

# Transformative Communication for Empowerment: Silence and Participatory Development in a Marginalized Community in Nueva Ecija

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored how the Outreach Philippines, Inc. (OPI) - a non-profit organization in the Philippines implements the participatory human development (PHD) methodology using transformative communication, in a community-based organization (CBO) - Lawag ti Caridad Norte Association (LCNA), in Caridad Norte, Llanera, Nueva Ecija. A phenomenological lens examined the lived experiences of six participants interviewed on December 10 and 13, 2022, and through my reflections as a development worker of OPI. Specifically, I analyzed the CBO leaders' perception of silence, transformative communication engagements in the PHD methodology, and changes among the stakeholders to provide a framework for transformative communication for empowerment in a marginalized community.

The nine-step PHD methodology itself is transformative communication that allows the mutual development of both the CBO leaders and the PHD facilitator. It mainly involves and establishes consistent dialogic communication and collaborative actions between the facilitator and the community members, hence, transforming both into more empowered agencies. However, for transformative communication to empower, it must consider different constructs of cultural silence in engaging the community, especially in facilitating participatory development. This study contributes to the expansion of knowledge on communication for empowerment, and not only for transmission and ritualistic purposes.

Keywords: *participatory development communication, non-government organization, empowerment, dialogical communication, development facilitators, Participatory Human Development steps/process*

### INTRODUCTION

Poverty in the Philippines is still pervasive. Based on the statistics issued by the Philippine Statistics Office this August 2022, about 19.99 million Filipinos are impoverished while the poverty incidence (the proportion of the population whose per capita income is inadequate to meet food and non-food necessities) is estimated at 18.1 percent in 2021. Nevertheless, poverty is not a natural phenomenon but the result of oppressive social structures (Delfin in Delfin et al, 2000). For instance, Zamboanga del Norte has been listed as one of the poorest provinces in the country since 2004 with a 53.6% poverty incidence in 2021. One of the main reasons for this was the locals could not criticize the prevailing set-up because of their “fear of reprisal from powerful businessmen who allegedly have ties with local government officials” or the culture of silence (Laput, 2021). According to Laput (2021), farmers and fisherfolks are afraid to confront the cartels, who manipulate the prices and production of goods in the area, as the cartels have connections with those in power. This kind of status quo often results in poverty issues like lack of income, food insufficiency, and limited livelihood opportunities in the area to name a few. Correspondingly, the underprivileged and minorities tend to normalize poverty, thus, becoming their way of living (McAllister et al., 2021).

Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian adult educator and philosopher, introduced the concept of the “culture of silence” in the context of his critical pedagogy. Freire is best known for his work in the field of education, particularly for his book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970). According to Freire, the powerless tend to see themselves as ignorant and do not regard their experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge (1970), as cited in Petschulat, 2010). Freire advocated for a transformative and liberatory approach to education. His central concepts are centered around the importance of dialogue, critical thinking, and a participatory learning environment where both teachers and students engage in a mutual process of learning and reflection. Hence, to address the culture of silence, Freire said that individuals must be empowered to become critically conscious of their social reality and to actively participate in the transformation of oppressive systems (Freire, 1970).

#### **Importance of Communication in Breaking the Culture of Silence**

To break from the culture of silence, Freire proposed that the oppressed must be capable of communicating and must have a sense of community and participation (1970, as cited in Petschulat, 2010). Therefore, the oppressed groups ought to be equipped with opportunities to express themselves and develop critical consciousness or conscientization. For the silenced to be able to speak

and be involved in their development, a participatory development approach has been proposed. Robert Chambers (1983), known as the father of the Participatory Development approach, believed that development experts should learn from the local people directly.

Participatory development requires participation from local stakeholders that entails communication, which is referred to as Participatory Communication. Chitnis (2005) asserts that this kind of communication recognizes that “knowledge is not a property of experts to be transmitted to beneficiaries” (p.88) and that achieving one’s full potential is possible if one possesses the freedom to think and act against oppression. In participatory communication, people’s knowledge, capacity, and potential are embedded in their development. However, such communication requires a deviation from its dominant views, which are transmissive (transmitting messages) and ritualistic (sharing beliefs and realities). Hence, the concept of transformative communication. Roy Pea, an American educational psychologist, in 1994 theorized this as a process of communication where each participant “potentially provides creative resources for transforming existing practices” (p.289) in his article “Seeing What We Build Together: Distributed Multimedia Learning Environments for Transformative Communication”. Transformative communication is regarded as the underpinning of sustainable and genuine participatory development (Horn & Allen, 2010).

