that social movements are intricate and multifaceted, frequently diverging from the changes proposed by programmes designed to guarantee human rights and reinforce democratic processes. Indeed, in contexts such as Latin America and the Caribbean, there are often significant divergences between local community conceptions of rights and liberal democratic understanding of rights (Pérez Quintero and Vega Casanova 2024). While some social movements have influenced public policy (Herrera Huérfano et al. 2024) and reforms in favour of minorities (Jácome 2010; Montero Barriga 2018), others have promoted attacks on democracy or laws against women's rights (Rodríguez Rondón 2017; Corredor 2019) or the right of young people to comprehensive sexuality education.

It is of the utmost importance to consider the diversity and autonomy of social movements when including them in the design of social action programmes and strategies. Despite a recurring interest in homogenising the realities of countries, regions, and continents below the Equator line, it is evident that we are confronted with a multitude of realities, characterised by diverse and autonomous dynamics and processes of change. In Latin America and the Caribbean, social movements have been observed to promote or reject reforms and, in some cases, even to bring their representatives into legislative decision-making spaces or the presidency. However, this characteristic is not uniform across all countries and regions of the "Souths", meaning, in the plural, the misnamed "Global South".

This gives rise to significant challenges in integrating work with social movements into programmes and strategies for social and behavioural change. It is essential to commence engagement with these types of movements from a comprehensive understanding of their underlying logic. This enables the formulation of strategies to establish alliances and reinforce those movements that espouse similar values and are committed to advancing collective welfare and social justice. In other instances, the objective is to advance counter-narratives that challenge the threats to democracy and human rights.

In this essay we address the following points: It is pertinent to question whether movements with deep roots and community strength, which claim hegemonic and elitist interests, can be considered social movements. Additionally, the question of how the Latin American tradition of action and reflection on social movements contribute to communication strategies aimed at social change. These questions consider engagement with social movements as a means of contributing to social justice and reflection on mechanisms for building strategic alliances to amplify the voices and ideas of those most affected, without directly interfering with the organic nature and flows of citizen-led social movements and community structures. Ultimately, how can international cooperation enhance the efficacy of social movements for human rights while challenging those that oppose them? An earlier version of this paper was presented at a Conference (Ayres and Vega-Casanova 2023).

2. The Role of Social Movements in Social Change

Social movements have been approached from a variety of theoretical and conceptual perspectives across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political science, social psychology, and history (Almeida and Cordero Ulate 2017; Inclán 2018; Somma 2020). Inclán (2018) cites a number of notable interdisciplinary anthologies on the subject of social movements in Latin America. These include works by authors such as Eckstein (1989), Warren and Jackson (2002), Langer and Muñoz (2002), Mestries et al. (2009), González González Arana and Schneider (2016), and the edited text on indigenous movements by Gutiérrez and Escárzaga (2006). This broad conceptualisation and this interdisciplinary approach highlight the complexity and dynamism of the topic, which has been fundamentally explored through case study methodology. Consequently, there has been limited scope for comparative studies in Latin America (Inclán 2018).

Regarding his conceptualisation, Tilly (1978) describes social movements as a sustained series of interactions between those in power positions and those claiming to represent a collective without formal representation. These movements publicly advocate for alterations in the distribution or exercise of power, supporting these demands through public demonstrations, thereby serving as a crucial conduit for popular engagement in public policy. From the perspective of resource mobilisation theory, McCarthy and Zald (1977) consider social movements to be organised efforts by individuals or groups seeking social or political change through mobilising available resources, such as money, labour, and the media.

Melucci (1989) places emphasis on the concept of collective identity and the role of culture in the configuration of social movements. He posits that these movements are not solely concerned with political or economic objectives; rather, they are deeply rooted in society's cultural and symbolic dimensions. In defining social movements, authors such as Escobar and Álvarez (1992) posit that they are organised collective actors engaged in sustained political or cultural contestation through institutional and extra-institutional actions. In their analyses of social movements in Latin America, Somma (2020) and Inclán (2018) identify many objectives and the intricate complexities of their organisational structures.

