WOMAASHI
(We press on)

Communications and Activism in the
Ada Songor Salt Women’s Association (ASSWA), Ghana

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Abstract
The purpose of the project is to create a model for improved and expanded participation in an activist network, The Ada Songor Salt Women's Association (ASSWA) by enhancing communications.

ASSWA is an organization of Brave Women (Yihi katseme) salt winners from the Songor lagoon area in southeastern Ghana. They are committed to ensuring that the lagoon and its harvest is a resource for all. ASSWA has found over time that to defend the lagoon and the livelihood of the 45 communities around it, requires that they articulate the experiences and demands of women and marginalized members of the community.

This study examines communications of the ASSWA network within the context of Communications for Change. describes the dialectic within the network, how members discuss issues and resolve differences, how they define and articulate their programmes and demands. It examines if the mobilisation and activism of poor rural women can challenge the dominant discourses of traditional development and patriarchy. Key to learning is abstraction, the linking of issues and abstracting of the problematic causative mechanisms, the project studies this process within the ASSWA context by looking at how the network and its members link their struggles with broader social movements within Ghana and beyond.

The continued agency of the ASSWA is challenged by the poverty of the community within which it operates and by its ability to communicate effectively locally, nationally and internationally. As it stands now, the organisation is active but long-term sustainability may be compromised by the lack of dialogic interactions at all levels of engagement.

This paper creates a model (theory) for more active participation in based on their identified priorities, needs and requirements, in such a way as to promote ‘power participation’. The research was conducted using a critical realist ontological framework and qualitative interview research methodologies.
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1. Chapter 1 – Introduction

Communications, from the perspective of an activist group, is a dialectical process which can change and be changed depending on circumstances, actors and time. It is a social process, relational and in constant flux (Tufte, 2017). Activism encompasses and creates (or refines) relationships between individuals, between individuals and the collective and between the local and the global. In the peaks and troughs of social dynamics, relationships change character and within an organization the levels, nature and quality of participation alters.

1.1. Background to the research and Situation Analysis

1.1.1. Introduction

“Yo katse me? Wamasi! / Brave women? We are here”

The ‘Brave Women’ of the Ada Songor Lagoon are battling on a number of fronts; against encroaching business interests (Langdon, 2007); the neglect of successive neo-liberal national governments (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014); local traditional authorities; district authorities; and possibly most ominously, the gradual erosion of their livelihoods through changing weather patterns and the drying up of the lagoon itself (Boateng, 2012). This is a conflict that pits communal rights against corporate appropriation of natural resources and has led to the emergence of the local ‘subjugated knowledges that contest this new reality’ (Langdon, 2007).

Salt has historically been a significant commodity of exchange for Ghana all along its 500km coastline, it was traded along with gold and cowries throughout the region. Salt production has played a major role in the lives of coastal communities (TWN Africa, 2017). Women have engaged in salt winning around the Songor Lagoon for centuries, there are records of extensive salt production in Ada and Keta from British officials as early as 1780 and their labours are recorded in place names further inland; ‘Fankyenabra’, meaning ‘Bring the salt and come’, is the name of a district in Kumasi, Ghana’s second city and the capital of the erstwhile Ashanti empire (Sutton, 1981). Unlike gold, colonial powers showed little interest in salt, likely because of its relatively low value. Salt production remained largely in the hands of the community producers until the 1970s when large-scale operations moved in, backed in part by foreign capital (Atta-Quayson, 2017). The centrality of salt to life in Ada is illustrated by the Dangme (the language of the region) saying: “Ee yon ngo?” which literally means “Does he/she eat salt?” but which figuratively means “Does that person speak Dangme?” (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014). It is estimated that 80 per cent of people living in and around the Songor are dependent on salt in some way for the livelihoods (Howard, Franco and Shaw, 2018).
Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president, oversaw the creation of the Akosombo dam on the Volta River between 1961 and 1965. The damming of the river had significant and lasting consequences for people living in its wake. The flow of water into the delta diminished considerably (Tsikata, 2006) and the already relatively arid climate of the eastern Ghana coast, changed with reduced rainfall and increased temperatures (Manuh, 1992) leading to significant environmental, social and economic upheaval.

In the 1960s the Ghana government began to intervene in salt production by granting concessions to large private interests all along the coast. In 1974 Vacuum Salts Products was granted an extensive concession at Ada Songor Lagoon area in precisely the same locations where women had been making their living through salt harvesting for centuries (Atta-quayson, 2019). In fact, there, is evidence that the traditional authorities (who are customarily custodians of land rather than owners with the right to sell), with government support, granted exclusive rights to a number of Salt companies within the Songor area (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014). Vacuum Salts built dams across the lagoon and employed armed guards there to prevent the villagers gaining access to the land they deemed to be owned in common. When community resistance threatened company operations, the state intervened by providing security in the form of armed police and army personnel (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014).
People of the area working on the salt flats were arrested on charges of stealing salt and imprisoned by the Ghana Police, who were seen by the community as acting in the interests of the companies. It was during this period that a salt co-operative, the Ada Songor Salt Miners’ Co-operative Society, emerged to organize the salt winners and to act as a focus in the struggle to regain rights over the lagoon (Manuh, 1992).

During a protest against the take-over of the lagoon by private interests, Margaret Kowunor, a pregnant salt winner, was shot and killed by police (Secretaries Committee of the Ada Songor Cooperative, 1989). Outrage at the death of a young woman both galvanized the community and prompted the PNDC government of Jerry Rawlings to enact PNDC Law 287 which held that the Songor Lagoon in trust for these “contiguous” communities (Langdon and Garbary, 2017). Following consultation by Cuban specialists and the communities a ‘Songor Master Plan’ (Third World Network Africa, 2017) emerged which suggested that the considerable salt capability be shared equally between the community collective and private companies. In addition, the plan envisaged government investment in the sustainability of the lagoon and protecting its salt production capacity by the construction of two inlets from the sea (Atta-Quayson,
The Master Plan has never been implemented and no further significant government development activity has occurred in the district.

As noted earlier, salt winning has been traditionally women’s work in Ghana, yet until the emergence of the ‘Brave Women’ they were largely excluded from decision making processes. Interestingly, it was another gender-skewed phenomenon which caused the formation of Ada Songor Salt Women’s Association (ASSWA). As the lagoon began to recede and dry up, and the lack of any government or district support continued, people with resources started to break away from the collective and win salt individually by creating their own pans and pumping brine (salt-water) from the lagoon. While this method of production accelerated the salt crystallisation process for individual owners, it disrupted the traditionally established practice of sustainable resource management to the detriment of the larger community and ultimately reduced the quality of the salt being produced. This phenomenon is known locally as ‘Atsiakpo’ (Langdon, 2007). In effect, this individualization of the collective resource reflects the larger society where access to finance allows for the concentration of individual ownership and the destruction of communal resources. It was almost exclusively men who had the funds to create and develop their own salt pans, since women lacked capital, they became employees and the dynamic in the community altered. As one woman put it: “We, women, serve as labourers for these miners. Meanwhile we are both natives of Ada. They pay me one cedi for a pan that can contain two buckets. As a labourer, you scoop the salt and carry to a designated place and get paid one cedi for it. So, if you are not strong and can only fetch 10 pans you get paid 10 cedis.” (Frederick Asiamah, 2017). Atsiakpo is undermining the collective identity and cohesion of the lagoon communities and flies in the face of their rallying cry: ‘Resources for All’ (Langdon, 2007).

This alteration in production relations and the gendered division of labour had a significant impact on the Songhor communities and saw a return to activism. In 2010 the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF) was formed and organised community rights campaigns alongside Radio Ada. The new activism cast a critical eye on previous movements’ exclusion of women from the decision-making processes. This led to a conscious effort within ASAF to ensure women are not only playing a leading role in the movement, but also in articulating the struggle. In was within this atmosphere that ASSWA was formed to stand on its own beside ASAF and Radio Ada (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014).

1.1.2. ASSWA

ASSWA organizes women from within forty-five communities around the Songor Lagoon. They say of themselves: ‘We are non-literate, many of us, because of poverty and cultural barriers, but deeply knowledgeable about the developments, plans, laws and agreements on the Songor’ (Howard, Franco and Shaw, 2018). It is a well-organized group with an agreed structure and elected officials; President; Coordinator; Secretary and Treasurer. Their aim is to promote collective and sustainable harvesting of the
salt, stop the Atsiakpo and to lobby for the implementation of the 1989 Master Plan. ASSWA is an active member of the National Coalition on Mining (NCOM)

The network began its advocacy work with local traditional leaders but found them to be no longer aligned with the communities. Most have prioritised their own economic interests over defending communal rights and resources. Advocacy at the national level has fared little better, government decisions are motivated by the commercial potential of the Songor lagoon and its preference for allocating resources to large private operations. ASSWA has found over time that to defend the lagoon and the livelihood of the 45 communities around it, requires that they articulate the experience and demands of marginalized members of the community and women (Howard, Franco and Shaw, 2018). The women have publicly challenged the traditional, district and national authorities; on one occasion about 60 women marched in red shirts (the colour of protest) to a traditional festival, which is attended by local and national dignitaries. The women carried basins of salt and placards opposing the privatization of the natural resource and chastising the local chiefs for disregarding the spirit of the Lagoon (Yomo) by siding with corporate interests against the community and the lagoon itself (Langdon, 2017).

1.1.3. Radio Ada

Radio Ada was founded by Alex and Wilna Quarmyne in 1998 and was the first community radio station in Ghana. Alex began his community radio activism in California in the 1960s when he was a student at UCSC and Wilna had been involved with community radio in the Philippines before they met. Alex is from the Ada area and wanted to establish a radio station where community members were not only listeners, but were actively engaged in bringing their own stories, ideas and participation to the air; “to enable the listening communities, especially the most disadvantaged groups, to upload and grow their own knowledge”. Since its inception the station has supported community struggles on fishing rights, the effects of climate change and coastal erosion as well as communal rights to land and resources (White, 2008). The station openly supports the Songor community groups and provides a platform for both the ASAF and ASSWA activists to talk and challenge the status-quo on air. ‘Okor Ng Kor’ is a radio-drama it developed which uses humour, song and drama to highlight the issues of land rights and Atsiakpo around the lagoon – and the importance of women’s leadership (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014).