### **Participatory Human Development (PHD) of Outreach Philippines, Inc.**

In the Philippines, a participatory development called Participatory Human Development (PHD) methodology is inspired by Freire’s ideology and was coined by Eduardo Delfin, a seasoned Filipino community organizer in the 1980s. Delfin asserted that there was a need for an alternative strategy to address the root causes of poverty and a methodology where collective actions are central for addressing a culture of silence, conscientization, and empowerment in marginalized communities (Delfin et al., 2000). Delfin also expounded in his written manual that PHD is a “process of raising the impoverished level of consciousness and capabilities to resolve identified problems of poverty; manage community-initiated programs; empower and organize people’s organizations to assert, protect, and act collectively on their interest and community issues; and lastly, sustain their own development initiatives” (Delfin et al., 2000, p. 100).

Outreach Philippines, Incorporated (OPI), the exclusive implementer of the PHD methodology in the Philippines, characterizes this as a dialogical, issue-based, experiential, and praxis-oriented approach. This methodology comprises nine essential steps for human development: Integration, Social Investigation, Problem Identification and Prioritization, Groundworking, Meetings, Role-

plays, Action, Evaluation, and Reflection. OPI has been dedicated to using PHD for nearly four decades to alleviate poverty through consciousness-raising and community organizing. OPI has provided support to 27 community-based organizations (CBOs) in some of the poorest communities in Isabela, Nueva Ecija, and Masbate (Cloete & Salazar, 2022).

OPI's PHD methodology is centered on fostering the development of self-sufficient CBOs. This entails cultivating capable leaders, democratically developed constitutions, by-laws, membership policies, financial management skills, evolving organizational funds, and community-led projects targeting poverty-related concerns (Outreach Philippines, Inc., 2023). As per OPI's recent capacity statement in 2023, they have established 31 CBOs and initiated 234 community projects. These projects encompass 27 rice loan implementations, distribution of 9,709 educational books, support for 16 community-led micro, educational, and grocery loans, planting 36,950 trees, and conducting 32 dental and medical missions to enhance community access to primary health and dental care. Importantly, OPI has strengthened the capacities of 353 community leaders, providing them with valuable experiences as first-time leaders, facilitators, financial managers, project managers, mobilizers, and project evaluators (Outreach Philippines, Inc., 2023)

Furthermore, Outreach International, the funding agency for OPI, employs the PHD methodology in ten developing countries globally, including the Philippines, India, Cambodia, Nepal, DR Congo, Malawi, Zambia, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Haiti. The projects encompass areas such as sanitation, livelihood, and food security, with the overarching goal of sustainably addressing poverty-related challenges as identified by community members (Outreach International, n.d.).

### **Inspirations of OPI's PHD methodology**

The PHD methodology aligns closely with Freire's concepts of praxis and conscientization. Through the practice of action and reflection and action known as praxis, individuals can cultivate a critical consciousness or conscientization. Delfin (in Delfin et al., 2000) stressed that conscientizing the poor "can help them understand and confront their situation" (p. 48). Conscientization, as defined by Freire (1974) is a transformative journey that entails acquiring the ability to recognize social, political, and economic contradictions, and to respond actively to counter oppressive aspects of reality.

Essentially, PHD draws its foundations from the principles of community organizing (CO) and is not only influenced by Paulo Freire but also by the ideologies of Saul Alinsky, a renowned American community organizer. Alinsky (1971), in his seminal work, asserted that organizers must "start from where the

world is” (para. 16) and operate within the existing system. He advocated for the empowerment of communities to address their issues, positing that true power resides in the hands of the people. Alinsky believed that organizing at the grassroots level is pivotal for effecting meaningful and sustainable change—a fundamental principle echoed in PHD, as articulated by Delfin (in Delfin et al., 2000).

Although PHD is basically a community organizing approach, there is a nuanced distinction between this process among other traditional development approaches (Delfin et al., 2000). In some traditional models, the established sequence usually starts with either organizing the people or delivering consciousness-raising activities i.e., training, then ends with collective actions, or projects establishments. Whereas, PHD charts a distinctive course, prioritizing collective actions on people’s issues as the initial step, followed by consciousness-raising activities, and ultimately, organization. In the practice of PHD, individuals should proactively address their felt issues by engaging in collective actions (Delfin et al., 2000). As a result, these collective experiences serve as the basis for conscientization and the formation of community-based organizations that address the genuine needs of the community.

### **Development Communication in the PHD methodology**

Over the past nearly six years, my role as a development practitioner at OPI has involved communication activities in implementing the PHD methodology to empower marginalized communities in the Philippines. As outlined in the PHD training manual by Delfin et al. (2000), the use of dialogic communication in the PHD methodology was highlighted, emphasizing mutual learning between community members and development workers. Gando (2020), a retired OPI staff member with 35 years of experience in process implementation, affirmed that our approach is fundamentally communicative. This is particularly evident in how it sustains participation and facilitates the replication of development activities through communication.