Almeida (2019) characterises social movements as excluded collectives that interact with economic and political elites to achieve social change. He asserts that, to be classified as social movements, they must present collective challenges supported by excluded social groups seeking to protect themselves from social, political, economic, and environmental harms. Participants tend to have limited financial and political power.

In their analysis of social movements in Latin America, Somma (2020) identifies a range of organisations from small local groups to broad territorially extensive movements with recognisable leaders and structures. Examples of the later include the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil or the Zapatistas in Mexico. Inclán (2018) additionally posits that the objectives of these movements are multifarious, encompassing the acquisition of political relevance, the establishment of organisational structures, the recruiting of activists, the mobilisation of support, the generation of funds, the influence of public opinion, and the

combatting of adversarial campaigns. The two authors concur that, despite the difficulty of reaching a consensus on the outcomes of social movements, this field presents significant opportunities for future research.

In the context of participatory development communication, social movements play a pivotal role in influencing the course of development processes by enabling marginalised voices to engage directly with the structures of power. Obregón and Tufte (2017) posited that communication theory highlights the significance of collective action and the media's strategies as pivotal instruments for engendering social transformation. Social movements frequently emerge in response to perceived inequalities and injustices, providing a platform for communities to articulate their grievances and mobilise for transformation. These movements employ communication as a tool for both organisation and mobilisation, as well as for challenging dominant narratives and raising awareness of critical social issues. The function of communication within these is not merely the dissemination of information, but it is also a means of empowerment, enabling individuals to participate in the construction of new narratives that reflect their lived experiences. This is consistent with the overarching goals of participatory development communication, which underscores the active involvement of communities in the development process and underscores the pivotal role of grassroots mobilisation in fostering long-term social change.

There are numerous examples of this type of initiative in feminist movements, as evidenced by the case of Puntos de Encuentro in Nicaragua (Rodríguez 2004). Similarly, rural agricultural workers have also been the focus of such initiatives, as illustrated by the case of the Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra (MST) in Brazil (Peruzzo 2024). Such initiatives have also been observed in indigenous movements, as evidenced by the case of El Tejido de Comunicación of the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca in Colombia (ACIN) (Cadavid et al. 2017). Nevertheless, some scholars argue that despite the extensive research on social movements in Latin America from the social science perspective, there is a dearth of studies examining the communication processes employed by these movements, particularly beyond the instrumentalist lens (Espinel-Rubio et al. 2020).

3. About Social Movements in Latin America

Several researchers have identified a range of social movements in Latin America, based on their respective fields of conflict, the principal actors involved, and the collective demands made. In his 1986 (Calderón Gutiérrez 1986) and 2010 (Calderón Gutérrez 2010) works, Calderón identifies social movements related to peasantry, quality of life, labour, gender, youth, and urban services. A common thread throughout the region is opposition to neoliberal policies and the effects of globalisation. Almeida and Cordero Ulate (2017) classify this resistance into three principal groups: workers, students, and the informal sector; New Social Movements (NMSs), including feminists and environmentalists; and rural and indigenous groups.

Workers are most active in protests due to the threat of economic crisis and privatisation. Students, particularly in Chile, have spearheaded notable movements against the privatisation of education. NSMs encompass feminists, environmentalists, the LGBT community, and consumer advocates, who address conflicts over lifestyles and identity. They are distinguished for their campaigns against environmental threats and the privatisation of health services. Rural and indigenous groups have challenged IMF policies and transnational corporations that threaten their lands and health, as evidenced by the Kuna and Ngobe communities in Panama and banana workers in Central America.

The nature of social movements in Latin America has undergone a significant transformation in response to shifts in the political and economic landscape. Zibechi (2006) posits that the 1990s marked a pivotal change with these movements assuming a prominent role in resisting neoliberal policies, privatisations, and structural adjustment programmes. This resistance resulted in not only mass mobilisations and popular uprisings but also a reshaping of the political landscape, facilitating the rise of progressive governments in

countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, and Venezuela. However, Zibechi (2006) observes that these very successes have resulted in a shift in the dynamics between social movements and state power.

