

E4L COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA REVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Empowerment for Life (E4L) is a Programme by the Ghana Developing Communities Association (GDCA), the Youth Empowerment for Life (YEFL), and the Ghana Venskab (GV) from Denmark and DANIDA, School for Life (SfL) and Changing Lives in Innovative Partnership (CLIP). In the current form, the E4L programme is in its fourth phase covering from 2020 to 2023. With several elements covered by the programme, development for the people at the community level is mainly pushed through proactive engagement by the community journalists and the citizen journalists (CJs) under the programme. Implemented in Kumbugu, Savelugu, Karaga, Mion, and Saboba, the programme through the CJs has significantly impacted their communities through radio, social media, and news reporting. These interventions help the local governance system expand their local decision-making system, improve inclusive governance, and expand their net revenue to cover all development needs of their districts. GDCA and its partners commissioned this review report of the project.

The findings show that;

1. The media communication strategy/approach is very effective and efficient, considering the rural nature and the logistics available to the CJs for their field operations.
2. With the use and adoption of the media ethics and procedures for on-air production, the CJs people's engagement skills demonstrated a higher level of confidence in delivering all topics and methods they were trained in.
3. CJ's ability to technically produce and use studio equipment indicates their improved capacity levels.
4. The steering committee meeting with the CJs at the Assemblies demonstrates E4L commitment to improving and deepening the accountability processes of the duty bearers.
5. The reported revenue leap in the programmes areas (30%, 56%, and 300%) for Savelugu, Saboba, and Karaga, respectively, shows the vast amount of impact on the development needs of the districts by E4L. It should however be noted that the reported quantum leap in an increase in revenue for areas such as Karaga and others requires further probing and verification.
6. There exist enormous opportunities in using social media and online publications in the districts, which with further engagements, the CJs can leverage to attract more traffic.

7. Community consciousness improved tremendously due to the civic engagement of the CJs across the districts on radio and social media.
8. Some district duty bearers consider the CJs as partners in development rather than journalists chasing after them for stories practised under adversarial journalism.

With these findings, the study recommended:

1. The online platforms should be encouraged more as it is less expensive, and CJs can always have access to them for their civic engagements since the radio is doing well. However, the power infrastructure for data communication in some parts of rural Ghana creates serious limitations where the problem exists.
2. The exit approach and transition of the CJs should be well thought through so that their capacities are well built to be mainstreamed them into the traditional media fraternity for practice.
3. Enhanced capacities and community social consciousness of the CJs should remain a strong pillar of sustainability. E4L should teach more of the social change and change agents' spirit in the CJs as part of the exit strategy.
4. The Assemblies should be encouraged to take more responsibility for the administration and management of their districts by negotiating with the radio stations for more time.

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

Empowerment for Life (E4L) is a development-led programme aiming to support the most vulnerable and weak districts with technical support in governance, education, and inclusive growth and development. The programme is to strengthen community groups and organizations to facilitate social, political, and economic development processes and ensure that the rights of people are upheld. Under the programme, 29 young persons from deprived communities in the region were trained as community journalists and attached to radio stations where they produced and filed stories and hosted weekly radio programmes on the development concerns of their communities to draw the attention of duty-bearers to address them. They also used social media to amplify community voices on the same concerns while encouraging the communities to take advantage of development opportunities by non-profit organisations and the government to better their lot (GDCA/YEfL, 2019).

1.2. Development and Community Journalism

Over the years, the concept of development journalism has been shaped by the changing notion of development and development communication (Chattopadhyay, 2019). In recent years the debate about development journalism has centred on its definition – journalists as agents of social change; nation builders; partners of government; watchdogs; guardians of transparency; non-adversarial; communitarians (Romano 2005), just like E4L CJs. Although there are different approaches to development journalism, it mainly refers to the kind of journalism that pays continuing attention to reporting policies, agendas, activities, and events that affect the developmental issues and are committed to the improvement of the life of the people. This approach differs from that of the traditional idea of journalism and the traditional objectivity principle. More recently, scholars and practitioners made efforts to move beyond topical definitions of development journalism to include stylistic elements. This kind of journalism is also not beyond criticism, and it has often been labelled as government propaganda, antithetical to a free press (Chattopadhyay, 2019). However, development journalism may create a useful connection between the government and the people, as seen in this project (E4L), and it seeks to mobilize people for national and local level development (Waisbord, 2009).

According to Meyer and Speakman (2019), existing research on community journalism has identified key distinctions between community journalism and other types. First, community media focus on information connected to everyday life, and second, its media members tend to develop a closer, more intimate connection to the community they serve. The idea of closeness began with early research into

the idea of community itself. Community as a concept revolves around emotional connection and membership. The two necessary elements for community formation are for a group of people to have something in common and something that differentiates them from other groups (Meyer & Speakman, 2019).

Additionally, Meyer and Speakman (2019) argue that community media are built upon these concepts to give communities and members a critical voice, as done by the CJs and the E4L programme. The audience for community news is often connected by an interest in, and emotional attachment to, a geographic area, which represents one form of community or a specific viewpoint, interest, or way of thinking, which often represents the virtual community. Both groups need journalists who provide factual information on the community and enable and support strong community ties. Community journalists can also help build place attachment and create third places for community members to congregate and interact socially in.

1.3. Media and Social Change

The media play a central role in informing the public about what happens globally, particularly in those areas in which audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience Happer & Philo, 2013). That is not to say that the media simply tell us what to think – people do not absorb media messages uncritically (Philo, 2008; Philo, Miller, & Happer, in press). But they are key to setting agendas and focusing public interest on particular subjects, which operates to limit the range of arguments and perspectives that inform public debate. Numerous theories have also attempted to understand the effect of the media on social change from various perspectives and for different objectives. These include media and democratization theories, development communication and social learning, and theories in health communication, social marketing, and participatory communication.