In this context, I affirm that our PHD methodology is not exclusively a community-organizing endeavor; it also embodies the principles of Development Communication (DevCom), involving the integration of human communication in development. Communication as the foundation of PHD methodology in consciousness-raising and community organizing, aligns effectively with Quebral’s vision of DevCom. According to Dr. Quebral, as emphasized by Daya (2019), communication is an integral part of development rather than a separate entity. Our approach employs highly participatory and dialogical communication, aiming to instigate collective actions, stimulate people’s involvement in development, and build the capacity of individuals to address poverty-related

issues and achieve their best selves. Communication in the PHD methodology adheres to the principles of DevCom: being two-way, people-centered, and participatory.

### The Research Gaps

Despite our work values, advocacy, and activities, and my readings on the literature, I realized that some issues have opened up more questions.

First, we adhere to the concept of the culture of silence of Freire, which we believe is one of the root causes of poverty in rural communities. However, we have not made any attempts to explore the phenomenon of silence in our current assisted communities, let alone identify its usage in the implementation of the participatory human development process. Nevertheless, most literature studies on silence seem focused on silence construction in educational settings but not so much in the context of poverty associated with the disempowerment of the marginalized.

Second, although we talk about the concept of communication leadership in OPI's PHD through the study of Gando (2020) a senior staff at OPI, the roles and communication competencies of community facilitators in implementing participatory development activities need more elucidation. Chitnis (2005) points out that communication is a key element for facilitation as it binds the community and facilitators of participatory development, thus, development facilitators are communicators for social transformation. The role of development workers (as communicators) demands awareness of power structure insofar as transforming power relations is concerned (Nawaz, 2013).

Third, our organization has yet to document the role of communication in the PHD methodology. Although Gando (2020) also claimed that the PHD methodology mainly involves communicative actions in sustaining the participation of people in collective actions and in replicating development actions, the communication process was not investigated closely. The concept of transformative communication resembles the communication approach that OPI has been using for years. How is transformative communication integrated into OPI's PHD methodology?

Lastly, OPI has been implementing the PHD for nearly four decades but only emphasizing community organizing. Considering the above observations and literature gaps, this research explores how participatory human development (PHD) as implemented by the OPI employs transformative communication in the community and among community facilitators, leading to community development.

Specifically, this research aimed to answer the following: (1) How do the community leaders of a Community-Based Organization (CBO) in a marginalized

community make sense of silence based on their lived experiences? (2) How do community facilitators engage in transformative communication with the communities during the PHD methodology? (3) How are these communication engagements developed the members of a marginalized community and the development facilitators? and (4) How can the intersection of PHD, transformative communication, and silence become a framework or model of transformative communication for empowerment?

This research followed a phenomenological approach in addressing the posed inquiries. It delved into the lived experiences of six participants, comprising five community leaders of a community-based organization and the HDF who supported them for nearly six years. Utilizing phenomenology provided an in-depth exploration of individuals' lived experiences, offering valuable insights into the subjective aspects of a phenomenon under study.

This study aims to augment the expanding body of literature on communication for empowerment, emphasizing a departure from mere transmission or ritualistic practices. Significantly, it aspires to provide insights that can enhance the effectiveness of PHD implementers in empowering marginalized populations by facilitating authentic participation development and fostering conscientization within these communities.

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is underpinned by phenomenology. As I intended to make sense of the lived experiences of the participants, the study goes beyond mere descriptions of experiences, but rather towards creating interpretations for a better understanding of a phenomenon studied. Therefore, I subscribed to the *interpretative phenomenology* of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher. In his renowned book, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), he highlighted the centrality of perception and consciousness in this context and their interconnectedness as “perception is the background of experience which guides every conscious action” (para. 2) (1962, as cited in Scott, 2002). Hence, we can only describe and understand the world through perceptions. The practice of interpretative phenomenology in qualitative research aims to examine thoroughly how individuals understand their personal and social environment by investigating their perspectives on a phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Smith and Osborn (2008) stated that this approach is a two-stage interpretation process: one is the participants' interpretation of their lifeworld, second is the researchers' interpretation of the participants' interpretation of their lifeworld.

In this study, I am co-constructing meanings based on my lived experiences as an implementer of the process with the participants. Further, I am incorporating



my analysis informed by my interpretations of not only the shared experiences of the participants from my in-depth interviews with them but also from my direct experience with them for more than five years.

### Analytical Framework of the Study

Figure 1 shows the analytical framework of the study. The goal was to develop a framework from the intersection of PHD, transformative communication, and silence for transformative communication that can bring community empowerment. Hence, the research questions are posted in such a way as to elicit the elucidation of these three concepts based on the lived experiences of the participants.