Even before the radio station was operational, Alex and others involved in community development, traveled to the various Dangme-speaking communities to ascertain what kind of radio they would like to have and would make a difference to their lives. The first thing was language, Radio Ada broadcasts in Dangme making it accessible and available to everyone in the area no matter their level of education. As a result, the radio station has a listenership of 600,000 in over 150 towns throughout the Ada/Krobo areas, and has a staff of over 50, most of whom volunteer their time and have done so for long periods.
Some of the most active staff members are employees of government in the areas of sustainable community development, culture, human rights and education. However, skilled staff retention is an issue. Radio Ada is self-financing and does not receive financial support from central government or the district assembly which makes paying for skilled staff difficult. What has happened over time is that several volunteers, who were trained and gained experience at Radio Ada, left subsequently to commercial radio stations elsewhere (Gamos Ltd, 1997).

At the same time as establishing the radio station, Alex and Wilna set up the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), which introduced the concept of community broadcasting to other parts of the country (White, 2008).

1.1.4. Government Policies on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM)

Ghana government policy since the 1970s has been largely antagonistic to the small-scale mining community. It has frequently used state forces against ASM producers and provided security services to large companies. In 2017 the government of Ghana launched a new Multilateral Mining Integrated Policy (MMIP) with the World Bank. From the policy a five-year project was initiated to deal ‘holistically’ with the problem of ASM in Ghana. The policy focuses almost entirely on gold mining to the exclusion of all other forms of mining, including salt. Yet the potential for substantial resource generation from the under-exploited national resource is significant. Currently, approximately 250,000 tonnes of salt are produced annually, but according to the Ghana Export Promotion Council (GEPC) this could be increased to between 2 and 3 million tonnes (2009) with proper development of the sector. Instead the government has facilitated the importation of cheap salt from Brazil which has further undermined the vulnerable livelihoods of Ghana’s small-scale salt miners.

Despite the stated policy of enabling sustainable ASM activities, there is ample evidence to show that government policy on salt is to attract foreign investment and promote large-scale private operations spurred, in large part, by the recent expansion of Ghana’s oil and gas operations. This was stated explicitly in a recent presentation given by the project manager of the MMIP, Dr Karikari (2019) “It is also expected that the salt industry will facilitate and accelerate the development of our oil fields as well as the downstream local petro-chemical industry. The salt industry will also support the proposed integrated bauxite-alumina industry (Ghana Integrated Aluminium Development Corporation), and the agriculture, food and beverage, water and textiles sub-sectors.”

This government stance has led to direct conflicts with salt-mining communities along the coast where, even though small-scale and community salt miners dominate production, they have little or no legal standing, nor are they registered with the Minerals Commission which regulates mining operations in Ghana. Thus, when large concessions are granted to private interests (as was the case with the Keta
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Lagoon (TWN Africa, 2017), small-scale miners’ activities become illegal. Work that communities have been doing for centuries becomes a crime and they become trespassers on land they consider to be communal.

1.1.5. National Coalition on Mining (NCOM)
Following a massive cyanide spill at Gold Fields Ghana Ltd., a large surface mining operation in the Western region of Ghana, Third World Network-Africa (TWN) and three other organisations, Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL), Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM) and the League of Environmental Journalists, formed NCOM. NCOM works with a variety of people and organisations from the individual who has had their crops destroyed to the community activist organizing people, to the CBOs working on the rights of artisanal miners. NCOM, an umbrella organization comprising development-oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which advocates for the communities. In addition to environmental degradation, NCOM points at the limited compensation for expropriated land. Considerable environmental problems are associated primarily with the old mines (UNDP, 2016). NCOM’s impact is probably best indicated by what the organisation describes as “its recognition [by the Government of Ghana] as a parallel body to the Ghana Chamber of Mines that has to be consulted in mining affairs”. This is a significant change from when the Chamber of Mines was acknowledged as the only non-state actor in partnership with the state to make mining policies. In the words of NCOM, this “monopoly has been broken through years of collaborative mobilization and organisation”. (Anyidoho and Crawford, 2014)

1.1.6. Rural Poverty in Ghana
Growing inequality in household consumption, regional disparities in welfare and a deteriorating macroeconomic environment are challenging progress in Ghana. By 2012, consumption per capita among the top decile of distribution was seven times greater than among the bottom percentile and the Gini index rose 8%, from 37.5 to 40.8. Poverty has become concentrated in rural areas and the North, with one out of three poor people living in rural areas. The report indicates a one percent growth in GDP resulted in just a paltry 0.07 percent reduction in poverty rate between 2013 and 2017 – indicating that economic growth in Ghana has become less pro-poor. From the regional perspective, the three regions of the north—Northern, Upper East, and Upper West—recorded the highest poverty rates. The report adds that 26 percent of all poor persons in Ghana are in the Northern Region. (GSS, 2018)

1.1.7. Broad Research Objective
The purpose of this study is to examine communication practices of the ASSWA network and implications for the network’s evolution and effectiveness within the context of Communications for Change. It will describe the dialectic of communication and learning within the network, how members discuss issues and resolve differences, how they define, articulate and communicate their programmes and demands to authorities and publics. It will examine if the mobilisation and activism of poor rural women can challenge
the dominant discourses and narratives of traditional development and patriarchy. Key to learning is abstraction, the linking of issues and abstracting of the problematic causative mechanisms, the project will examine this process within the ASSWA context by looking at how the network and its members link their struggles with broader social movements within Ghana and beyond. The project seeks to show how the narratives of the movement have shifted over time, how this collective reflection and analysis have revealed deeper learning, and how this learning has informed emergent strategies of meaning-making and action.

1.1.8. Concern:
Many Social Movements and Activist Groups gradually morph into community-based organisations CBOs and their role can often (and quickly) become that of awareness raising, where communication and decision making is all one way. This happens when, during the peak moments of activity, the ‘learning’ and consciousness-raising, the linking of issues and abstracting of the problematic causative mechanisms are not inculcated into the movement. So the consciousness, at the individual and network levels, remains static while the tempo of events change (Tufte, 2017 p103). As a consequence, the effective agency of the movement is compromised.

The continued agency of the ASSWA is challenged by the poverty of the community within which it operates and by its ability to communicate effectively locally, nationally and internationally. As it stands now, the organisation is active but long-term sustainability may be compromised by the lack of dialogic interactions at all levels of engagement.

1.1.9. Question
The question raised therefore is can we create a model (theory) for empowered agency of ASSWA through improved communication based on their identified priorities, needs and requirements, in such a way as to promote ‘power participation’?
2. Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Introduction
This chapter seeks to outline the theoretical issues that arise within the research project and to define the relevant concepts that clarify and validate the emergent theory. At the end of the chapter, elements from the situational analysis in Chapter 1 and the concepts discussed here are distilled into a conceptual framework causal loop diagram of the interaction of the various forces which affect the agency of the women activists of Songor Lagoon.

2.2. Civil Society
Civil Society is a term for organisations who act independent of state power structures, what Jürgen Habermas might characterize as a collection of public spheres “a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs” (Fraser, 1990). The term ‘Civil Society’ which today appears neutral and without political connotation or slant, emerged from intensely polarized political struggles during the 1980s in Central and South America, and in post-Soviet eastern Europe where people were resisting authoritarian, undemocratic governments (WEF, 2018). For socialists, all society is ‘civil society’ in that it is in perpetual conflict with the market or the state whether that conflict is explicit or not (Burawoy, 2003), and the specific model of civil society which exists at a given place or time depends largely on the nature of the state and the type of capitalist economy which holds sway. This means that the attitude and formation of any civil society is determined by the relationships between the state and the market, and citizens. While civil society (and indeed social movements) can be retrogressive, historically it has been seen as an agent of transformation or ‘power from below’ tempering the inequalities of capitalism and meeting the needs of wider society (Murphy, 2011). Shaw defines civil society as a “network of institutions through which groups in society in general represent themselves – both to each other and to the state” (Shaw 1994 in Purdue, 2007), which indicates that it is within the context of civil society that social movements form and operate.

2.3. Social Movements
According to Colin Barker (2013, p47) defining ‘Social Movements’ is fraught with difficulty due the variety and nebulous nature of the form. Marx used the term ‘the social movement’ in the context of increasingly widespread and disparate resistance activities by nascent national and political struggles outside of the formal workers’ movements. Later on social movements were understood as informal networks composed of individuals, organisations or groups with shared identities who were collectively engage in political or cultural conflict (Diani, 1992). Social movements, while vastly differing in almost every respect, have certain common or general characteristics. They are collective, with collective identities, shared values and projects and the exchange of opinion and ideas and while they may include
organisations, they are a more loosely structured entity – a network which is capable of flexibility and change in shape and scope.

The trajectory of social movements is powered through debates, disputes, arguments and social interactions around issues, policies, values or analysis. Much of this dialectic is with opponents, but equally important is the dynamic that occurs internally “struggle among themselves about how to struggle” (Barker, 2013 p59) which allows the movements develop, reassess and respond to events. It is this continuous dialogue during periods of upheaval which drives the learning and abstraction process; firstly organizing around specific needs within the existing social context, but the meeting of those needs requires questioning and changing social forms and amongst activist develops new questions about meaning, relationships and values; these new more radical needs and values cannot be met within the existing structures – which raises the possibility of allying with other agents of change to create new structures (Nilsen and Cox, 2017).