Today, we are living in a highly mediated society where information is central to our everyday lives. We are living in an information society, where the media is the strapping tool of communication and connectivity. The media plays an active role in social and personal life. Certainly, media has the power to change people and social capital (Singh, 2015). The media act as an effective catalyst for social change. The mass media, no doubt, is considered the fourth pillar of a democratic society. In the present time of media globalization, media is a backbone of social growth, where everything works due to information. It is the media that brings all types of changes and makes them according to public opinion. It creates awareness deep in the public (Johnson, 2001).

1.4. Empowerment and Social Movements

Most theories of collective action attribute the birth of social movements either to the breakdown of the social system or to the formation of new interests or of new forms of solidarity and collective identity (Tilly, 1975). Before entering upon a discussion of this dichotomy, however, we may note a striking fact about the current theories: most of them, either directly or indirectly, presuppose change as a given factor. Whether collective action is ascribed to the breakdown of the system or to the appearance of new interests, there is always a change whose nature and causes are left unexamined by the model. Social movements often organize activities around the use of written forms. Yet these literacy events and practices have received little attention for the roles they play in effecting social, cultural, and political change.

Empowerment is multi-dimensional, social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationships with others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected (Page and Czuba, 1999).

Social movements are networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities. It is argued that the concept is sharp enough as in; a) to different social movements from related concepts such as interest groups, political parties, protest events, and coalitions; b) to identify a specific area of investigation and theorizing for social movement research (Diani, 1992). In inference, Page and Czuba (1999) see empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important. Thus, the link between social movement and empowerment is that social movement's core mandate is to empower the voiceless.

2. ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS

2.1. Objectives

The overall objective of the assignment is to provide the E4L program with an assessment of the effectiveness of the media and communication components and provide inputs and recommendations for future strategic alignment.

2.2. Questions

The following questions were used to guide and frame the scope of the review assignment.

1. To what extent do citizens journalists have voices and platforms to address injustices and engage stakeholders and duty bearers on community issues?
2. What impact has the strategy made in addressing community issues?
3. What is the impact/efficiency of each media?
4. Have the combination of media (radio, social media, and news reporting) strengthened the impact of the youth participants' actions? Is it cost-efficient?
5. Have the duty bearers' perceptions towards the CBOs and journalists changed as a result of the media programs?
6. Are duty bearers responding to and or addressing issues raised through the various media used by the community/citizen journalists?
7. What positive and or negative unexpected changes have taken place for the participants, program strategy, communities?
8. How well have CJs been able to use the skills gained beyond the E4L program?

3. METHODOLOGY

The assessment of the impact of the media and communication component of the E4L addresses critical issues and community consciousness and collectiveness in fostering dialogue resulting in a change in the private and public spheres. Community journalism's impact and issues of social change in societies require the approach of in-depth qualitative approaches. The assessment focused on the effectiveness, efficiencies, relevance, reliability, and sustainability approaches of the empowerment life program.

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

In undertaking the review, we used Focused Group Discussions (FCD) with segregation of participants according to the roles including community journalists, citizen journalists, and duty bearers (community leaders including at the traditional, state agencies, and political groups). Districts visited for this exercise include Savelugu and Kumbungu, Saboba, and Karaga. The team could not visit Mion due to technical factors. The team also interacted with the staff and management of all the radio stations in the districts visited including Kitawoln FM, Might FM, Jata Radio, and Simli Radio.

These FGD groups provided relevant information on advocacy and governance, community roles, ownership of their development spaces, etc. As duty bearers and providers of relevant information and empowerment to people, including the youth and the general public, this allowed the CJs, the youth, and the assembly representatives to offer deeper perspectives on the role of the E4L on issues of social change.

Table 1. Study Units and Locations

Community	Radio Station
Savelugu	Might FM
Kumbungu	Simli Radio
Saboba	Gaaki FM Kitawoln FM
Mion	Zaa Radio
Karaga	Jata FM Zaa Radio
Online	Social Media reporters

3.2. Document Reviews

Relevant reports were collected from the E4L programme and detailed documentation was reviewed with a focus on (reports, field change stories/outcome harvests, recordings from radio programs, selection of published online news articles, evaluation of the YSU reports, and the YSU best practice publications). The information provided expanded the scope of understanding of the E4L programme

and its impact, and the likely counterfactuals. It also complimented and validated aspects of the primary data gathered from the interviews.

3.3. Visits to locations for observations and interviews

An interview guide was developed based on the structure of the terms of reference (TOR) and a further line of leading interactions or questions. Audio recorders were used to record participants during key interview sessions. The cyber ethnographic approach of gleaning from the published social media accounts of the community journalists (feature writing and social media) was done to understand how online activism was done by the CJs.

3.4. Participants Consent

All participants' consent was sought before the start of interviews, including the questions and the reasons the recording was done on the recording devices so that their privacy and data sharing willingness rights were respected and protected.

3.5. Review and analysis

The sessions were recorded digitally, and the recordings were transcribed. The interviewers checked the transcripts for transcription errors in conjunction with the digital recordings. The transcriptions were coded into apriori and emerging themes, categories for trend analysis, verbatim quotes, and margins of impacts using NVIVO.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. VOICES OF COMMUNITY, YOUTH PARTICIPATION, AND CITIZENS JOURNALISTS

As a general definition, however, we suggest that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important (Bailey (1992). As argued from empirical literature on development discursiveness, local participation in decision-making serves as strong catalysts for development. For participation to occur effectively, empowerment serves as an essential critical

success factor. From the interactions in the project districts, E4L emerged as the vehicle of empowerment and a purveyor of strong voices for the youth in these communities.