First, I looked at how the community leaders viewed silence. As described in the review of literature, silence can mean many things to community leaders and members. Literature confirms the existence of silence, in the context of the disadvantaged communities and provides actual experiences on how the culture of silence (of Freire) or silence as a form of passivity can be both a coping mechanism as well as a form of dehumanization. It is worth noting that silence, as a concept, can also be cultural and its perceptions may differ amongst cultures and situations. In doing so, I hope to present a bigger picture of silence for a better understanding of its dynamics and complexities as a construct and a critical element in communication.

Second, I analyzed how the community facilitators engaged in communication with the community members during the PHD methodology which could be considered transformative. In PHD, facilitators played a significant role in guiding, capacitating, and empowering community members to achieve conscientization through dialogical communication. Nonetheless, the process of how PHD facilitators or HDFs deliberately employ communication to break the culture of silence and transform consciousness is still unspecified. Polman and Pea (2001) highlighted the effectuality of transformative communication among learners with an expert or *More Knowledgeable Other* (MKO) that actively guides them as they develop critical skills for higher mental capacities (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in McLeod, 2023). Relating this to the communication practice of OPI, HDFs act as the MKO who capacitate the community members until they become capacitated and empowered. Thus, this study explored the transformative communication activities that were employed by the HDFs in the PHD implementation.

The PHD methodology has nine steps in the development process that were derived from the basic human development process of Knowing, Deciding, Acting, Evaluating, and Reflecting (OPI website). The following are the nine steps identified and expounded by Delfin (in Delfin et al., 2000):

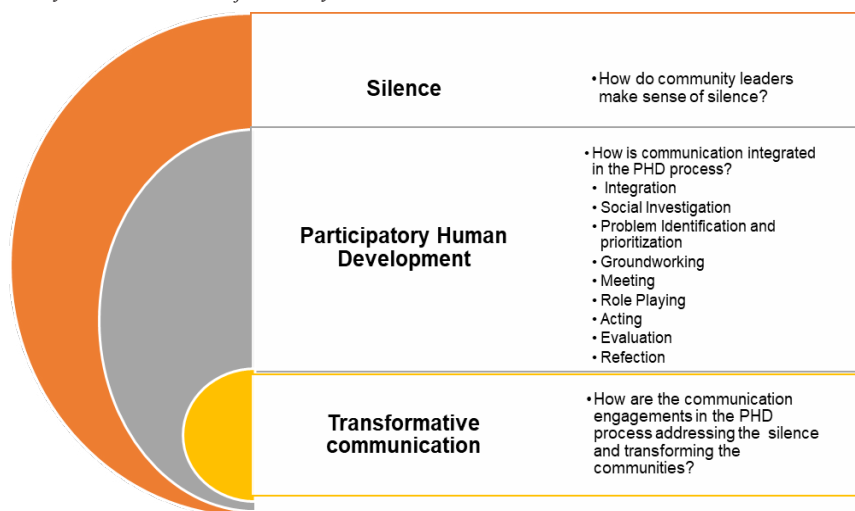


1. **Integration** - where HDFs interact closely and stay with community members to be accepted. This is also where the HDF learns about the culture in a community by living with them.
2. **Social investigation (SI)** - data gathering in the community through information sources i.e., the village office, churches, educational institutions, etc., and the residents themselves.
3. **Problem Identification and Prioritization (PIP)**- this is when the HDF trims down issues raised by the people and identifies the focus of their initial meeting.
4. **Ground working** - the step where people are stimulated to act. HDF engages with target people (those who are affected by the issue) and figures out what communication strategy will make those who are unaffected to be concerned with the issue of the majority.
5. **Meeting** - the act of gathering people to exchange ideas and opinions.
6. **Roleplay**- preparation for the upcoming action according to the plan. It is comparable to a rehearsal of a stage play.
7. **Acting** - actualization of the implementation plan and mobilization.
8. **Evaluation** - after every action, it must be assessed to know its strengths and weaknesses for better action in the future.
9. **Reflection** - this is where people draw out their insights and conclusions about attitude and behavioral change. Also, this enhances their level of consciousness and stimulates their sustainable participation.

Third, I analyzed how these communication engagements empowered both the community members and the development practitioner in the process. Pea (1994) argued that in transformative communication, communicative interchanges not only transform or educate the students but also the experts or the teachers framing transformative communication as “a two-way dynamic system” (p.289) in learning environments. How did these communication engagements in PHD become transformative?

There is an apparent lack of empirical research on transformative communication, and its application in different fields of knowledge, let alone in the participatory human development process. Related research on Transformative Communication from Polman and Pea (2001) may need updating and was observed mainly in a science classroom setting. Campbell and Cornish (2012) re-defined transformative communication in a recent setting: however, they focused on health-related issues. All the answers and the eventual framework emanated from the participants’ lived experiences, realities, and contexts.