In addition to the diverse movements identified by Calderón Gutérrez (2010), Almeida and Cordero Ulate (2017), and Zibechi (2006), scholars such as Inclán (2018) and Bringel and Falero (2016) emphasise the importance of examining how social movements interact with the state, particularly in the context of progressive governments in Latin America. Inclán observes that while traditional social movements such as those representing workers and students continue to play a significant role, newer actors, including indigenous, feminist, and LGBT groups, have introduced new dynamics to the political landscape by contesting issues such as corruption, political violence, and social inequality. Bringel and Falero (2016) further observe that these movements frequently encounter intricate relationships with progressive governments. They may collaborate to advance reforms but also diverge in their policy approaches, particularly about resource extraction and development projects. This illustrates the dynamic evolution of Latin American social movements, which navigate the challenges of supporting and resisting state power while persistently striving to influence public policy and safeguard their interests.

In their analysis of recent decades, Somma (2020) identifies two significant shifts in the region. The first is the weakening of working class and peasant movements, which previously advocated for housing, land, and social security during the import substitution period (1930–1960). The second is the emergence of fragmented movements in the 1970s, driven by the crisis of the populist state and the expansion of authoritarian governments. These new movements espouse particular causes and adopt decentralised and pluralistic organisational forms, reflecting non-class identities and interests. While there is consensus on these changes, Somma emphasises the need for empirical studies that delve deeper into each of these periods.

Moreover, Munck and Sankey (2020) underscore the continued evolution of the political landscape for Latin American social movements in the 21st century, particularly in the context of challenges posed by internal contradictions and external conservative forces to progressive governments. It is observed that while movements such as the Brazilian MST and feminist organisations in El Salvador made progress in avoiding co-optation, many movements experienced a weakening of popular mobilisation as activists were absorbed into state structures. This dynamic gave rise to strategic dilemmas for social movements, particularly in terms of balancing the necessity for systemic change with the risk of becoming excessively integrated into existing power structures. The ongoing evolution of social movements in Latin America is characterised by maintaining autonomy while engaging with the state.

It is crucial to underscore the significance of decolonial perspectives on social movements, particularly those that incorporate intersectionality. This is exemplified in the work of Gudynas (2021), as well as in feminist perspectives, including contributions by Rita Segato (2007), María Lugones (2011), and Claudia Korol (2016). These perspectives challenge the diversity of women's movements including those at the grassroots and popular organisational levels. In many instances, these movements do not explicitly identify as feminist but nevertheless advocate for transformative change against violence and multiple forms of oppression. Similarly, the youth movements of the last two decades in a globalised context (Ramírez Varela 2020) have diverse interests, ranging from social justice to climate justice (de Armenteras Cabot 2021). They employ different political, aesthetic, and communicative perspectives, including cyberactivism (Mare 2020).

4. Conservative Social Movements

The importance of studying conservative social movements has become increasingly apparent in the contemporary political milieu, witnessing the ascendance of novel actors espousing conservative ideologies (López Pacheco 2021). This phenomenon, observable both globally and regionally, not only implies significant changes in political dynamics

but also highlights the urgent need to understand their current power, strategies, and influence. The increasing significance of these movements necessitates a comprehensive examination to ascertain their impact and the novel configurations they propose within the contemporary political landscape.

It has been observed that the nature of the desired changes among citizens mobilised around various social issues does not always align with the interests of the most vulnerable, marginalised, and excluded populations. In numerous instances, the demands have been directed against democracy itself. A case in point is the recent incident in Brazil, on 8 January 2023, when buildings representing the power of democratic institutions in Brasilia were invaded and vandalised. This phenomenon is not confined to Latin America; other examples include the mobilisations against the peace agreement between the government and the FARC in Colombia and the protests against the inclusion of rights in the new Chilean constitution. Globally, there has been a notable increase in the number of anti-democratic, anti-vaccine, anti-gender equality, and anti-sexual and reproductive health policy demonstrations, as well as other anti-human rights protests. This has resulted in an increasingly hostile environment for organisations that advocate for the rights of marginalised communities.

As Pleyers (2019) notes, the inclusion of the conservative movement is justified by the knowledge gap that stems from the epistemological bias which invariably associates social movements with progressivism. This restricted perspective fails to acknowledge the social action of conservative movements, which also play a substantial role in social change. It is therefore imperative to examine how these movements, like their progressive counterparts, contribute ideas and values to the public sphere.