In Karaga and in Savelugu in particular, both the old and new community journalists demonstrated higher levels of knowledge and confidence in understanding the functional process of local governance demand for accountability.

We do not fear the Assembly people, they are our leaders. We assist them to develop our communities and we want to make sure the schools, hospitals, and roads are done. We will continue to talk to them.... Community Journalist, Karaga.

We talk to the community members, we discuss why we should pay our taxes on the radio every week, we play jingles to advertise, and we always monitor the market and routes where the assemblies can get revenue... Citizen Journalists, Saboba.

The information provision and purveyance process of information of these empowered youth go beyond the spirit of collectivism and pushing for social equity in local communities. These statements reveal the local level co-creation and co-management role of development in sharing burdens and responsibilities through voluntary community engagement management for better and enhanced governance at the local level.

Beyond the shared knowledge and empowerment function of the E4L programme on the CJs which has amplified their voices, the media platforms came as one of the driving pillars. The interactions with participants indicated that the capacity, functionality of the radio stations (Radio Kitawohn, Simli Radio, Might FM, Jata FM and Zaa Radio) in their various districts offered validity to their voices on air for the citizens to follow. Real-time information is provided and also done in the local languages of the audience. Participants revealed that their local stations travel far and wide and it serves as the main source of information for them.

Can you imagine if there was no radio station here? All our effort would have been difficult. Now we are lucky we have Jata radio, and we don't have to travel to Tamale to do our programmes. The people listen to us, and they contribute a lot during the call-in sessions. Just that the time is very short...Community Journalist, Karaga.

This CJs position means that both the access to media and the information requirement and the knowledge required has been achieved through the E4L initiatives. With a louder and more empowered voice now, they all must appreciate and change their own welfare whilst demanding development from their leaders

The online and social media was another stronger platform available to the citizens and community journalists to effect social change. From the capacity development component of the E4L programme, they were trained on the use of social media and how online advocacy could be done. In particular, each district had dedicated community journalists who were focused on the online/social media aspect for their advocacy. The art and techniques of writing features for social media dissemination and dialogic engagement.

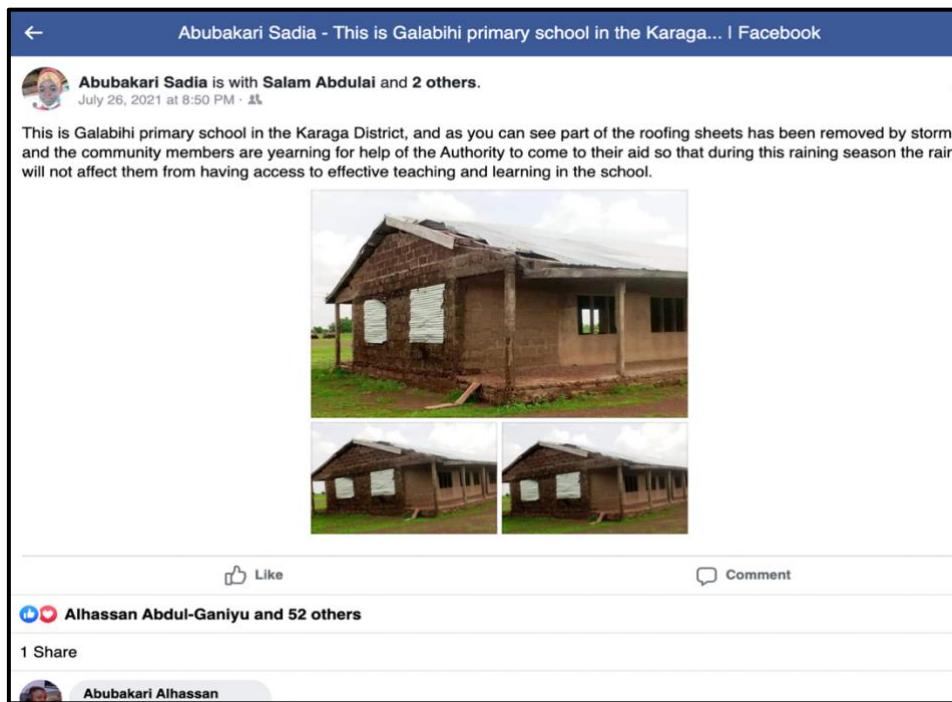


Figure 1. Facebook posting from a CJ, Karaga

We were trained on how to use Facebook, Twitter, canvas, feature writing, tagging, and sharing pictures. That's what we do. We will tag the DCE and some people in the district so that they see it.....Community Journalist, Saboba.

I will go round and identify community problems, take pictures, and tag our community leaders on Facebook, and share. When the duty bearers see the posts, they will try to address the problem....Community Journalist, Savelgu.