2.4. Activism
Cox and Nilsen argue (2005) that the process of becoming an activist is primarily a process of learning, learning through action and drawing the lessons of those actions, their outcomes and consequences. The same type of learning can be ascribed to an organisation or a movement. For most people, becoming a member of a social movement (formally or informally) happens because they see something is wrong with our world that can only be addressed by protesting or organizing against the power structures. Thus, the process of becoming an activist is to learn that the system, despite its claims, does not work for you or your community, and to move towards the understanding that the underlying causal mechanisms of developmental and societal issues are linked, and the movements to overcome them should be also.

However, while social movements can challenge power relations, not all social movements are ‘bottom-up’ or progressive (Griff Foley, 1999 in Choudry and Kapoor, 2010) they can be contradictory, containing both progressive and retrogressive tendencies, and can change dramatically depending on events and altered states of popular agitation (Barker, 2013).

2.4.1. Sustainable Activism in marginalized groups
Across the African continent in the past couple of decades there have been significant social movements against oppression and poverty (Hill, 2013) yet none has achieved any structural changes to their societies, though a number of long term autocrats have lost political power. It was Antonio Gramsci who pointed out how elites stay in power through ‘passive revolution’ – an apparent changing of the guard without transforming underlying class relations (Brooks, 2017). In Ghana, as in most parts of the continent, there is a semblance of democracy with two conservative neo-liberal parties vying for power, and while people celebrate a change in the ruling administration most realise that change is largely cosmetic; it is ‘change without change’.
Most of the major struggles that have occurred were not organized by nor to any great extent populated by the rural poor. Which is not to say that the rural poor, whose livelihoods are being systematically destroyed (Davis, 2006 p15) do not have much to be angry about. The consequences of radical political engagement for people living in poverty can be great and the daily struggle to provide support to family means time or opportunity is limited. The communities affected by mining are some of the poorest and most vulnerable in Ghana (UNDP, 2016). But it can often be the case that the most vulnerable in society that are the most reluctant to engage in campaigns for change or to challenge the existing power structures. Thus, poor women of ASSWA who are challenging local power structures, can be vulnerable if isolated. According to Brooks (2017 p206) this lack of participation in very poor communities can be compounded when there are no viable alternatives discussed or agreed, or where movements lacked clear aims and objectives. Despite the difficulties, there are community struggles going on globally which, though rarely mentioned, contain vital “movement-centric” knowledge and learning dynamics (Choudry and Kapoor, 2010 p2).

2.5. Leadership and Democracy in Movements from Below
Social movements and activist organisations are formed and shaped by the socio-cultural context within which they emerge and by the relations to that society (Barker, 2013). They are composed of individuals combining to assert their rights and act collectively. However, the democratic structures within activist organisations, particularly in the nascent stages, are shaped not only by aspirations of the activists, but also the dominant social value system which holds sway in society. Central to capitalist social relations (or any elitist society) is the concept that hierarchies are both natural and necessary – and therefore inevitable. That for decision making to be effective, requires strong leadership (sub-text read ‘male’) and thus organisations should be pyramidal in structure. Implicit in this, of course, is in-built inequality and curtailed democracy and individual agency (Gemmill and Oakley 1992 in (Blaug, 2009)).

The starting point for many activist groups is a response to specific needs, grounded in the concrete situation, but to become a movement requires levels of abstraction in thinking and purpose (Nilsen and Cox, 2017). Repeated confrontations with power structures change consciousness at the individual and organisational levels, they raise questions and start discursive and learning processes about the purpose of the movement, its values, the forces opposed to them, what strategies and tactics should be deployed and about the nature of society (Barker, 2013). It is through this internal dialectic that the discussion and decision-making processes, and thus the desired democratic framework, of the movement can be defined and redefined.

The democratic form of Social movements often depends on their life cycles. Starting out they are often spontaneous and decentralised collectives with horizontal decision-making and communication processes. With time many become institutionalised and develop hierarchical (vertical) structures, after
which there is a decline in activism and effectiveness as the movements become 'tamed and co-opted' by the societal forces they were fighting (though others argue it is the decline in activism which leads to a change in the democratic natures and processes (Nilsen and Cox, 2017)). However, though common, this decline is not inevitable (Anastasia Kavada in (Wilkins, Tufte and Obregon, 2014)) as social movements are affected by external events and the changing sociocultural context.

2.6. Communication for Change
Given the understanding of social movements and of sustained or radical (transformational) change, the model of communication for development indicated is one which builds towards involved ‘power’ activism and enables a burgeoning of awareness within the activist group of underlying power structures and their own agency. I intend to examine what can be considered “communication at the margins”, with an emphasis and focus on social practice engagement and interaction, a dialectic within the community (at all levels – local, national and international) where ‘the margins’ refers to both physical and symbolic distance to power (Hemer and Tufte, 2016). A move away from ‘development-centric’ community organizing towards “movement-centric” knowledge and learning dynamics (Choudry and Kapoor, 2010 p2), a move away from thinking that is ‘trapped in the normativity of the development industry’ to one that is concerned with groups at all levels implementing communications strategies as part of movements for change (Enghel, 2013).

The character of participation within the ASSWA is important, and communications can be a key component in fostering ‘power participation’ (Cicilia Peruzzo 2014, quoted in (Tufte, 2017 p62)) which is based on ‘democratic, authentic, autonomous participation that best facilitates people’s growth as individuals’ and the development is not only on the individual level but linked strongly to community processes and community culture. Tufte further points out that this period of constant upheaval requires a rethink of both research in and the practice of communication for social change. He developed the diagram below to illustrate the differences between Media-Centric and Socio-Centric Communications. Where radical participation, which see social change as structural transformation, and a socio-centric perspective which views all communications activities by how well they amplify the voice of the marginalized. Thus, communications for change must be explicitly pro-poor and by definition, political (Tufte, 2017 p52).
According to Colin Sparks, for communications to contribute towards real change it requires a reengagement with its political role and that it be entirely democratic, making a top-down approach unthinkable (Sparks, 2007 p224). His arguments coincide with Cox and Nielsen who argue (2005) the to become an activist is to learn that the system does not work for you or your community (despite its claims), and to move towards the understanding that the power structure of developmental and societal issues are linked. An understanding of class power and of imperialism (class power on a global scale) is relevant to all activists for social change – and as such links with people in similar situations internationally is vital to building robust vehicles for change and for drawing wider lesson on the nature of power and the structures underlying social relations globally (Sparks, 2007 p225). Communications as part of a social movement or activist network can promote democratic dialogues, build a more complete understanding of underlying causative mechanisms of inequality, and encourage drawing in others fighting similar battles at international, national and local levels.

2.7. Community Radio as a tool of change
Community radio has been supporting local struggles and the forging of shared identities since the early 1940s (Bosch, 2014). It started when a miners’ protests set up a radio station in Bolivia with the aim of combatting a hostile mainstream media. It has become an important communication tool in community activism where it reflects the voices of the locale and in the language of the area (Rodríguez and Miralles, 2014). What defines radio as being ‘Community’ is the participative nature of its operations, encouraging broad engagement and self-management by the communities. In poor communities it is particularly effective as it relatively low cost but able to reach marginalized groups in geographically remote areas and less literate populations who are poorly served by the mainstream media. In effect it is (or can be) a participatory platform where disempowered groups of people claim their right to active agency in society.
Community radio is of particular relevance to women, it provides them a voice and allows them to be heard. In many ways it can challenge and alter the dominant public sphere (Milan, 2009)(Malik and Bandelli, 2012).

Levels of participation in community radio stations vary, from listenership to community ownership and management. FAO use the participation scale below in their Handbook on Communications for Rural Development (Mario Acunzo, Marzia Pafumi, 2014).

**FIGURE 4: PARTICPATION SCALE IN COMMUNITY RADIO (FAO)**

2.8. Causal Loop Diagram of the Research Variables

2.8.1. **Key Variables in the concept of Agency of ASSWA**

To illustrate the purpose for my research project I am using a Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) conceptual framework of my understanding of the situation, as it relates to key Communications for Development concepts identified in the literature in Chapter 2 and the Situation Analysis about the Songhor Lagoon community struggles in Chapter 1.
FIGURE 5: CAUSAL LOOP DIAGRAM SHOWING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATIONS, ACTIVISM, LEARNING AND AGENCY

At the local level

Context: Very poor rural communities with few sources of livelihood. Individual salt miners who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, many of whom are employers (and men) and virtually all employees are women. The Lagoon is drying up and the quality of the salt is diminishing. Local Government and Traditional Authorities currently take the part of the individual employers. Radio Ada helped establish ASSWA and provides significant logistical, solidarity and communications support

1. Communication with members: Level at which members communicate about issues, ideas, problems and events
2. Communication with community: Degree to which activities and programme of ASSWA is communicated to the population of the area which is made up of about 45 communities
3. Internal Debate and Discussion: Level at which there is discussion and debate within the members of ASSWA
4. Internal Democracy: Level at which democratic decision making is present and all members views respected and discussed
5. Activism: Level of involvement in activities of ASSAW members and officers
6. Participation with Radio Ada: Level at which ASSAW is actively driving the perspective, content and activities of Radio Ada
7. **Understanding the local power structures**: Level of understanding of power relations in the district and lagoon surrounds

8. **Learning**: Presence of consciousness raising and the level at which members link their own issues to wider societal problems, level of reflection on activities and learning what works and why.

9. **Agency of ASSWA**: Degree of confidence and effectiveness of ASSWA in addressing the concerns of the Women of Songhor.

**At the national Level**

**Context**: In Ghana there is an ongoing struggle between community/artisanal mining groups and larger corporate interests, historically hidden but increasingly in the open. The past decade has seen a huge increase in illegal artisanal mining (known locally as Galamsey), which brings with it related problems of environmental degradation, pollution, criminality and child labour exploitation (UNDP, 2016). Government policies favour the large Gold and Mineral companies and traditional authorities regularly sell large tracts of land to mining concessions. There are several small-scale solar salt producing communities along Ghana’s coast near lagoons and protected harbours with similar issues to the Songhor communities. These groups, along with small scale gold, iron and diamond miners have organized into a national coalition NCOM to advocate on behalf of their members.