In the Latin American context, two processes can be identified as antecedents to the emergence of conservative movements. Firstly, in most countries, political constitutions were enacted with a foundation in human rights, accompanied by a shift towards more secular states. In some instances, this occurred during the final quarter of the 20th century as a consequence of the so-called second-generation reforms (Vega 2011), while in other cases, it took place at the beginning of the 21st century. Secondly, there was the ascendance of leftist governments, which enacted policies more favourable to human rights. This resulted in a shift whereby moral values, previously the foundation of the legal structure of the states, became the anti-rights agendas of actors who mobilised either to abolish these policies or to prevent their implementation. In the case of the "pro-life/pro-family" movements, Morán Faúndes (2024) contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding the terminology used to describe these groups: conservative, fundamentalist, or anti-gender.

The term "conservative social movement" describes collective action oriented towards maintaining the status quo and resisting radical change. These movements focus on preserving historical experience and defending enduring beliefs, values, and ideas. They seek to protect intermediate powers from the concentration of personal power, thereby maintaining continuity with the past and favouring stability and tradition over disruptive innovation (Castro 2023).

McEwan and Narayanaswamy (2023) demonstrate how anti-gender movements have acquired political, social, and economic legitimacy. Those who are anti-gender and pro-family are developing sophisticated discourses that serve to justify their position's stance against gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and comprehensive sexuality education. These movements have pushed policies that challenge the scope of gender studies in countries such as Brazil, Poland, and Hungary. They portray gender and sexuality as morally reprehensible excesses of the "liberal West". A recent case in Florida considers a bill prohibiting offering courses in gender studies at public universities (Bernstein 2023). In Latin America, movements such as "Con mis hijos no te metas" ("Don't you mess with my children") are opposed to Comprehensive Education for Sexuality, women's rights, and the LGTBIQ+ population. Additionally, anti-science movements, such as those opposing vaccination, have also made their presence felt in the media and social networks.

A review of the above literature provides significant elements that can be used to answer whether social movements that have deep roots and community strength but claim hegemonic and elitist interests can be considered as such. It is evident that the meaning of the demands made by such movements is not the sole determining factor in whether they can be defined as social movements. It is the agency and practices that are deeply rooted in popular mobilisation that are of more significant consequence.

5. Challenges for Working with Social Movements from the Perspective of International Cooperation

This last section addresses the question of how international cooperation could potentially enhance the impact of social movements that advocate for human rights, while also confronting those who oppose human rights advances.

In the context of international cooperation, there is an intense critical discussion about the approaches to social change, which are strongly focused on controlled individual change. Additionally, there are concerns about the constraints of autonomy within the framework of participation, particularly in participatory processes spearheaded by these organisations that encourage citizens to engage in predefined actions (Tufte 2017; Dutta 2015). In contrast, social movements emerge and develop organically from the experiences and principles of the people involved, and it is therefore important to ensure they are not co-opted by cooperation organisations.

One argument in favour of this line of thought is based on the premise that the root causes of social movements are frequently grievances associated with inequalities, injustice, and power imbalances. Consequently, social mobilisation and civil activism seek to challenge the systems and social norms that have resulted in these inequalities as a fundamental starting point. In conclusion, these participatory practices that facilitate social change are more legitimate when they originate from citizens and are shaped by their own perspectives, rather than being imposed by institutions (Ayres 2021).

Similarly, international cooperation organisations might innovate in their interventions by working directly with social movement leaders, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their practices.

This approach considers the provision of support for child- and youth-focused collective action and social movements encompassing rights to civil participation, assembly, the expression of their world views, quality and accessible education, protection, health and nutrition, and climate justice.

One potential strategy for facilitating evidence-based decision-making regarding the implementation of actions is the implementation of an observatory of social movements. This approach could facilitate articulation between research and citizens' everyday life through participation through social movements, above all, youth-led collective initiatives.

In more detail, an observatory of social movements could seek to comprehend the impact of collective actions on the child rights' agenda focusing on their dynamics, strategies, and tactics. Ultimately, this initiative could generate evidence of young people's social claims and deliberations, which is useful for creating conditions for empowering youth-led movements and influencing policymaking aimed at child rights advocacy.