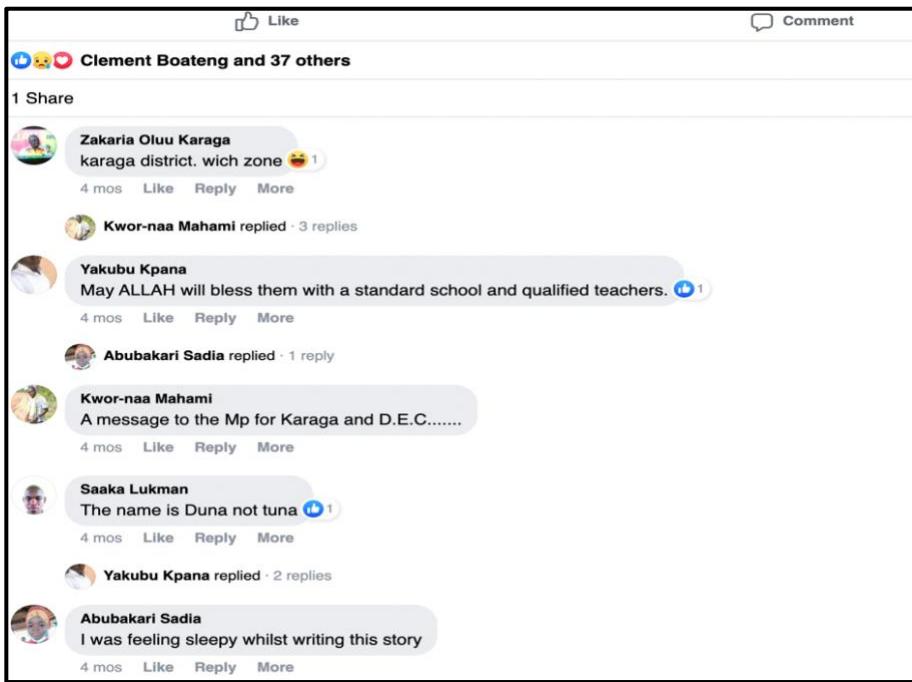


Figure 2: Dialogic Engagement with community followers on postings

I write and publish on social media and also feature writing. Sometimes there are very serious issues needing attention in our local communities, and more or less attention is given to it the media is also not reporting such an issue. So, for us, when we find such issues, we write about them and publish them on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other platforms to draw the attention of those who should attend to them.... Community Journalist, Karaga.

One of the old and experienced CJs explained how he used the platforms severally to share and update information and go live on Facebook for wider coverage—considering the huge platform of the social media space in the world and Ghana in particular.

For me, I have been going live on Facebook, and I do guide the other guys on how to do it.... Community Journalist, Karaga.

With 15.7 million internet users, 8.2 million social media users, Facebook accounts for 70.89% of the social media share in Ghana (Digital, 2022). These indicators underscore the significant importance of the online/social media platform and how it has been under-utilized in the project areas. All the CJs (community and citizens) were using their private and personal media accounts, which had some discernible and low following and could not make the required social impact compared to the radio platforms.

It emerged from the field discussions that social media has great potential in local communities' advocacy and governance process. This stems from the growing youth and the increasing interest of the CJs in purveying their gathered information to the public whilst gratifying their nerdiness on social media. However, the challenge of the telecom network infrastructure deficit in rural Ghana remains a huge gap in pushing through the use of social media as a heavy internet-driven tool for networking and information sharing. Karaga, Kumbugu, Saboba, and Mion have high-speed internet (4G) deficit, and only Savelegu appeared to be enjoying flip-flap 4G for being closer to the urban Metropolis of Tamale.

Beyond these real and unavoidable perils of the social media and network stability in the E4L project areas, the following critical recommendations can improve and consolidate the current social media strategies of the programme.

4.2. ESTABLISHING INDIVIDUAL CHANGES OF CJS OR PARTICIPANTS

Other observed amplified voices of the people through this E4L programme were about the boldness and conscious level of the youth and the people in negotiating their own developments. In Karaga for example, one of the duty bearers, the Chief Imam, spoke eloquently and with passion about why the people of Karaga and its environs need to pay taxes to create their own reality of development. Such acts of local stakeholders and a higher level of local participation on issues like taxation indicate how detailed the empowered efforts of the people are in the project areas.

We tell the youth to pay their tax. We tell everyone to pay their taxes. Every farmer should pay a tax on their yield so that our assemblies can construct our roads, school, and hospital buildings, and also our water. We are thankful that the youth and the people are accepting the message. We thank E4L and the team for this.....Community Duty Bearer, Karaga.

The discursive point of local development and collective decision-making led by local people comes on the hills of the power of social change and the peoples' ability to negotiate in different arenas of development as in the cases of these communities. Most of the District Assemblies (DAs) and other agencies including (Ghana Education Service, Ghana Health Service, CHRAG, etc.) offered an open demonstration of goodwill and support towards the volunteering role of the citizen and the community journalists and how it impacted their districts and communities.

More CJs excitingly rejoiced on the significant impact of being a CJ and the transformation it had on their lives. From the training they had and the continuous practice in their various districts, CJs developed higher self-efficacies in dealing with community and personal level issues and aspirations.

I am very confident and can talk to anybody now without fear. Unlike before, I will be trembling. I am happy to be a CJ.....CJ, Saboba

For me, I am grateful to the E4L team. I finished my diploma and am now almost done with my bachelor's degree in communication at UDS. I have also learned and love local advocacy and activism. I can do so many things on the radio on campus and in Tamale. I also support the new CJs too.CJ, Saboba.

The exposure has helped me, and I am very confident than before. I have dealt with authorities to bring help to my community members. All because of E4L and being a CJ....CJ, Savelegu.

Others are now into mainstream media practice (radio) having been a CJ, whilst some had the opportunity to be trained in Denmark. These individual change attributes of the CJs and how that impacts their individual driven passion for community service and self-growth indicates the impact level of the E4L initiatives.