Figure 1  
Analytical Framework of the Study



### The Methodology

In this study, I employed a phenomenological approach as the guiding philosophical lens within my methodology. Phenomenology, as described by Van Manen (1984), involves the examination of lived experiences, the exploration of the core qualities of phenomena, a deliberate cultivation of thoughtful inquiry, and a quest to understand the essence of human existence. Central to this approach is a deliberate suspension of my assumptions and biases to better understand the phenomenon under investigation from the participants’ unique viewpoints. Through this lens, I captured the essence of silence, transformative communication engagements in PHD implementation, and manifestations of development to both the community members and the PHD implementer based on the lived experiences of the participants. From their answers to these questions, I created an intersection among transformative communication, silence, and participatory development to have a model for transformative communication for the empowerment of marginalized communities.

This study involved one Human Development Facilitator (HDF) from OPI who collaborated with the Lawag ti Caridad Norte Association (LCNA) from 2017 to 2022. Additionally, five community leaders of the group, mostly middle-aged women, actively participated. They have been engaged in the Participatory Human Development (PHD) methodology since 2017 and continue to lead and manage the LCNA. LCNA is a graduate community-based organization of OPI situated in Caridad Norte, Llanera, Nueva Ecija.

I employed Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) using semi-structured interviews to elicit the lived experiences of the participants who have personal knowledge about the topic of interest (USAID, 1996). Before the interviews, I intentionally cleared my mind of preconceived notions and perceptions related to the topics I planned to discuss with the participants. This allowed me to better grasp their responses from their perspectives. I conducted five semi-structured interviews with LCNA leaders on December 10, 2022, in the building owned by LCNA located at Zone 4, Caridad Norte, Llanera, Nueva Ecija. Each interview lasted 40-50 minutes, and I asked ten open-ended questions in Filipino. On December 13, 2022, I conducted a 1.5-hour interview with the HDF who assisted LCNA at OPI's office in Cabanatuan City. These interviews were also in Filipino and conducted with all participants' consent. I recorded the interviews using my mobile phone with their permission.

Thematic analysis was done to analyze the data obtained from the transcribed interviews following the general steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include familiarizing with the data step, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining the themes, and writing up. The findings were verified by the head of the OPI, three Human Development Facilitators (HDFs) including the research participant, and my emic perspectives as the Project Development and Management Officer of the organization.

In this research, I prioritized informed consent and voluntary participation. Data collection procedures were coordinated with OPI and the participating HDF, including a thorough review and discussion of the informed consent form before participants signed it. Interviews were held at the participants' convenience, with their approval for video recording. Videos were securely stored to protect privacy. Participants' anonymity was maintained by not disclosing personal information. Findings and conclusions were shared with HDFs and OPI upon research completion to fulfill its purpose. On data management, all recorded transcripts and processed data were stored in a password-protected laptop and accessible only to me and my adviser. After submission and acceptance of the manuscript, all the data were deleted. Any presentation or publications using the data and/or information were coded, aggregated, and rendered anonymously.

### **My Role as the Researcher**

In my capacity as the researcher, I undertook a multifaceted role encompassing the design and formulation of data instruments, participant interviews, transcription of dialogues, translation of transcripts, textual analysis, thematic extraction, and the subsequent reporting of findings. Embracing the qualitative research paradigm, my primary objective was to delve into the thoughts and emotions of the study participants, as outlined by Sutton and Austin (2015).

Noteworthy is my longstanding engagement with all participants, having served as an OPI staff for over five years. This pre-existing relationship allowed for a foundation of rapport and trust, fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue. Participants, already familiar and comfortable with me, willingly shared their experiences and stories. Despite this familiarity, I maintained a posture of respect, sensitivity, and objectivity, refraining from influencing or interrupting their responses. Creating a space for them to articulate their narratives freely and openly was paramount.

Throughout the research process, my commitment was to immerse myself in the shared stories of the participants. I sought not only to comprehend their narratives but also to retell them from their unique perspectives, encapsulating the authenticity of their lived experiences. This approach was foundational in the exploration of meanings derived from the participants' voices and the subsequent sense-making of their narratives.

### Results and Discussions

This section discusses the results of the qualitative data gathered from the lived experiences of participants of the study. It is composed of four sections: silence as viewed by the community leaders; the facilitators' communication activities in the PHD process that can be considered as transformative; the mutual empowerment of the community and the facilitators; and the intersection of silence, participatory human development, and transformative communication in a framework.

#### *Silence as Viewed by the Community Leaders*

For the community leaders of LCNA, silence can be both conducive and negative. It can be conducive as it can maintain the stability and harmony of the group. Conversely, it can be a negative as it can be a form of passiveness and an obstruction to the group's development.