In light of the considerations above, it would be prudent to contemplate the establishment of a collaborative framework that encompasses systemic actions while also undertaking a reflective process to ascertain the boundaries of such a framework. This would ensure that the concerns of organicity and legitimacy pertaining to citizens' participatory practices are duly addressed.

In alignment with these tenets, a model founded upon two key elements could establish this initiative's essence: firstly, to foster an environment conducive to sustainable social change and, secondly, to encourage the advancement of thought that challenges the prevailing unequal power structures.

In the initial contribution, supporting the enabling environment denotes creating or reinforcing conditions for amplifying the voices of those most affected or rendering

hitherto invisible voices audible. This entails initially mapping the social movements in specific contexts within the Latin American and Caribbean region and subsequently analysing their demands for both pro-rights and anti-right movements, thereby generating evidence for advocacy purposes. Furthermore, the initiative could aim to strengthen strategic alliances with other organisations working on children's and young people's rights, facilitate dialogues between members of civil society and local organisations, gaining in-depth understanding of the issues on the rights agenda, and advocating at higher levels of power for greater space, plurality of voices, and counter-narratives to support these movements. The second contribution is concerned with creating and amplifying the debate on the conditions affecting the realisation of children's and young people's rights. This includes the decolonisation of the development paradigm, the empowerment of community-led processes, the valuation of culture and local knowledge, and addressing the imbalance of power relations by influencing and advocating for children- and youth-based policies.

By considering the potential risks associated with this institutional approach, it is essential to ensure clarity and define boundaries to prevent the interests of social actors from being unduly influenced by the agendas of cooperation organisations or for agencies to foster their own movements inadvertently.

Firstly, it is essential to differentiate between actions that do not inherently entail relations with social movements. Conversely, these are social mobilisation actions which, although they may be beneficial and generate significant contributions, are ultimately institutionalised actions with less organic articulation. To illustrate this, when the leadership and agency of the youth population or youth organisations are promoted and strengthened, this is conducted at an individual level and assumes that they are the beneficiary subjects, and such actions may serve as a basis for strengthening social movements in the medium and long term. However, individual leadership and agency are not always articulated in democratic perspectives.

Secondly, moving away from a perspective of control is essential, both in the actions above and in the relationship with organisations and social movements. It is necessary to adopt a perspective of recognising the autonomy and empowerment of social organisations and movements. In many instances, institutions adopt a paternalistic or co-opting stance, as evidenced by the language used to describe actions and relationships. This language often places the institution at the forefront, using the first-person singular or plural to convey a sense of ownership and control. Examples include statements such as "I create, or we create organizations or movements", "our young people", "our organizations", "the population that works with us", etc. In all of these cases, the process is dismissed as being the opposite of what it should be, and the agency and enunciation are not attributed to the actors of change. Affirming a "we" can contribute to the strengthening of organisational processes, but it is important to understand and assume the autonomy of the movements over the processes and organisations.

Additionally, there is a potential conflict of interest between international organisations, which are typically funded by public sources, and the work that they are able to carry out with social movements, which often find themselves in confrontation with government or state authorities. In many instances, ensuring the rights of children necessitates the formulation or transformation of governmental actions to attain those rights.

Nevertheless, international organisations, especially those within the United Nations system, are dedicated to upholding the principles of neutrality and impartiality in the fulfilment of their mandates. This entails refraining from involvement in political disputes, providing services and support in accordance with identified needs, and avoiding any action that may cause harm.

The challenge for the implementation of an observatory would be to prioritise countries facing the most significant child rights violations and to collaborate with social movements on the basis of a narrative centred on the mandate of children's rights, in order to ensure that it is not understood on the basis of partisan political considerations.

The establishment of an observatory of social movements in Latin America would satisfy this need by fostering a community of thought, learning, and socialisation of the best practices within the region. In addition, an observatory could serve as a conduit between organisations and social movements, facilitating a collaborative process to ascertain their needs in terms of support and guidance. In essence, a proposal of this nature entails a process that delves deeply into both the epistemological questions of origin and history as well as the more pragmatic concerns pertaining to daily practices.