4.3. ENGAGEMENT IMPACT OF DUTY BEARERS AND THE CJS ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENTS

The engagement of the CJs with the duty bearers at the local level appeared to be one of the effective mediums of pushing for development. In engaging the community leaders, the CJs directly participate in development discourses and are able to push the leaders to act. The engagement takes off the tendency of leaders, and elected representatives at the local government level to act on their whims and caprices. The refreshing testimonies from the duty bearers in all the project areas reflected how the local actors negotiate with hegemonic power in terms of decision making, rights of the people, and their voices. The testimonies show how human agency is enabled.

In fact, the CJs have been very supportive of us. Through them and hard work (advocacy and radio engagement), we increased our revenue by 30% in 2021. We are hoping to increase it

more than we are doing. They also follow up for us to account for how those revenues are spent. We have the district steering committee meeting at the assembly where CJs are part of most decisions.....Budget Officer, Savelugu.

I am telling you; we are very happy with them. Our revenue increased by 300% in 2021. Yes, not 30%, I mean 300% leap. This is gotten through their support and advocacy. The Citizen Journalists have done well. I do move with them when I am going out for revenue mobilization. They also check out books to make sure we are accountable. We need more Citizen Journalists and community journalists.... Revenue Mobilisation Officer, Karaga.

I think the district revenue increased to 65%. I know it's even more than that. So, if we have more of them, they can help us more to generate more revenues.... Information Officer, Saboba.

The CJs and the E4L team have been here for about two years now. As an NGO in our district, to be honest with you we have enjoyed a lot from them. They are into education and one of their core mandates is to ensure that the ordinary person's child can also get an education. They engage the parents and teachers through meetings to let the parents know their responsibilities and rights. And I think that has helped a lot. Apart from meeting the parents face to face, E4L has also provided airtime, where we talk about education and the entire district for everybody to know their rights and responsibilities. I remember my coordinating director who has gone on transfer always saying that we should be thankful to God that these CJs and E4L teams are always there to help us go and talk to the public about the need to pay their taxes and their rights to demand some of the things that the Assembly is supposed to provide them..... Information Officer, Saboba.

Such testimonies from the duty bearers offer some validity to the effort of the CJS and the entire initiatives of the E4L programme. It should however be noted that some of the testimonies require further validation. It also emerged that the level of ethical considerations on-air and the civility of the CJs in engaging the leaders were high which indicates a good level of professional practice. The code of ethics and professional guidelines was one of the areas the CJs were trained on in the programme

and the application of these guidelines in their field practices reflects the adoption and commitments of the CJs.

The feature writing and social media focus aspect of the engagement also amplified the voices and the publicity of the districts. The gatekeepers (editors) assigned to assist the CJs over time led to the publication of some feature materials on diamondfmonline, and watchghana.com, aside from the social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook).

The observed issues of the feature writing challenge from the publications made on these sites and social media were of low quality and did not cover the broader frame of the 5Ws and H (what, when, who, where, which, and how). Also, the structure and basic processes involved in the online publication and feature writing, including structure, lead, transition, body, length, and conclusion, were not strictly applied. However, the descriptive and persuasive outlook of the publications was assuring.

4.4. THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITIES

Change in attitude and general perception of local people involved in development discourse saw encouragement from their interactions. The youth centre appeared to be the place of interaction and discussions among the youth in the various districts. The center became a space for promoting consciousness of volunteerism, and civil society activism, bringing impactful governance to the local level contributing to negotiated development on their terms and creating of social movement blocks where they rise and mobilise for better development. Economically sustaining the centers to serve the youth and help them in their bonding processes will enhance the empowerment process.

The E4L team explained how the engagement of the youth through the centers on social enterprise opportunities and activities including computer labs for ICT training serves as an income generation tool for the centers and the continued support of the District Coordinators. The changes in the citizen interactions and relationship building in the project areas contributed to the change and transformation of cultural and social institutions.

When asked one of the duty bearers whether there were observed social and behavioural changes in the youth, in particular, she said;

Yes, even though it is not gone completely, there is a lot of change. There have been changes in education (attendance), PTA attendance increase, immunization interest, school dropouts' reduction, and teenage pregnancy reduction. We believe this civic education by CJs in this district and their radio engagement have contributed to these reductions and changes.....Duty Bearer, CHRAG, Saboba.

Another duty bearer remarked about how the programme is building on the people's behaviour and social change concept. In his view, the confidence of community members in asking for more information from contractors, value for money works and quality issues are instances of the significant impact of the E4L programme in the district.

There is social and behavioural change, and the people are conscious to ask questions for example, when a contractor comes to our community, the people will be able to ask the relevant questions. Because of awareness and conscious building of the people, can help in sustainability after the project end. Even if E4L is no more there, the people themselves can govern and check the power bearers to act.....Duty Bearer, Saboba.

Participants in the Karaga community and the district explained how most of the streets had been cleared of street children as most of them are back to school. The sensitization and advocacy using the radio have been very powerful and they now know the importance of education, a participant retorted.

The young people have now recognized the importance of education to what they were doing previously. So, I think it has helped a lot. It came to a time when school-going children didn't find education impactful and authorities didn't find the need to come here but with the youth speaking up, the authorities especially the traditional authorities stepped in with a regulation that all school-going children must go to school that is why you will see that the road is now cleared of the children....Duty Bearer, Ghana Education Service- GES, Karaga

From my experience, the issue of bush burning has drastically reduced through the effort of the CJs using the radio and their social media write-ups, I follow them, and you would have seen it as you were coming from Tamale...Duty bearer, Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), Karaga.

The positive change pattern observed as a result of the radio, social media, and online activism by the CJs and other community center youths resonates with Paulussen & D'heer, (2013); David Kurpius, (1999) arguments that, with empowered voices and space, the youth have a higher propensity of causing change now and in the future when they become fully responsible as duty bearers.