For ASSWA, important processes and concerns include:

1. **Communication with other Salt Miner Activists**: Level to which ASSWA members communicate with other small-scale salt mining groups in Ghana
2. **Engagement with NCOM**: level of activity and contribution to discussions within the coalition
3. **Engagement with artisanal miners**: Level of discussion with other artisanal mining activist groups to coordinate activities, agree programmes and demands and seek common ground
4. **Engagement with women’s groups**: Level of interaction with women’s groups in Ghana to discuss gender roles and power structures in relation to production and wealth
5. **Understanding of national power structures**: Level to which ASSWA members and officers identify the interests of social classes in Ghana and how their struggle intersects or conflicts with these interests
6. **Funding and Resources**: Access to funding for support of community activities

**At the international Level**

**Context**: A number of Academic Institutions, particularly in the area of Development Studies, have conducted research projects in the area and have provided support (financial and logistical) to ASSWA and publicised their struggles. There are also international and national activists’ groups fighting for indigenous land rights and community control of natural resources and engage in solidarity networking.
1. **Communication with other Land Rights Groups**: Level of engagement with other similar activist groups to discuss activities, similarities in struggles and different approaches to resistance.

2. **Understanding of International Power Structures (Imperialism)**: Level to which ASSWA members and officers identify the interests of international capitalism and ruling social classes globally and how their struggle intersects or conflicts with these interests.

3. **Funding and Resources**: Level of international financial and logistical support for ASSWA activities.

The next chapter will discuss how the research will be carried out and how the data will be analysed.
3. Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1. The Research Methodology
The Songor women are a close-knit group despite their geographic spread around the lagoon, and they have maintained a momentum and cohesion in starkly difficult circumstances (Langdon, 2007). My aim is to interrogate the intersection of activism, democratic participation, individual and collective learning and communications, in order to discover whether and how communications has contributed to their progress, in particular to their individual and collective agency.

I set out to dig narrow and deep in my search, by interviewing a small number of people in depth. I opted to use conversational interviews (Currivan, 2008) (Tracy, 2012b) as my major data collection method with key members of ASSAW and follow-up with further interviews amongst the women, or expand the cohort if findings indicated. The interview process was informed by, interrogated and set in context by extensive documentary research of current government policies, historical research, analyses often made in conference presentations around small scale mining in Ghana and research into the sharpening conflicts over land and natural resource rights and uses. This section provides an overview of the underlying critical realist ontological and epistemological frameworks which shaped the project, the methodology used, the ethical considerations and the rationale underpinning my choices.

3.1.1. Critical Realism Ontological Framework
Before determining how to carry out this research project on communications within an activist community it is necessary to define the ontological point of view on which the epistemological methodology will be based. The ontological philosophy I have chosen to for this research is Critical Realism (CR). CR has influenced a number of social science fields including politics, economics and social studies. A major factor in using a critical realist approach to this project is that it gives the ontological basis for interpretivist research as it places importance on meanings, interpretation, and context as causal influences.

CR makes a clear distinction between our knowledge of the world and the world itself. Though this transitive knowledge constitutes a part of the intransitive world, the existence of the world is not dependent upon this knowledge (Longshore Smith, 2006). Reality is conceived as complex, structured, and multi-leveled, with its apparent workings the outcome of interaction between the mechanisms that underlie them (Callinicos, 2003). Reality is therefore a set of structures that have causal powers from which observable events emerge.

CR Theory: The domains of real, actual, and empirical (Clark, 2012).

The Domain of Empirical includes observable experiences events or phenomena.
The Domain of Actual includes events and non-events which are created by the Mechanism.
The Domain of Real includes the structures and mechanisms that have generated the actual events.

3.1.2. Critical Realist Epistemological Framework
A Critical Realist epistemology sets out to discover not only the existence or occurrences of phenomena but also the connections between them and in doing so begin to identify and understand the underlying structure and causal mechanisms at play (Mcevoy and Richards, 2006). It is only by doing this that we get beyond the ‘mere appearances’ of things, to their nature and essences (Edwards, O’Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). These underlying mechanisms are essentially unobservable and can only be known by constructing ideas about them. This study will be based on interviews, observation and literature/document reviews. Much of the data will be empirical in nature (actual or recounted) which suggest or describe underlying structures and their relationships.

3.1.3. Story telling in Ghana
Constructing narratives is a way of sense-making and extracting meaning from events, conversation and social engagement – communication practices which create discursive spaces for participation (Tufte, 2017 p171), a space that this permanently under construction so long as the conversation continues (Leavy, Bochner and Riggs, 2014). Ghana has a rich oral tradition which, despite improved literacy and modern technologies, remains vibrant, in particular within the rural setting (Kwakye-opong and Gharbin, 2017). Storytelling and communal conversations strengthen bonds and “guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behavior that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good” (Gyekye, K. (1996) quoted in Kwakye-opong and Gharbin, 2017). Much collective education happens in community conversations and storytelling; Jonathan Langdon and Rachel Garbary’s 2017 study found that, within the Songor and Ada communities learnings from past struggles were passed on and re-learned through stories and collective conversations (Langdon and Garbary, 2017).

3.2. The Interview Process
According to Steinar Kvale (2011) there are seven steps to conducting successful qualitative interviews:
Thematizing; Designing; Interviewing, Transcribing, Analysing and Reporting

3.2.1. Thematizing.
Prior to beginning the interview design, the first task of any research project is to define clearly what the aim of the enterprise is, what is to be achieved, what will be known that we don’t know. My examination of background materials (documents and videos) allowed me to develop research questions and define the aim of the study itself. It also gave me an initial (basic) understanding of what relationships and mechanisms I might find, and importantly, what empirical data would answer my research questions and how the data could be best analysed and understood (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2014).
This requires a thorough study of the background and context of the project along with an initial mapping of the perspectives of the key actors within the project scope. Using the question raised in the previous chapter (the answer to which will be the result of the research) the purpose of the investigation can be determined. This purpose, the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of the research, needs clear definition before the method is decided upon and the study designed. In this case, the question to be addressed is how ‘can we create a model (theory) for empowered agency of ASSWA through improved communication based on their identified priorities, needs and requirements, in such a way as to promote ‘power participation’?’ Ethically, the study aims to garner new knowledge while contributing, however minimally, towards the improvement of the human situation investigated (Kvale, 2011b).

### 3.2.2. Designing.

The design of this study is based on; what is achievable within the limitations of time and resources, what the study aspires to achieve and the way (ethically and procedurally) I want to conduct the research and the interviews. There are a number of issues to consider within the context of the ASSWA community: Language, Power Relations, trust, cultural divergence (Kapborg and Berterö, 2002), potential consequences for the interviewees, ethical issues around consent, accurate representation as well as other key concerns around objectivity, validity, reliability, and generalizability (Brinkmann, 2009).

### 3.2.3. Interviewees

Following the document review and literature research around the topic, the first interviews will be conducted with the coordinator of TWN Africa and of NCOM to further establish the background to the study and gain their insights into the current situation and their guidance on the best people to interview within ASSWA. Following on quickly, interviews will be conducted with the elected officers of ASSWA within their community around Songor; in their space and at their convenience and at no financial cost to the participants.

### 3.2.4. Interview method:

There are a number of interview methods suggested for a study which seeks to get a detailed and comprehensive view of the dialectic within an activist group, the discourse around issues, the resolution of disagreements and also the relationships with their own community and the wider networks - national and international. Brinkmann states that “Our very inquiring and interpreting selves are conversational at their core; they are constituted by the numerous relationships we have and have had with other people” (Brinkmann, 2012). The idea is to conduct in-depth individual interviews which provides the time and space for the interviewee to share rich descriptions of phenomena while also allowing the interviewer to explore topics which arise during the conversation – or return to issues in more detail (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).
For the purposes of this study, the Officers of ASSWA are both informants and interviewees, they are telling their story while explaining their understanding of phenomena and events. Because of this I opt to use a conversational format (as indicated by our context of rural Ghana) of Informant and Narrative interviews (Tracy, 2012a) which are both a form of unstructured interviews and ones that encourage the participants to expand on topics, provide opinions and tell stories rather than the more traditional survey style of limited responses to specific questions. As pointed out by Brinkman (2008) the qualitative interview can be defined as an interview “with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” and while the interviews will be conversational and dialogic, they are not entirely unstructured as the interviewer/researcher will set the context.

### 3.2.5. The role of the researcher

Far from being a neutral or background presence, the researcher in any qualitative investigation can have a marked impact on the project in terms of validity, ethics and efficacy. From the initial planning stages it is important to reflect on and recognize one’s own perspective – a process known as ‘positionality’ (Johnson, 2017) where the research consciously examines their own background, experiences, assumptions or biases. The act of reflecting on one’s background and positionality is termed ‘reflexivity’ which recognizes the researcher and the researcher’s relxivity as part of the project ecosystem, and which is in contrast to the common practice in quantitative studies to minimize or separate out the role of the researcher. For this project, at each stage I will consider my attitude, feelings, reactions and growing relationship with interview participants.

### 3.2.6. Interpreter

The majority of the women activists of ASSWA are not comfortable speaking in English and it is important for the validity of the interview process that conversations be conducted in Ga-Adangbe, which is the language of the Krobo/Ada people. However, using an interpreter in interviews complicates the situation and poses a risk to the study’s validity (Kapborg and Berteró, 2002) – which the design of the interview process seeks to address in a number of ways: The interpreter and the translator/transcriber will be different people to ensure there is a check on the meanings and the translation. The interpreter will be part of the wider support group to ASSWA who has the trust of the women and the research project.

### 3.2.7. Interviewing

As the interview party settles and prior to the interviews starting, I will provide the group with an overview of what the research study is about, what I hope to achieve and what the role of the participant is in the overall project. The interviews themselves will be largely unstructured and conversational is tone (Brinkmann, 2014). They will start with an open question stemming from the background discussions with NCOM and TWN Africa and on the document reviews. The interview setting will be as conducive as possible to making the participants relaxed and trust will be built based on introductions from mutual
collaborators and creating an atmosphere of respect by providing a clear explanation of the project, agreeing how the interview will be conducted, listen actively and engage with the information shared (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Throughout the interview, I will endeavour to adopt a reflective approach to the questions and the evolving knowledge and relationships.