**Conducive Silence.** Conducive silence maintains the stability and harmony of the group through the following:

***Silence Maintains the Stability of the Group.*** Silence counters negativity. The participants sometimes heard unfavorable things about them. However, they opted not to talk back to preserve the group. For example, Diwa, one of the participants, said: "It would be better that way [to keep silent] even if you hear something negative, I think it's better to be silent for the sake of the group, for its stability."

Silence cuts endless exchanges. Interestingly, silence has been a way for the participants to avert ceaseless exchanges among members that might result in the disbandment of the group. As mentioned by Diwa, "I told myself that if I talk back, it will go on endlessly, and it might lead to the falling apart of our group."

Silence de-escalates aggravating situations. Since conflicts are inevitable in the group, the participants found silence to prevent worsening heated arguments or misunderstandings during group meetings or activities. For Tala, “There are instances when the situation is unpleasant, and there are misunderstandings, for the heated arguments to stop worsening, you should remain silent.”

Silence for the LCNA leaders stabilizes the group by doing away with actions that might cause the disbandment of their group. They do this by not participating in aggressive behavior and violent disagreements with other members of the group. As Jose, the assigned HDF in the community, consistently stimulated the leaders to be rational and more understanding persons in the group, these leaders have institutionalized the practices and values that are necessary to keep the group’s stability. The leaders’ utilization of silence to stabilize the group for peaceful and amenable social surroundings coincides with the Japanese students’ use of silence in Bao’s case study (2014).

***Silence Maintains the Harmony of the Group.*** Silence enables understanding of a situation or topic. For the participants, being silent helps them to absorb and understand the situation or a topic so that they can deliver relevant and sensible responses. As Amihan expounded, “In situations when I couldn’t absorb the topic well, if I was having a hard time understanding it, I would keep silent first and then digest it. Then, I will answer.”

Silence respects other members and the group. Participants likewise shared that they opt for silence to respect their fellow members by letting them speak first. Dalisay explained:

There are times when you should be silent, especially if it’s not your turn to speak. For instance, if you are not assigned to this project, you must be silent first. If they are assigned to the latrine project, let them speak first about it. We also have projects to which we are assigned. So, if it is our time to speak, then we will speak. (Dalisay)

Silence humbles oneself. According to Bituin, a leader is open to making mistakes. So, whenever she makes mistakes, instead of being prideful, she chooses to be silent. According to Bituin, “If I realize that I have made a mistake, that’s my time to be silent and apologize to them after.”

This theme encompasses three uses of silence to promote group harmony. Firstly, the leaders employ silence to foster understanding. As I have observed during interviews, the leaders tend to pause before responding, revealing that silence signifies thoughtful engagement rather than passivity. In this context, silence can indicate comprehension, analysis, and reflection, aligning with Bao’s

(2014) assertion that it can be a form of learning and thinking. Secondly, silence is a critical mark of respect for harmonizing social groups, demonstrated by LCNA leaders through their preference for silence over aggressive expressions. Lastly, silence also signifies humility, as these leaders who underwent the PHD process developed humility, recognizing its significance for group success. For instance, Tala became humbler through her work with the group as she was a prideful person before, while Amihan acknowledged the need to listen to others for improvement. In essence, silence as a manifestation of humility results from these leaders heightened self-awareness cultivated during the PHD process.

**Negative Silence.** For the leaders, negative silence is a form of passiveness by hindering learning; and an obstruction to the group's development by not participating in group planning and not sharing opinions in leader's meetings.

***Silence as a Form of Passiveness.*** It can be a form of passiveness toward learning. For Amihan, being silent can manifest as being uninterested in learning.

I think if you are silent, you do not want to learn. But if you are not silent, then maybe you are interested to learn. You would not know what silence might bring you. So, if you are silent, maybe your mind is closed, and you are not ready to learn.  
(Amihan)

***Silence as an Obstruction to the Group's Development.*** Silence can obstruct the group's development, particularly during group activities when the voices and participation of the members are needed.

For the participants, opting for silence is not always good, especially during the planning activities of the group. According to Tala:

Remaining silent as I've said before, if it is about the improvement of Lawag, you should not be silent. Be involved in the plans. Don't be silent, you need to participate, don't be quiet in sharing for the sake of the group. (Tala)

Moreover, the participants recommended not keeping silent during the leaders' meetings when they are supposed to share their opinions. Amihan shared:

When it comes to the discussion of the leaders, maybe it's better not to be silent. Since we are only a few, you can share your opinions, unlike in GA [General Assembly], where there are many of us, and there are lots of minds.(Amihan)

The LCNA leaders' lived experiences showed that silence for them is not a rigid concept. When I asked them questions related to the use of silence in their

group, all of them used to say it always depends on the situation. Tala expressed that silence is not good when it prevents their members from participating and learning, which coincides with Bao's (2014) contention that silence is detrimental once it prevents cooperation and understanding.