4.5. Challenges of the Media Strategies for Social Change

Interacting with all duty bearers and the CJs in the project areas as well as the media managers revealed a number of operational, technical, and social challenges.

4.5.1. Threats/Warnings and Gender-Based Abuse

The usual hazards in journalism were the first of complaints by all the CJs. They explained that for most of the part, depending on the story or development issue being followed they were likely to face verbal threats and warning to stay away from such exercises. These threats at the local are mostly linked to the followers of duty bearers who attempt to fight and protect their leaders. Though not widespread and repetitive, attempting to kill stories or follow-ups for accountability that they considered essential for development stifles the right to press freedom and information by the people. Some of the CJs explained that;

We have been receiving threats and sometimes someone will come and tell you how someone has said they are planning to beat you because you reported an issue that is not favouring them.....CJs, Karaga

We receive threats from political activists, individuals, and even some teachers. Some time ago, we were having teacher absenteeism, and we reported that some teachers threatened to beat us.... CJs, Karaga

Yes, for example, in 2015, after we had a discussion concerning roads in the area on a radio station, someone threatened to beat me for that.....CJs, Saboba

We have received threats before from party commentators in the district...CJs, Savelugu

Beyond the general threats of assaults reported by the CJs, there was a gender dimension too. The female CJs indicated how they were assaulted for being women and engaging in such activism initiatives.

You are a woman, you should not be doing that, you are a woman.....CJ, Saboba

If you continue like this, no one will marry you. You are too known, you are a prostitute.....CJ, Saboba

The hopeful insight was that all the CJs appeared not to be perturbed about these developments and are encouraged to do more to improve the lots of their communities. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) recounted the number of assaults and other violent perpetrations toward female journalists between 1999-and 2021 and expressed deep worry. The media civil society watchdog organization explained that

“Some have also experienced psychological and physical harm as a result of some newsroom practices, inequalities/injustices, job security, and sexual harassment. When women journalists are restricted or hounded out of the profession, society is denied access to a diverse range of information and perspective.”...MFWA, 2021

We know that journalism is a risky job, but we still feel that we need to protect it..... CJ, Saboba

4.5.2. Phone Quality Issues

The main operational tool or logistics for the CJs are the mobile phones they use for both voice calls, text, and online social media interactions. Another use of mobile phones was the use for multimedia functions (use of photographs and videos). The news gathering and the feature writing activities are largely done through mobile, which is the main provision between the E4L programme and the CJs.

The main challenge with the brand and model of phones (Infinix smart) being used was that it could not effectively support the volume of content produced. Frequent freezing, low memory, and poor camera quality were indicated to be the daily usage challenge of the tool. Since this is the primary tool, it tends to slow issues and newsgathering processes for radio programmes and feature-writing.

4.5.3. Transportation Challenges

They explained the scattered nature of the communities in each district, and considering the low population density, it is a responsibility to cover every community for inclusive development and decision-making involvement. However, the rampant fuel increments and the serviceability of the motorbikes for the movements were indicated to be critical issues affecting their fieldwork.

Yes, they should provide means for the community journalist, and they should increase their number because they cannot go to all the communities. Because they are doing the work for all of us, they are not working for themselves or for only E4L. Because I ever had a programme with one of them from Wapuli, he was late because he didn't have means and there are so many places, they could have visited but because they don't have means it is a challenge to them. And E4L should be empowered to cover more themes.....CHRAG, Saboba

4.5.4. English language expression challenge with some of the CJs

Through our interactions, very few of the CJs could confidently express themselves well in English. It was observed that those with tertiary qualifications were better at articulations and critical discourse than their colleagues with senior high school certificates. However, they revealed that expressing themselves in the local languages (Dagbanli and Likpakpa) was the most appropriate route for them and that future training and another capacity-building effort could be made using the local language for effective adoption and usage.

4.5.5. Duration of the Radio Programme

The use of the radio platform was the most effective mode and aspect of the communication strategy in the field. Local community members had improved access to radio programmes and the knowledge that the CJs are their own who will be on air to educate, create community points of interest for discussion and seek accountability from the duty bearers made the radio aspect very effective and well listened to. They explained the often-reflective feelings they experience and go through every week with committed call-ins from listeners across the districts who want their community issues addressed and effect other needful social change within.

However, the one-hour (1 hour) duration, was short in their opinion. This observation came through from the CJs, the radio station management, and even the duty bearers. Some of the station managers revealed that as part of their corporate social responsibilities, they will often add 30 minutes of time for the CJs and the call-in sessions to be extensive and inclusive.

They are able to educate the people through our medium to monitor projects in the communities. So, they come and sit on the radio and discuss these issues, and sometimes it is also about feedback, and they do that through text messages and phone. We give them the

corporate social responsibility time of thirty minutes (30mins) to continue the programme. And we are planning to incorporate the community journalist into our morning shows. They go to the communities they know what is happening in the communities, so we need them...Jata Radio Management, Karaga.

Conversely, not all the stations were doing that, and the additional support from the assemblies could create more engagements and consolidate the existing impactful effect. With the revealed quadrupled increase in revenues, it was expected that the assemblies could support in providing additional airtime required for more advocacy and campaigns on the radio.

4.5.6. Reluctance and Avoidable Excuses by Duty Bearers

The CJs explained that in most instances of the accountability processes, most of the duty bearers will often give excuses to avoid engaging the public and would often invoke the bureaucratic requirements of information flow at the local government level. This derails some of the timed issues that require urgent feedback and information provision for the community members.