The interview will be audio recorded with the permission of all concerned. The questions will be asked by the researcher to the interviewee and translated by the interpreter. The response will be made in full prior to being translated to the researcher. In addition to the recording, the researcher will take notes discreetly about the process and observations that may not be otherwise captured (Tracy, 2012b).

3.2.8. **Transcribing**

Before data analysis is possible the interviews will go through three levels of abstraction, recording, translation and transcription. Through this process the certain nuances will be lost – the tone of voice, the intonations and any meaningful hesitations. According to Kvale (2011c) ‘transcripts are impoverished decontextualized renderings of interview conversations’. However, they are necessary to prepare the interviews for analysis. A qualified translator and transcriber will be used to translate the interviews into English and transcribe them all verbatim as much as practicable. The transcriptions to written text will be reviewed by the interpreter to ensure quality, completeness and validity. During the interview, translation and transcription process the confidentiality of the interviewees requires to be protected.

3.2.9. **Analyzing the data.**

The interviews will be analysed using a mixed approach or ‘Bricolage’ method (Kvale, 2011a). This almost ad-hoc methodology of data analysis is in relatively common use for interview analysis. Using the CLD constructed for the conceptual framework (Chapter 2), I will read and re-read the interview transcripts and loosely codify sections that relate to the CLD variables. The data will provide a more rounded picture of what each one means, or the sense of each one, within the context of the ASSWA and the Songhor lagoon. Parts of the interviews will be used as a direct narrative, so the women’s words are heard.

3.2.10. **Verifying.**

The validity of the data will be checked throughout the research process by checking assumptions or clarifying details with the participants themselves (repeat interviews), with other project informants and through literature and document reviews. Essentially, this is a form of triangulation. Common objections to interview studies concern their reliability, validity and generalization (Kvale, 2011e). These are valid concerns and will be addressed in the concluding chapter which will discuss the theory’s application beyond the context of the study. As with much qualitative research, the validity of knowledge generated rests on the skills, ability and reliability of the researcher(Johnson, 2017). This can only be addressed meaningfully through continually reflecting upon, checking and questioning the emergent theory.
3.2.11. Reporting.
The findings of the research project will be detailed in Chapter 4 – Findings and discussed more completely in Chapter 6 – Conclusion. The analysis will be integrated into the ‘Theory’ CLD in the form of new, expanded or more complete variables and suggestions for possible areas of intervention to support the effectiveness of communications for development processes within the ASSWA.

3.3. Research framework
To bring together all the elements of the proposed study I have used a research framework suggested by Joseph Maxwell (2012) What is innovative about Maxwell’s model is that the major components namely: goals, methodology, research questions, issues of validity and the conceptual framework are not to be seen in a strictly linear or sequential manner - rather all the elements of the research design are integrated to form an interactive holistic model which emphasises the connections between the various design elements. According to Maxwell, sequential models do not necessarily fit well with qualitative design such as this as often design components have to be changed due to changes in the environment, changes in other design elements or new information. This design model allows for dialectic between the research design and the research itself – where the design is not simply an abstract proposition but part of the entire process.
FIGURE 6: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK SHOWING THE BETWEEN THE GOAL, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, VALIDITY, METHODOLOGY AND QUESTION(S)

Having defined the methodology, the next Chapter will discuss the outcome of the interviews and the emergent theory of change.

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4. Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1. Introduction
I spoke to Mary Akuteye, the president of ASSWA, on the phone and arranged to come the 50 kilometres to her hometown, Bonikope, on the edge of the Songhor Lagoon for our first interview. It would be my first time to Songhor. The area is just over an hour outside of Ghana’s capital, Accra, but it looked like another country and in many ways, like another planet. The busy main road from Accra to Lome passes less than 15 kilometres from the salt-white and largely barren landscape of the lagoon and the surrounding communities struggling for the survival of their natural resources and their way of life.

On my first visit, Mary took us to see the women collecting salt on the flats at the edge of the lagoon, and as we walked through the village to get there, people passing by would nod and greet her by saying ‘Yokatse’.

“They call us “YOKATSE” which means ‘Brave Women’. When people address us that way, we respond “WOMAASHI” which means, we stand firm and will press on”

The community is very poor, and unlike most parts of southern Ghana, there are few crops or livestock evident. For the women of ASSAW, their lives depend almost entirely on their labour at the salt pans which is poorly paid and diminishing.

The interviews at Songhor were conducted in Ga/Dangme using an interpreter. They were recorded then translated and transcribed before the analysis. Three interviews were held with the women of ASSWA, one in Bonikope (Songhor), one in Ada Foah (the district and local government capital) and the final one in Accra at the NCOM National Conference on Artisanal Small-Scale Mining (ASSM).
This chapter will outline the main empirical findings from the interviews and discussions conducted with all the research informants; Third World Network Africa, National Coalition on Mining and the Officers of ASSAW. In addition, observations and reflections noted at the time will be included.

4.2. About ASSWA

Though ASSWA is only 6 years old, the women have been actively fighting for decades to hold onto to their livelihoods, as part of the struggles of the community to defend its natural resource. The struggle has been hard. Its wider political implications exposing activists to violence and threats from state security forces as in 1974, when the granting of a large private concession to Vacuum Salt, a Ghanaian company, effectively criminalized the work of the women who now became trespassers on their own land, sparking serious conflict and police brutalization of the salt winners.

“The private company boss brought in the police to prevent us from winning salt. When one of us is arrested, the police force you to eat raw salt and then give you raw brine water which they force you to drink. The police tortured us”.

Figure 8: Mary Akuteye, President of ASSWA, standing in front of the Atsiako salt pans of Songhor Lagoon, with some of the women labourers in the background (Photo taken by author)
A decade later, a salt winner, Maggie Kuwornu, was shot dead by the police during a 1985 revolt of the community. This led to a huge victory of the community over the police, the company and the State, when community ownership of the Lagoon was conceded by the government in 1989.

Since then however, powerful new pressures have layered onto the older ones. The era of neoliberal trade liberalisation and globalization with its intensifying inequalities threaten to further grind the women down by sheer force of attrition – be it the effects of competition from cheap salt imports from Brazil, or the ways in which Ghana’s new oil industry, with potential market for salt, has raised the commercial stakes considerably and unleashed a fresh and broader impetus to privatization.

This now includes local medium to smaller-scale individual private concessions (Atsiakpo). The latter combine non-traditional mechanized methods, accelerating the depletion of the lagoon and diminishing the quality of salt, and the cheap labour of women who, lacking capital to compete in private concessions, are displaced and downgraded to precarious piece-work wage labour. The private operators pay commercial rents to local government and to traditional authorities who grant them the concessions. A new array of forces and threats have become the frontline of the women’s struggles.

ASSWA was founded in 2013, as a women’s network-organisation in response to intensifying gender-specific exploitation. The women are battling on several fronts: national government setting aside implementation of the Songor Master Plan; District Assembly disinvestment in lagoon rehabilitation and regulation of rampant private individual operations; traditional authorities to stop concessioning and become accountable to communities’ collective needs, but most immediately they’re trying to stir their own community towards collective action.

They are having to creative and communicate values that will regenerate new unities, community relations and natural resource sustainability, adapting historical imagery and oral traditions. The women are growing as self-empowering subjects and as actors contributing models of collective expression and new values of common regeneration, much like the leaves they emblematically self-identify with:

“We had WOOD, LEAVES and STONE. These stand for the characters of some people in the community. People who know the value of the lagoon to the people but refused to defend it are the STONES. Those who sit on the fence; those who do not care whether it is defended or sold are the WOOD. Those who wish to defend and preserve the lagoon for the future generations are the LEAVES. We use these symbols to demonstrate in the community”.

And they are doing this when cohesion is increasingly strained by differentiation and divergence of interests that are gaining strength in the new regime of privatization, in a changing context of community.
Campaigning in the community

There are 45 communities of varying size around the lagoon, 8 have significant populations and ASSWA is organized in all of them due to outreach undertaken by founding members in every village and town to raise awareness using song and discussion.

“So we marched into the community and sought the views of the people on developments concerning the lagoon. As we marched in town we sang songs to attract people’s attention and rally them to us.”

The women conducted on-the-spot assemblies and forums to discuss the issues and define demands. Despite their doubly subordinated positions as precarious, dependent labourers and as caregivers, increasing numbers of women have joined the group.

The organizational reach and presence of the ASSWA and the broader range of issues they are taking up shows its emergence as a social force. In recent years, ASSWA began using its reach in campaigns about teen pregnancies in Secondary Schools. Poverty is rendering young girls, whose families are unable to provide for them, vulnerable to approaches for sex for school fees. Another campaign on sanitation succeeded in upgrading community maintenance of compounds and communal areas and, even more, got the district assembly to provide waste collection services. The women have gained considerable respect as their campaigning and organizational presence has permeated throughout the lagoon area, winning unlikely allies even from among traditional leaders.

“Now our message has gained grounds. Some elders call to congratulate us and say they support us.”

Attempts have been made to intimidate and to infiltrate the Women’s collective. In response, ASSWA decided to scale up public action and gain a visibility that could not be ignored.

The women organized and marched en masse at Asafotufiam, the major annual traditional festival which is attended by all the Ada chiefs and people from all walks of life, including MPs and government ministers, tourists and media. Their women’s intervention was electrified by the purpose-branded red t-shirts (lacoste) they wore as badge of their distinct collective identity, and the placards they displayed about their struggle.

“Formerly, during our festival we sit passively to watch but now we play active roles. We now join to march. We have our own dress code, we prepare our lacoste to march.”