In summary, the LCNA leaders considered silence to be conducive as it maintains the stability and harmony of the group. Conducive silence maintains the stability of the group because it counters negativity, cuts endless exchanges, and de-escalates worsening situations. It also keeps the harmony of the group as it enables understanding, engenders respect among other members of the group, and enables the community leaders to be humble. However, silence must be well managed because it can also be negative as it can be a form of passiveness and an obstruction to the group's development. As practiced by these leaders, silence is a deliberate choice that coincides with Bao's (2014) assertion that "silence signifies autonomy". Also, silence is not always passivity but a form of critical thinking that strengthens CBOs, so it should be valued alongside speech in empowering these communities.

### ***Transformative Communication Process in the PHD implementation***

The Participatory Human Development process of OPI is deemed to be a transformative communication process itself. Each PHD methodology (integration, social investigation, problem identification, and prioritization, ground working, meeting, roleplay, acting, and evaluation) is mobilized by communicative activities that aim to 'transform' the community members' and leaders' thoughts, emotions, and actions.

**Step 1. Integration and Step 2. Social Investigation.** Communication activities started with knowing the culture of the community better and earning their trust, which meant continuous friendly talks about each other's lives, situations, and even dreams on the participants' own terms and turfs. For Jose, the assigned HDF from OPI in the community of Caridad Norte, the first thing he did during his community entry was to know and integrate well with the members. He *delved into the community's culture* by knowing and being with the community, adjusting the language to the one used by the locals, and initiating people-centered conversations. He also added that *winning the trust* and fostering openness were his goals when he was integrating with members of the community. The same goes for doing Social Investigation (SI).

To perform an SI, they should have trust in you so that everything you need to know will come out from them. Just like with a friend, if you do not see them as one, then you will not share something personal with them. As an HDF, I need



to know them personally as well as issues in their community, and their families. (Jose)

Jose emphasizes that socializing plays an important role in fostering openness. As recalled by Amihan, one of the early participants of the group and now a leader:

He [Jose] literally showed us not to look at him as superior. He tried to be one of us, no matter how low we were. You would not see him being finicky, unlike others. He would eat where we eat. Drink what we drink. We saw him like that, he was not finicky. He socializes with us. (Amihan)

The PHD methodology rejects the traditional approach of development programs that lack engagement with participants' lives. Jose manifested this principle as he tried to make connections between himself and the community members to build trust and foster openness. As affirmed by Amihan, Jose's efforts included socializing with them during their social activities, which, apparently, was a remarkable experience for her because she was able to recall this moment during the interview.

**Step 3. Problem Identification and Prioritization.** According to Jose, in Problem Identification and Prioritization (PIP), all the different issues are listed in a meeting with the interested residents of the community. Also, it is known to be one of the major activities facilitated by an HDF, as this is the first time people gathered to collectively discuss poverty-related issues in the community. The main actions typically done here are facilitation in analyzing the issues, prioritization of the collective issue with interested community members, and developing new ideas and activities to break complex problems into smaller issues.

During the PIP activity, people are asked about their problems. However, Jose stated that people tend to respond with solutions rather than issues. Hence, he needed to facilitate an issue analysis to create issue statements with the group. After finalizing the issue statements, Jose and the group proceeded to decide which of the issues should be prioritized. To do this, the people must have a common goal and perceive their problems as ones that concern other members of the community too, to stimulate collective actions. Since this activity occurs early in the PHD process, the community members are still learning. In this role, Jose acted as MKO (Vygotsky as cited in McLeod, 2023) by helping community members with activities they hadn't experienced before. This approach aligns with transformative communication, where guidance from experts leads to learning and change, as suggested by Polman and Pea (2001).

Critically, Jose shared an interesting experience that he had with LCNA. According to him, in an ideal scenario of the PHD process, simple issues or those that can be resolved easily ought to be prioritized. Nevertheless, the people in Caridad Norte opted for a complex issue instead of a simple one. Instead of imposing what he wanted, Jose adapted to the situation and developed new strategies based on the dialogues and interactions with the people. This incident substantiates that new ideas and activities are being created in the process of communication between the facilitator and the community members, which supports the argument of Pea (1994) that transformative communication commences new ways and thinking that transform existing practices, ergo, allowing innovations.

**Step 4. Groundworking.** Communication at this stage involved empowering the community leaders to speak for their community. This was done by providing opportunities for them to speak, execute tasks, build people's confidence to speak and recognize and appreciate the efforts of the community.