You can follow them for several weeks and they will tell you they don't have approvals to talk to you or engage you. Or give us more time and I will prepare, they say. But if you don't push hard, they will never provide the information you need...CJ, Savelugu

It is sometimes difficult getting some documents and detailed information from the assembly. Sometimes they don't feel comfortable working with us, but sometimes too, they do.....CJ, Saboba

In development journalism, these are normative expectations globally. Most elected officials and general duty-bearing officers feel reluctant to account for their stewardship.

4.5.7. Low Social Media Usage

From the field interactions, it emerged that the CJs had low social media use skills and general capacities. The few who were active on social media had few followers to generate a viral effect and make a change. They explained that the poor network system in the areas caused most of their weak showing on social media.

Posting pictures on Facebook sometimes takes a lot of time. The network can vanish, and you cannot even do live or post several pictures. Apart from the network, the phones do not help....CJ Saboba

Our social media activity is mainly limited to Facebook and more recently the likes of Twitter Instagram, among others, are also huge platforms but most of us are not conversant with these platforms and so if we could be trained on how to use them, especially for the publishing of news stories it would be very helpful.... CJ Karaga

I have not been live on Facebook before.....CJ Saboba

Whilst revealing these challenges on the social media part of advocacy, the CJs revealed they had training on the use of social media and online publications. But the social media viral nature is yet to penetrate well in rural Ghana and the telecom network stability.

We were trained on how to use social media, especially Facebook, and when I get a story, I want to publish to get the attention of duty bearers on Facebook, I tag them in the post....

CJ Savelugu

It is a known fact that telecom and data services are concentrated and effective in urban and peri-urban areas. This means it is much easier to access data services up to 4G level around Savelugu because of its proximity to the Tamale Metropolis than Saboba area.

4.6. PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON CHANGING STRATEGIES OF THE CURRENT APPROACH (CJS, RADIO, SOCIAL MEDIA AND FEATURE WRITING)

4.6.1. Feature Writing

Our interactions with the editors reveal that the CJs were committed to the course of rural journalism with intermittent scripting of text for publication with the guide of the volunteer editors. However, the editors intimated that some of the CJs who were serving as mentees showed some lack of commitment and were reaching out to them for support as agreed.

Actually, some of them are not serious, I cannot remember the last time they contacted me. I even told them. You follow them to support and publish their writeups, but they don't....Volunteer News Editor.

For us, I told them that, if they are committed, Zaa can engage them for the correspondence role at the district level, especially for the Mion area. Some of them have great potential..... Volunteer News Editor.

The editors recounted the content they engaged the CJs with during the training session and the assurances offered to direct sensitive and big stories to them to publish on mainstream media and blogging websites (zaaradioonline, radiotamaleonline, diamondfmonline, modernghana.com, GhanaWeb, Facebook etc.), for better and wider coverage. It was also according to encourage CJs to reduce their risks and exposures.

4.6.2. Radio Drama

Participants spoke about the inclusion of radio drama in addition to the current two advocacy approaches of the E4L programme. Participants thought the drama aspect of acting out on issues they can relate to on the radio. Radio drama is much more effective in achieving social change and impact because of self-character embedded at the local levels. Racicot-Matta, C., Wilcke, M., & Egeland, G. M. (2016) argued that community dramas are always effective when community-based interventions adopt community and individual involvement approaches and use local cultures a needle effect impact. A drama on taxation, and social change issues (education, decision making, teenage pregnancies, security, capital projects, health, agriculture, etc.), can well resonate with the people on negotiated development initiatives.

4.6.3. Increase the number of Training/number of CJs

All duty bearers interacted with indicated that there was a need to increase the number of CJs considering the huge impact they have made in their various communities. For the CJs, the farther distances of communities were a bigger problem, and whilst some suggested support to the transportation problem, others indicated that E4L could add more CJs for wide coverage.

E4L should add more CJs to help us. They are God-sent. We are grateful to the NGO for choosing our district. Please tell them to get us more staff.....Duty Bearer, Saboba

Training and refresher courses including more on:

1. Advance feature writing and blogging

2. Techniques of social media use, increasing followers on social media, going live, bundle management, online ethics, and privacy, online disinformation
3. Use of canvas
4. Partner with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) to train all CJs on radio and media strategies and skills.
5. Picture documentary
6. Training on fake news, misinformation, and disinformation
7. Picture and video editing using adobe and other free applications
8. Media ethics (Ghana Journalists Association, (GJA), National Media Commission, (NMC) guidelines on professionalism and content, and National Communication Authority, NCA on authorization ethics/guidelines).
9. Right to Information Act training and how information is accessed
10. Training on the use of podcasts for both online social media publications and radio websites.
11. Populating shorter audio jingles for sharing to group platforms and community members
12. Technical production training including (radio gadgets, consol, camera handling, lightening, handling calls/messages, and managing guests on air).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Project interventions are time-based and will always come to an end. In the process, maintaining and sustaining the gains achieved over the period remains crucial for project and programme stakeholders. A question on why the assemblies cannot contribute towards the revenue generation effort and the time of the radio programme. Participants said:

We know we could have done that, but our hands cannot reach our back....Duty Bearer, Karaga.

Sometimes we do. Assembly sometimes can go and pay one hour, or thirty minutes and you know when you are on air it makes the people bring their views. Sometimes you think that you know everything, but when you are on air and receive information from the villages, you will know that you don't know everything. There is a lot we get from the communities.... Duty bearer, Saboba.

From the field interactions and observations, it appeared with the following key recommendations, the sustainability effort of the E4L will be achieved after closure.