Their protests gained national attention. But it also provoked huge backlash from chiefs, the police and other local authorities who tried to intimidate and stop them. However, the unprecedented, well targeted and very public nature of their action proved a very successful tactic and they marched unmolested.
through Big Ada. In subsequent years, they varied tactics in line with prevailing threats and opportunities. The next year they distributed leaflets, communicating by new means. For the coming year, they have decided to organize their contingent around a marching band (with their own self-composed songs) an established tradition within the festival. This new tactic gives them automatic access to the festival; and, full control over the crafting and communication of their messages.

The traditional authorities were trying to silence the women because of the challenge they posed to their authority, but were unable to ignore or exclude them altogether, and explicitly had to recognize their legitimacy and standing. The women have broadened their support and gained recognition and voice. They want to be heard and refuse to be silenced.

“We want to announce it [undertake mass public action of our cause] again. This time we will target the Paramount Chiefs of Ada and Accra. They are the custodians of the land. We will remind the Chief of Ada the lagoon is an age-old legacy and has been there before he was installed. Is it wise for a Chief to sit and see it degenerate and spoil?”

4.3. What do meetings look like?
Given the powers they confront, the quality of participation in ASSWA and its meetings is an important asset. General, district-wide meetings can be big, with upwards of 400 people participating. Each of the 45 communities send up to 10 people. The meetings are open, democratic spaces encouraging discussion, with song, drama and games are used to promote engagement.

“We begin with a play. Formerly there were plays [traditional interactive community theatre with ‘morality play’ aspects] that are no longer performed. We pick one of such old plays and sing. The play contains messages and oral histories in the folksongs we sing. After that we bring out the issue, we have something like a tennis ball, we throw it into the air whoever the ball lands on has the floor and speaks her mind”

After agenda issues are agreed, the assembly breaks into groups to deliberate proposed ideas and activities. Each group selects a spokesperson to present their conclusions to the full house of assembled women, who then decide the course of action. These large meetings are becoming less frequent due to the cost of organizing and transporting members to them. They were more frequent when external funding made this possible, but with the end of the IDS project on Sustainable Livelihoods the associated funding stopped, and mass meetings have suffered as have the dynamics they engender within the group such as collective ownership and public accountability to the mass membership.

Smaller village or community ASSWA branches convene to address issues and discuss activities more regularly, but even their frequency is also variable, subject to finances, immediacy of needs, and what is happening in the area.
4.4. Communicating with members
The ASSWA organizes in 45 communities around the lagoon, an area stretching almost 80 kilometres. Like many rural areas in Ghana, women in the communities are very poor with limited access to modern communications, except for the single-use mobile phones. Roads in the area are bad, transport is infrequent and incurs costs. Communication between the community organisations and among members is done primarily through mobile phone calls and Radio Ada. The single use phone has a radio player, so when the ASSWA wants to communicate with its members, it calls Radio Ada and they broadcast the message. This has been very effectively used to organize the large formal assemblies and to call women to protest, for example when one of their number has been arrested.

“my community members always wish I can talk to them; and often invite me to visit them. There are times I am invited but have financial problems [and can’t go]. If I had a motorbike I could have gone to meet them because I have committed myself to this cause.”

Debate and Disagreement
The management of disagreement within ASSWA appears to be a primarily leadership-led consensus-building process. When dispute occur within the broader group, the practice is to set the issue aside until the next meeting to allow members to reflect and re-consider. Every effort is made to reach consensus.

The officers feel pushing contentious issues to a vote might introduce avoidable fracture, weakening the cohesion that has seen them through very difficult times. After meetings where disputes arise, the leadership reaches a position on which basis the president and other officers then call or visit the parties to the dispute, explain their thinking to them and urge the ‘correct’ compromise position on them. Parties are advised (also translates as ‘admonish’) not to inflame sentiments. At the next meeting the issue is agreed by consensus.

The elected leaders of the ASSWA are held in high regard by everyone associated with the campaign: ASSWA members, Radio Ada staff, NCOM members and TWN Africa officers. Within their own communities they are trusted and respected by most (and feared by others) for their honesty, integrity and their abiding knowledge and commitment. Relationships play a significant role in the cohesion of the group and how discussions play out. The leaders of the ASSWA are all natives of Songhor whose families have lived there for generations. Most are former salt-winners (more below) who eke out a subsistence living like all their members. Not all of them are literate, but their profound understanding of harsh socio-cultural environment of the lagoon, and the problems of women in particular, cements empathy and solidarity with their members.
But especially when the financial cost of sustaining mass participation is becoming more problematic, this ‘political capital’ of the leadership also enables them to take action, for example disciplinary decisions in well known cases of transgression, without involving or informing members about the process.

“Later I instructed them to be patient because I know what to do. Later I called the leaders and suggested that as leaders, if we the executives disagree, our members will be disorganized.”

The officers of ASSWA are elected every two years. Since its inception there have been two elections, with the executive returned on both occasions and therefore remaining largely unchanged. Mary Akuteye was nominated as coordinator when the group was formed and subsequently twice elected as Chairperson/President.

4.5. Relationship with Radio Ada

“It is a community radio, but when they hear our call they run to us because it is communal.”

Radio Ada plays a key role in the network’s activities. It is committed to the struggle of the Songor women salt miners and the survival of the lagoon communities. Volunteers at the station working with the ASAFA assisted the formation of the ASSWA.

Radio Ada’s mission is to give voice to the marginalized people within the Ada/Krobo (the Dangme speaking) area.

“our priority is to engage with the marginalized community and get them to take decisions. Their own decisions are best for them and for their own initiatives. We have a bottom up approach. Women are the most marginalized in the community. So we already had a lot of women [involved with the station] even before we started doing gender education”

When signs of renewed government intent to grant a large concession (and displace some communities) resurfaced around in recent years it also created an enabling environment for strengthening Atsiakpo. Radio Ada visited communities, providing a platform for information and interviews with community members, which they broadcast. Sharing stories from one area to another via radio sparked awareness, discussion and protest particularly amongst the women, and it was from this that the initiative to organize ASSWA grew.

“It all rests on the women and their voices. We just facilitate [what they do]. It is the community members who feel that as indigenous people they have to engage themselves. As community radio, we can help the community learn from experiences and share with the others. Our reporters go and ask, “tell us your stories” which we package and broadcast for others to learn.”
Radio Ada’s programmes about the struggle of the Songor women has made a meaningful difference to their outreach and for their relationships and connections. It provides a platform for communicating with dispersed members, broadcasts their communication initiatives such as plays and discussion programmes and, very significantly, can help in holding powerful actors and authorities to public account. A local chief had to take make an unprecedented public apology to the women on air, after he realized he was being broadcast live. Radio Ada’s activities have linked the women to other national and international groups working for indigenous community democratic management of natural resources. The coordinator of NCOM heard of the women’s struggle on air and approached Radio Ada to contact the women, initiating the involvement through which ASSWA has built strong links with ASSM groups of both salt and gold mining communities nationally.

4.6. Involvement in NCOM

ASSWA has become an active participant in NCOM, with Mary Akuteye representing them on its steering committee. Their participation in the coalition has helped forge links with other salt producer communities located across the coastal regions of the country such as Keta Lagoon, Elmina and Cape Coast. In April 2018, the salt campaigners all met in Sogakope (on Lake Volta) to discuss on-going campaigns against large-scale private industrial concessions and police assaults on salt communities. ASSWA members have widened their lens of interpreting their local experiences and the broader frame of national policy and wider political and economic developments within which the different but inter-related struggles in salt communities occur.

They are beginning to generalize about conditions and requirements of small-scale producer communities. At the last NCOM national conference in Accra in May 2019, the women heard of government interventions in other areas and linked this to their situation:
“We want the government to replenish the lagoon with water. In the regions where cocoa [a major export commodity] is produced, the government buys the cocoa and also supplies the farmers with inputs. We demand same approach”

In that conference, community small-scale salt producer activist groups came together to develop a national advocacy programme, demanding implementation of principles and approaches originally elaborated in the Songhor Master Plan in all solar salt producing areas, rehabilitation of lagoons and their development as sustainable community resources.

They also discussed issues of common cause with the artisanal gold miners, despite very different relations to the respective resource base, facilitated by their growing appreciation of the interconnectedness of various forms of threats to indigenous rights of access and community control of natural resources.

In the plenary sessions of the conference the women seemed quiet and their engagement appeared slight, but the importance of their presence was recognized by the translation of discussions to Dangme and Ewe. When the meeting split into smaller ‘Gold’ and ‘Salt’ groups the women were significantly more engaged. The participation of ASSWA executive in the 2-day meeting held in Accra would not have been possible without funding through TWN Africa.

4.7. International Links
Through NCOM and Radio Ada the women of Songor became involved in two participatory research projects with IDS in Sussex and with Dr. John Langdon of Francis Xavier University, Canada. Both projects have brought the campaign to international attention and forged links between the women and other international indigenous land rights activists’ groups with which they regularly communicate. The connections provide encouragement to the women and a realization of the global nature of the struggle.
Both Francis Xavier University and IDS also provided resources, in the form of funding for some ASSWA activities, although that has since ended with the research projects.

4.8. Threats to their network
In addition to the multiple threats discussed in the foregoing, the greatest threat to the network in its daily existence, beneath the radar and energy of the high moments, are the more local and enduring ones of poverty and isolation

“Salt is the only source of livelihood for the women. Those of us campaigning for the restoration of community owned operations are not in good books of many powerful people, because they are making a lot of money and they feel we are threatening this. Automatically such people may be hostile to us and seek to ridicule, discredit and isolate us. Many people see how I am struggling financially and ask me ‘what on earth are you gaining from all this campaigning. They say, “You
are poor, salt production is a source of money for you and those like you but you are urging people to stop it.”

The financial constraints are also impacting the regularity of their participatory mass-membership assemblies and other outreach.