The concept of an observatory of social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, as put forth by Stompka (1993), is designed to comprehend the dynamics of involving realities across a range of issues on the region's agenda for change. This understanding would facilitate the determination of strategies for strategic articulation, particularly in regard to the role of various actors.

As previously stated, the potential benefits of understanding the dynamics of social movements include the ability to identify those social movements with which synergies could be created, as they share some common objectives. This can be achieved through actions such as enhancing members' communication and agency capacities and facilitating the creation of spaces where their voices can be heard. Furthermore, this can be based on identifying movements that are in opposition to rights and the actions they promote, such as anti-democratic, anti-science, and anti-rights movements. This can be conducted to enhance their arguments and narratives, aiming to communicate alternative elements based on science, validated and recognised indigenous knowledge, and international agreements such as human rights to society and decision-makers.

6. Conclusions

In consideration of the three questions addressed in this essay, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Is it possible to consider whether social movements, which have deep roots and robust community strength but which claim hegemonic and elitist interests, can be classified as such? In light of the above, it can be posited that the significance of the demands in question is not the sole determining factor in classifying processes with agency and practices firmly rooted in popular mobilisation, which constitute social movements. While there has been a long tradition of studying social movements that promote democratisation and social inclusion and defend human rights, the last decade has seen the emergence of social movements representing hegemonic sectors that defend conservative traditions and often oppose rights and democracy. These movements have had a significant impact, in some cases with setbacks, on the issues proposed by the rights promotion agendas of international cooperation, thus posing a substantial challenge.

What can the Latin American tradition of action and reflection on social movements contribute to strategies aimed at social change? In answer to the second question, it can be argued that the current tradition of women's, gender, youth, and indigenous peoples' movements, among others, as well as studies about them from a Latin American perspective, provides a broad spectrum of opportunities for confluence and articulation within the framework of the work of NGOs and international cooperation agencies. However, the recent emergence of anti-rights movements also presents a significant challenge.

How can international cooperation generate added value for social movements for human rights while also challenging those that oppose them? In terms of the contribution of international cooperation to an articulated work with social movements, a number of potential actions can be identified, including the following:

a. It is essential to provide support for the enabling environment by creating or reinforcing conditions that amplify the voices of those most affected or render invisible voices visible.

b. It is recommended that direct support be provided to the leaders of these rights movements, with a particular focus on enhancing their technical capacities in relation to communication tactics, leadership, and the formation of alliances with key sectors. In this

regard, it is crucial to integrate capacity-building approaches into communication strategies from a decolonial perspective (Vega-Casanova et al. 2023).

c. The creation and amplification of debate on the conditions affecting the realisation of children's and young people's rights must include the decolonisation of the development paradigm, the empowerment of community-led processes, the valuation of culture and local knowledge, and addressing the imbalance of power relations.

d. The promotion of narratives based on scientific evidence, validated and recognised ancestral indigenous knowledge, and international agreements such as those pertaining to human rights is essential to enable citizens and decision-makers to develop a robust argument against the narratives of anti-science and anti-rights movements.

This is proposed as a gateway to establishing a social movement observatory that incorporates collaboration with academic institutions and civil society organisations. The objective of this observatory would be to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge regarding the dynamics of social movements and the potential avenues for support and accompaniment.

In addition to a preliminary examination of the outcomes and insights gleaned from the experiences of analogous observatories in the region, the following questions, which could be addressed by this observatory, remain to be discussed further:

How do conservative social movements' narratives and communication strategies influence public perception and policymaking in Latin America, and how do these narratives affect democracy and human rights in the region?

How social and behavioural change (SBC) strategies might be employed to counter the influence of social movements that oppose human rights and how these strategies could strengthen movements that advocate for social justice and inclusion in Latin America?

This space would facilitate the possibility of addressing several challenges to international cooperation identified in the essay, including the necessity of acknowledging the autonomy and empowerment of organisations and social movements with regard to their agendas and action strategies. This necessitates the implementation of relationship approaches founded on cooperation and consensus-building, as opposed to paternalistic or co-optation perspectives.

Furthermore, spaces such as this could facilitate the convergence of debates on social movements, which are often perceived as isolated from one another. This may occur within the movements themselves, in academic publications and conferences on the subject, or in the agendas of international cooperation initiatives that include these actors.

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