5.1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More CJs with additional roles and logistics should be provided. This is necessary if the programme is to be sustained. In a situation where the number cannot be increased, the current number of CJs can be supported to resolve the transportation challenges to enable them move across distances
2. The online platforms should be encouraged more as it is less expensive, and CJs can always have access to them for their civic engagements. Despite the challenge of poor data communication infrastructure in some rural areas, online platforms have the ability to reach policymakers who often reside in urban areas. The global nature of online communication can thus help to force a response to the challenges of development in rural areas.
3. The exit approach and transition of the CJs should be well thought through so that their capacities are well built to be mainstreamed into the traditional media fraternity for practice. A conscious effort should be made to provide additional training programmes to build the capacity of the CJs so that they can be mainstreamed. For instance, The GBC College, the Ghana Institute of Journalism, or UDS's Department of Communication, Innovation and Strategy, can be engaged to design a top-up training programme to build the confidence level and skillset of CJs to go mainstream.
4. Enhanced capacities and community social consciousness of the CJs remain a strong pillar of sustainability. As part of the exit strategy, E4L should inculcate more of the social change and change agents' spirit in the CJs than before. This can be achieved through the top-up training programme already recommended.
5. Better and strong mobile phones with enough memories and camera quality can be acquired to help retool the CJs fieldwork. This is necessary to facilitate the work of CJs. Camera functionality and durability of the phones will support the sustainability of the project.
6. Increase the roles and engagements of the gatekeepers (editors) to improve their (CJs) performance and efficiencies.
7. Use group messaging and group calls (associations, groups on WhatsApp etc.)
8. CJS should improve on their interpersonal engagement, persuasions, and some level of professional networks as that can help improve their relationships with the duty bearers for better engagement and accountability.

5.2. SOCIAL MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increased use of social media group pages by CJs and the E4L teams in the districts. CJs in districts should be encouraged to have group pages/accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to build a strong fan base/followers for maximum impact. Individual CJs can continue to use their personal pages and build them.
2. Encourage CJs to share their feature articles widely, and general advocacy content to multiple pages (High school pages, pages of assemblies, churches, and other youth groups), assigned editors, etc.
3. They should be tagging media personalities, duty bearers and other community actors who can help make content viral.
4. CJs should be trained to improve on their sentence construction, articulation and diction.
5. Social and digital media literacy training to improve on their skills, risks, generating and managing followers etc.
6. CJs should be trained on social media risks, exposures, threats, privacy, and ethics to better use the platforms.
7. General digital literacy education and support to both the social media skills and feature writing abilities.
8. More and improved use of *Canvas, Skitch, project, Snagit, Snappa Giphy, Touchretouch, adobe* etc to improve on posts (text, picture, and video) qualities.
9. CJs should be taught how to resize, pad and reduce the sizes of videos and pictures for better quality and easy upload.
10. E4L can start infrastructure advocacy campaigns with relevant stakeholders (Assemblies, National Community Authority (NCA), Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFFEC), the Telecoms, the Academia, NGOs, Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the local communities etc).

5.3. FEATURE WRITING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that CJs are further trained on research techniques on issues before any featured article is produced.

2. Capacity building on communication skills and structural grammar training to CJs, use of appropriate local graphics content
3. The E4L team should create a platform for the CJs to share their articles and general content for guide and broader dissemination.
4. E4L should procure tablets for the social media and feature writing team for better online engagement and writeups.

5.4. HARASSMENT OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS

This is a very serious issue that requires attention by various stakeholders. It is strongly recommended that the top-up training programme that is recommended should have a strong dose of strategies for confronting gender-based abuse of CJs:

1. Training and building the capacities (awareness, consciousness, resilience, normalization, societal culture etc.) of the female journalist to stand up to the bullies with toxic verbal assaults.
2. Education, orientation, and behaviour change communication advocacy on-air and at community levels to sensitize the public on sexual harassment issues.
3. Female CJs should be oriented to be careful and avoid issues duty bearers and community members often used as decoys to harass them.
4. E4L should create a platform for CJs to share experiences and critical issues on sexual and other related harassment issues for support, guidance and mentorship.
5. CJs should be supported to ‘build walls and develop thick skins’ on virulence, prejudicial, stereotypical comments and engagements. The training programme should aim to build the capacity of female CJs to disarticulate and re-articulate toxic gender-based discourses into empowering ones.
6. Circumspection and ethical guidance in engaging community members and duty bearers.

5.5. THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES

- The Assemblies should take more responsibility for the administration and management of their districts by negotiating with the radio stations for more time.
- The assemblies should improve on their relationship with the CJs as change agents in the communities for their own benefits since they are helping them to bring inclusive and productive development.

9. The assemblies should take steps to improve the information sharing and access rate to the people as mandated by the RTI act.

6. CONCLUSION

The communication and media strategy of the E4L programme is observed from the field to be effective, simple, and well followed by the CJs. The ethics and procedures on air, the people engagement skills demonstrated by the CJs, the level of confidence they have, and their seeming popularity show how their work has met the aspiration of the locals. Despite their low education and their ability to use just the radio, mobile phones, and social media/online to affect social and behavior change, the eloquence remains encouraging. The steering committee meeting with the CJs at the assemblies demonstrates E4L commitment to improving and deepening the accountability processes of the duty bearers.

The revenue leap in the programme areas (30%, 56%, and 300%) for Savelugu, Saboba, and Karaga respectively from participants perspectives, shows the vast amount of impact on the development needs of the districts by E4L.

The radio managers' expression of the confidence level of the CJs in delivering, newsgathering, and sometimes in production also adds up to the progress of the communication and media training of the CJs. The people and community leaders have accepted the goal and purpose of the E4L programme largely through the support services the CJs receive.

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