Other threats include that of persecution and violence:

“I no longer go to the lagoon at all as a principled position, given the stance we have taken against the Atsiakpo system operating there. As a leader, I have to sacrifice the option of earning the small wage opportunities there, even though understandably many of our members have no choice but to work there. I lost all income earning opportunities. It has not been easy for me. I have also tried selling food in the market but some people try to stop me. Once, three men came threatening to dump my wares saying that if I am opposed to Atsiakpo I should not benefit from people spending the money they earn there. I have had to move my sales to less favourable places because of threats like that.

4.9. Conclusion
This chapter has sought to examine in some detail the activities, attitudes, links, communication channels and problems of the ASSWA using their own words, my observations and discussions with their partners and collaborators. A number of elements stand out as the most salient empirical findings about the ASSWA experience.

First is the learning capabilities developed and acquired by the women through building a women’s/gender-specific network-organisation. This is a novelty, despite the women’s long experience of activism in the community and is an act that has added to and wrought changes on the landscape of the community. ASSWA is having to build a membership that faces the constant challenge of stepping out from underneath the weight of traditions that have submerged and stunted their autonomous agency. They are having to reinvent themselves, find new means of communication to build this.

The community context is undergoing change. Private interests are more present locally but clearly derive considerable strength from their interconnections with wider markets, the state, the ripple effects of globalization and of global value chains in salt and natural resource sectors.

But ASSWAs evolution is also opening up potential for wider connections that can symmetrically match those on the other side of the conflict - within the community, nationally and beyond. An important finding is ASSWAs ability to relate to and actively use Radio Ada as an external resource and an indirect part of her infrastructure of communications. Linked to this, more broadly, is ASSWAs development as a
social movement actor. It is far from a passive member of NCOM and its participation is altering NCOMs own modes and practices of communications.

The learning taking place is also evident in the evolution of ASSWAs communications practices – from adaptation of historical communication practices like interactive participatory community theatre and song, innovating with leafleting and other means and sites of communicating. Richer tactics, strategies, exemplified by the diversity of interventions in the major annual festival. The finding in this regard attests to the women learning expansion of their communications skill sets and channels of expression, their ability to win support and construct alliances through communicating for change.

The threats and adversity they are confronted with are immediate and deep seated. They can be debilitating, such as the impact of poverty and lack of funding on levels and quality of participatory democracy and leadership accountability.

But the women have learnt positive lessons of public mobilization, voice, communication and action, and their activities have generated empirical evidence that enables consideration of emergent theories that can identify factors and inform potential approaches and propositions for enhancing their sustainability. In the next chapter I will analyse these findings and propose a model for such an emergent theory.
5. Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Introduction
The continued agency of the ASSWA is challenged by the poverty of the community within which it operates and by its ability to communicate effectively locally, nationally and internationally. As it stands now, the organisation is active but long-term sustainability may be compromised by the lack of dialogic interactions at all levels of engagement. The purpose of this study was to examine communication practices of the ASSWA network and implications for the network’s evolution and effectiveness within the context of Communications for Change; and, to create a model (theory) for empowered agency of ASSWA through improved communication based on their identified priorities, needs and requirements, such as to promote ‘power participation’.

To achieve this, I first defined the variables for this research project and set them in their theoretical context, developing a CLD to illustrate the causative relationships between elements (Chapter 2). In Chapter 4, I detailed the findings from the interviews carried out with members of the ASSWA, NCOM, Radio Ada and TWN Africa using the variables as a lens through which to view the data and using the project research methodology described in Chapter 3.

The aim of this chapter is to formulate or suggest interventions and mechanisms within the ASSWA context which can lead to expanded communications for change, that promotes horizontal engagement between members, communities and trans-localities (Langdon, 2018) in a way that promotes learning within the organisation. In doing so, suggest a pathway to sustained agency and effectiveness for the ASSWA.

5.2. ASSWA – A shared identity
Without question there is a strong bond and cohesiveness of a shared identity evident in ASSWA which in some ways, paradoxically, has been formed through the shift downwards in the nature of the women’s relationship to production (Howard, Franco and Shaw, 2018). The paradox is that while the previous collective community ownership phase of the Songhor area gave some assurance and protection to women’s rights of access and use arising from their membership of the community, there was less pressure for the contradictions and differences of gender to emerge as a distinctive question. It is when the newly emerging property rights of Atsiakpo, and its attendant division of labour collectively marginalized women (Langdon, Larweh and Cameron, 2014) and threatened to downgrade them from independent individual producers within the community to precarious wage-dependent workers in the emerging division of labour, that a collective identity (Diani, 1992), collective voice, a communications for change agenda became both more imperative and more possible (Wilkins, Tufte and Obregon, 2014). It also posits new narratives, outlooks and demands that can impact structures of property and production relations as transformed, and transformative, mechanisms for women, community economy and wider
development. It is no coincidence that the women of ASSWA are the only collective force in the area fighting for the sustainability of the lagoon as a community resource, all other organisations and institutional actors are seeking its expanded exploitation in the short and medium term.

5.3. Communications with the members

The process of becoming an activist is a process of learning. According to Cox and Nilsen (2005, 2017) this happens to individuals and organisations when they encounter resistance or, in the case of the Songhor communities, the indifference or violence of the system, when they assert their rights against powerful extractive industry forces, national government neo-liberal policies and local small business interests. According to Griff Foley (1999 in Choudry and Kapoor, 2010), the learning gained through the experience of social action is a fundamental component for deepening understanding and developing strategies. It is the internal dialectic which conflict with authority and the prevailing social power structures give rise to that precipitates discussion about what to do, and then how the system might react, as Barker (2013) calls it “struggle among themselves about how to struggle”.

Data from the interviews tell a story of fantastic efforts to cohere the group and manage discussions in ways that have worked over time within the socio-cultural setting of the lagoon. However, the number of meetings held has diminished in the past couple of years, with the last general meeting having been held in October 2018. At that meeting attendance was reduced because the funds were not available to subsidise transport to the venue, making it impossible for poor women from remote locations to attend. Thus the potential power of their discursive space (Tufte, 2017) as a communication vehicle for change is compromised.

The lack of available technologies is certainly an impediment to more frequent and interactive engagement with and between ASSWA members, where in other locations online dialogues have facilitated on going conversations about issues within groups (Mutsvairo, 2016), this is largely unavailable to rural poor in Ghana, and indeed other parts of the continent (Gillwald, 2017). Conversations are held face-to-face when possible or facilitated by Radio Ada or via mobile phones.

It is difficult to analyse ASSWA’s method of dispute resolution in detail without more information and discussion with members. What are their expectations of a democratic space and how do they see their roles? or ability to challenge the executive? It is not feasible to say at this stage. What the data showed is that relationships within ASSWA remain on the individual and personal level (as in so much of Ghana) and reaching consensus is considered important to maintaining cohesion and that the group has “its own cultural codes and narratives in a democratic idiom” (Della Porta, 2009). This is a common feature of small social movements (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2015) and there is a danger, that in the drive for consensus, of stifling debate, which would, in turn, compromise the tendency towards individual and collective learning. My feeling is that the current democratic set-up of ASSWA has more to do with the hierarchical thinking
(especially for women) inculcated into every young girl by the pervasive value system; the concept that hierarchies are both natural and necessary and, more often than not, male led (Gemmill and Oakley 1992 in (Blaug, 2009)). That this thinking has not altered may be indicative of the lack of on-going debate and discussion within the group, caused primarily by the poverty of the group and its members and the lack of available resources to deepen participatory group learning and the weight of active, collective governance.

5.4. Communications with external allies

Given the relatively remote situation (in terms of social access, location and technology) of ASSWA it has made impressive external linkages with other small-scale salt producers in Ghana, the NCOM, the Ada diaspora in Accra and beyond and with other indigenous rights activists globally. The women I spoke with draw considerable strength from their contact and communications with their solidarity network. Shared stories of common experiences demonstrated to the ASSAW group that their struggle was not isolated nor unusual, and that, while there were significant local differences, the struggles were nonetheless similar. It has begun the process of the women becoming part and helping to construct a global shared identity (Della Porta, 2009). Mary Akuteye attended a conference in South Africa of indigenous land-rights groups and was horrified by the idea that people had lost all rights to land, housing and income and she brought her experience back as a salutary lesson for the women of Songhor. What was also clear from the interviews was how much the international recognition of their struggle meant to all the group, and the respect and regard with which their experiences and knowledge are held.

The conduit for much of the women’s contacts with national and international allies is Radio Ada. It was through the radio that Dr. Johnathon Langdon first began working in the community in 2008 (before ASSWA was founded). His work in building networks of trans-local learning (Langdon, 2018) has brought the women into direct (virtual) contact with activists in Canada (First Nation groups), Guatemala, Uganda and India. It was through these contacts that Mary Akuteye was invited to the conference in South Africa. The ASSWA received funding from the IDS (Sussex University) Programme for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods project and the Francis Xavier University participatory research project which sustained some of their organisational and communications work until recently.

ASSWA activity within NCOM is important for both organisations, the women bring the struggle of disempowered wage-labourers to a coalition that is largely made up of small-scale employers (most of the artisanal gold miners are not single-person operations, rather SMEs) and the interaction is transformative for both organisation. The ongoing communications and the work developing an agreed common programme with the small-scale salt miners along Ghana’s coast provides significant discursive sphere for the women.
Nonetheless, even in these undoubted positively empowering external relations, the diffusion of positive impacts through ASSWA could become compromised without growing mass participation in the life of the group. A knowledge gap can open up and leaders who also become sole points of external interface on behalf of the group can become habituated in relatively ‘privileged’ gate keeping stances and roles.

5.5. Engagement with Radio Ada and the power of Story Telling

Radio Ada is central to the story of the ASSWA, from being one of the prime movers in the formation of the group, as a platform for amplification and projection of their struggle in wider public domains, providing backroom managerial and administrative support such as accounting and maintaining membership records, and as a medium of intra-group communications, sending out messages to ASSWA members throughout the district. The station has developed content with the community through chat shows, drama and story-telling and in doing so reinforces the shared identities within the area and with the Ada diaspora in Accra and beyond.

It is also a custodian of the memory of the Songhor struggle, with the community as keeper (and reteller) of the stories which form the collective memory. Tufte talks of public memory as ‘both a rhetorical and political strategy’ (Tufte, 2008), in this way community organisation like ASSWA are able to bring forth their stories of former struggles and use these a resource for present and future action. At Bonikope there is a monument to Maggie Kuwornu, who was shot and killed by police in 1985. Her statue serves to remind the women of the forces against them, but far more importantly it is a daily reminder of their victory against private interests and the state. I believe it is the force of this memory which explains the differences in the struggles between the women of Songhor and the other salt-winning communities along the coast, where community access is being lost and large private interests have already encroached on communal resources (Third World Network-Africa, 2017).
FIGURE 10: MARY AKUTYE IN FRONT OF THE MEMORIAL TO MAGGIE KUWORNU AT BONIKOPE, SONGHOR (PHOTO: AUTHOR)

5.5.1. Problem Causal Diagram

The level of engagement of the ASSWA members is being undermined by their lack of resources, the regularity of contact between the executive and members is declining and the frequency of meetings at both the local and districts level is dropping. Inevitably, this threatens the immanent tendency towards increased activism and learning. Given the relative isolation and precarious livelihood security of the
members, the question arises what kind of strategy might extend and expand awareness, involvement and solidarity with their struggle in such a way as to enhance the communications for change dynamic within ASSWA.

5.6. Theory for Expanded and Sustained Agency of ASSWA

**Figure 12: Theory for Expanded and Sustained Agency of ASSWA**

**Expanded Solidarity Networks**

The possibilities exist for ASSWA to expand its solidarity links with other rights activists’ groups both locally and internationally. Creating these partnerships with people and organisations involved in similar struggles can benefit ASSWA in several ways. It will enable the organisation to create alliances founded on equal relations (Anyidoho and Crawford, 2014), it enhances the learning through the sharing of experiences and ideas and in doing so created shared identities and a clearer understanding of power structures locally and globally, and can provide access to resources for activities within the Songhor area. This allows ASSWA to steer away from the more technocratic NGO pathway which more often than not avoids discussions around political or transformational social change.

There are numerous examples of successful international solidarity networks, such as the opposition to large dams at Narmada. Here the local activists faced intractable local and national state forces, as a
result they raised their campaign to national and the international levels. It became part of a transnational movement who were committed to the complete opposition to large dams globally and advocated for alternative way of managing water supplies. It was the elevation of the struggle to the national and global arenas that led to their victory. Were the protest to have remained local it is unlikely to have succeeded. (Nilsen and Cox, 2017).

5.6.1. Relationships with the community
The interaction and communication with the Songhor communities is key to the success of the women’s campaigns. They are of the place but to succeed requires the participation and support of a broad section of the population. The initial outreach they did in the communities, the on the spot assemblies and discussion fora was so instrumental and effective in recruiting and consolidating their core membership in every one of the communities. Equally, public mobilisation and action, the protests and demonstrations (which are also forms of communication and expression) has won them recruits, support, respect other intangible resources. Stepping up communications with the community can renew them, bring fresh recruits, broaden their membership - and it can integrate and better optimise their disparate activities and making them more sustainable and improving the group’s overall impact. There may even be an overlap with their teenage pregnancy campaigns, the older girls might join the women’s cause, especially when they are more independent after graduation, bringing expanded demography, new skills sets and new energy.
5.6.2. Active Participation in Radio Ada
The relationship between the women of ASSWA and Radio Ada is strong and collaborative, and through the community provides content and purpose, the power dynamic is tilted towards the radio station due to its resources, its skilled and educated staff and its reach. It plays a massively positive role in the campaign of the women in terms of maintaining its books and membership lists, but were the women to be more actively involved in the station and to receive skills training (broadcasting, book-keeping, financial literacy) they would be able to engage with the station on a more equal footing and the mutual engagement and dialogue can produce improved decision making, programming and community exchanges.

5.6.3. Evaluation

5.6.3.1. Implications for Further Research
Examining communications models for other organisations in NCOM: The National Coalition on Mining (NCOM) is a network of activists, community-based organizations (those living in mining communities), artisanal and small-scale miners and civil society organizations helping small-scale miners and communities affected by mining to organise collectively in order to advocate and for communal land and resources rights. Having carried out this research with the women of ASSWA it would be valuable to select other activist groups, also part of NCOM to research – and perhaps even NCOM itself.

5.6.3.2. Limitations of the research
Though this research was conceived within the context of the broader NCOM coalition, the context of the women at Songhor is quite specific. So, while the methodology and approach can have relevant application in other similar contexts. Given the unique ties of common struggle that exists between the ASAF, Radio Ada and ASSWA, the emergent theory is likely to be meaningful within this context. As outlined in Chapter 3 the interview group was small and confined primarily to executive member of the ASSWA. Therefore, the theory that emerged cannot be generalized confidently outside of the Ada Songhor context, though it raises ideas and questions for further research beyond the ambit of this project.

5.6.3.3. Validity
Reliability and validity in the context of a qualitative research project are defined as trustworthiness, rigour and quality (Golafshani, 2003). It is this definition that I used for the evaluation of the research process and the emergent theory. In order to ensure that the theory that emerged from this research was valid the following criteria for assessing the quality or ‘goodness’ of the research and theory were applied.

Built into the research framework for this project are a number of criteria which I used in an attempt to improve the validity of the conclusions. Primary amongst these is the constant checking of the concepts
with the data: throughout the research process I checked my interpretations and conclusions with the participants and finally with relevant literature.

The validity of this paper is undermined to an extent however by three factors which I have acknowledged and tried to address in the methodology design and results analysis:

1. My personal bias and my status as a foreigner in Ghana might influence the final result: The primary method I used to counteract my own influence on the research process and the theory development was triangulation is defined to be "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, quoted in Golafshani, 2003). This was carried out in a number of ways: by a comprehensive literature review as part of the interview data analysis; check back with participants regularly. As well as the use of triangulation within this paper I reflected on the analysis process as well as acknowledged my own positions and opinions in the discussion.

2. The size of the interview participant group was smaller than planned originally, partially due to difficulty in getting access to an interpreter and translator, and because of the remote location of the lagoon itself. I had hoped to talk with ordinary members, but as it turned out I met with the executive.

5.6.3.4. Ethics
In ‘The Craft of Research’ Booth, Columb and Williams, (1995) make the point that aside from the more obvious research-related ethical proscriptions such as; not misrepresenting or misreporting; not plagiarising; not inventing results and not distorting opposing views, there are other positive ethical practices that if adopted can assist in the research and the research subjects. The premise underlying their ideas is that the way the research process is conducted, prepared and reported can be treated as a conversation amongst equals. In this way the participants have the opportunity to benefit from the research and the conversation expands their understanding and leads them to new knowledge also. In qualitative interview research methodologies this conversational trait is hard coded into the design. In conducting this research project, I have endeavoured to discuss the emerging data with participants, other informants (in NCOM and TWN); to get feedback, certainly, but also in some small way expand the ownership of the results and ideas.

The research process threw up many difficult and sensitive topics around relationships, hierarchies, cultural biases and respect. To be able to delve into these issues in depth required a level of closeness and trust between myself and the participants with many opinions expressed that might not otherwise be articulate in the work context. To protect the participants their anonymity was guaranteed and a number
of fascinating opinions and anecdotes which could be clearly identified with individuals were not included in the research reports or in this research papers.

5.7. Conclusion

At first glance, the Brave Women of Ada Songhor Lagoon communities are locked in dubious battle. They are fighting against expropriation of the natural resource base of their livelihood and their exploitation as cheap wage labour on the community salt flats with very little going for them. They are almost uniformly poor, mostly illiterate, scattered in communities along an 80 kilometre stretch in an isolated and hostile environment. Ranged against them is a panoply of powerful interests - those of small local capital, giant multinationals, unaccountable local government, unresponsive and distant central government, and traditional chiefs eagerly participating in the scramble to secure rights of appropriation of the potential wealth of an evolving salt mining industry.

Despite the odds, their short six year existence has so far shown them as a committed and cohesive group of activists, winning an increasing majority of support in their communities, enlisting the local community radio as a platform of outreach and amplification, and the solidarity of rights activists, organisations and social movements in Ghana and beyond. impressive an impressive.

Their is an unfolding story of how within the debilitating structures of indigence and inequalities, agency for change can emerge through building capabilities that can impact the balance of power and generate potential to transform the prospects of sustainable development for their community and its natural resources and for their own productive labours.

The learning and capabilities they are developing through resilience, cohesive and committed organising and campaigning has strengthened them in ways that are highly relevant, and constitute rich subject matter, for the communications for change school. This study has used the tools of this tradition to research the question of how the Brave Women can continue to sustain and transform the strategies that have thus far won them voice and recognition but have as yet fallen well short of decisive change in their favour. Through this interrogation, a model has been theorised and developed as potential strategy that might yield further resources to strengthen and sustain the Brave Women.
Bibliography


WOMAASHI: Communications and Activism in the Ada Songor Salt Women’s Association of Ghana


Appendix 1: People Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pauline VanderPallen</td>
<td>TWN/NCOM</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaw Graham</td>
<td>TWN</td>
<td>Programme Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Akuteye</td>
<td>ASSWA</td>
<td>Chairperson/President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Sophia Kitcher</td>
<td>ASSWA</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Osabutey Okuomo</td>
<td>ASSWA</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris Mensah</td>
<td>ASSWA</td>
<td>Organiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Amerdjo</td>
<td>Radio Ada</td>
<td>Community Organiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah Dameh</td>
<td>Radio Ada</td>
<td>Programme Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Ofoe</td>
<td>Radio Ada</td>
<td>Station Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi Larweh</td>
<td>Ghana Community Radio Network</td>
<td>Lead Trainer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: Transcripts and Recordings
All Interview Recordings and Transcripts can be located here:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1JWJ8Vj3D_6G5T7RU0IQeyhc0RVjOiu3b