The participants remembered that they were overly shy back then, but Jose had been of great help in boosting their confidence. Dalisay revealed:

I was timid back then. I tended to be shy because I was not used to being in front of many people. Whenever Sir was there [in our meetings], he boosted my confidence. Because he was there, assisting us. He led us, 'You guys do it, for you to get used to it'. He trained us and for that, we learned to stand [on our own]. (Dalisay)

Dalisay, as well as the other leaders expressed that they were hesitant to participate or speak up in their earlier meetings. According to Jose, one reason for this was that the members had not previously had opportunities to communicate in their community; they were typically listeners rather than speakers. However, through consistent opportunities for speaking and tasks, coupled with motivational support, especially from Jose, there were remarkable transformations in these leaders' confidence and communication abilities. As the leaders revealed, they can confidently address community events, including gatherings with high-ranking officials like the Municipal Mayor, Vice-Mayor, and Councilors. Further, they can now face and communicate with persons of authority, especially in accessing resources for their group. This underscores how community-level communication fosters self-expression and builds confidence, aligning with Cloete and Salazar's (2022) observation that PHD-involved leaders become more vocal and self-assured in sharing their ideas and opinions in public.

**Step 5. Meeting.** Community meetings, according to Jose, were opportunities for him and the community leaders to discuss collectively and sustain communication. Hence, to ensure better understanding and meaning making, he shared the communication strategies that he employed during his meetings like using humor to capture people's attention, visuals for better understanding, analogies for easier explanations, and capturing community leaders' keywords for efficient meetings.

For Jose, meetings are collective discussions for collaboration between him and the community members. The preceding strategies he employed ensured that people understand a topic so that in turn, they can actively participate in the formulation of a plan or conduct of an assessment. Furthermore, this affirms Pea's assertion (in Polman & Pea, 2001) that transformative communication is an interactive process of guided participation in which Jose (as the expert) is an active guide, while the community members are the active learners and actors in development.

**Step 6. Roleplay.** The participating leaders also highlighted that preparation for, and actual execution of planned actions enabled them to communicate with different agencies to access resources that will resolve issues identified by the group. Hence, they simulated scenarios and prepared actions for positive and negative scenarios. As for Jose, he beautifully explained the need for this:

When you prepare them in the various situations that may happen, be it positive or negative, if they succeed or fail, they're ready. ... they can accept it and move on. If positive situations happen, they're happy. Otherwise, if they're not ready and they receive negative feedback, the impact on them is different. The ones from the community do not have a wide experience with these situations so it is important for them to be prepared.  
(Jose)

As Tala recalled, such preparations made them confident in facing people of authority. For Jose, preparing the people before every mobilization is critical. He stressed the importance of preparing leaders by identifying successes and failures that they might encounter. Experiencing failures, as shared by him, can be an avenue for leaders to develop themselves. Consequently, the leaders displayed optimism and tenacity when asked about their failures, Amihan shared that whenever they made a mistake, she tried to be positive and learned something from it.

**Step 7. Acting.** One of the distinct identities of transformative communication, as implied by Polman and Pea (2001), is the role of an expert in guiding the

learners actively without removing the latter's dynamic role throughout the learning process. Hence, the facilitator may guide them in the initial steps and then gradually let the community members assume a greater role for themselves. This was seen in the communicative acts at this stage wherein Jose brought the community leaders to actual offices, organizations, and persons of authority so that they would experience firsthand how to deal with these on their own. As Jose stated, "Our job is to expose them, that they are not limited to what they are currently doing, that there are bigger opportunities if they're willing. We guide them until they are willing, then they can reach those opportunities."

Likewise, Jose allowed the leaders to carry out conversations with people of authority like the Mayor, Congressmen, and even the Governor. Bituin shared that when they first went to the Provincial Office and talked with the Governor to ask for some resources for their group event, Jose let her do the talking and just waited for her outside the office. She realized that Jose had been training them already to communicate with authorities by themselves.

Aside from being an active guide, Jose has been the source of strength and hope for these leaders when things didn't go as planned. In both Jose's and the LCNA leaders' experiences, not all their mobilizations in resource agencies have been successful and productive. However, Jose had always kept the leaders' morale high for them to continue to do mobilizations despite challenges. He did this by cheering up the leaders, acknowledging their efforts, and empathizing with them by allowing them to feel and process their emotions. As Jose expounded, the HDF must not only be skilled in the facilitation of development activities in the community but also in processing people's emotions so that they can learn from their experiences and sustain their actions. Noteworthy, Jose only prepared and accompanied the leaders in their earlier mobilizations and then allowed the leaders to discover and try new experiences. Such experiences later build up the community leaders' confidence, capacity, and critical consciousness that are conducive to their development and empowerment. Apparently, the leaders have all expressed their gratitude to Jose for enabling them to develop confidence and overcome their shyness in talking with persons of authority.

**Step 8. Evaluation and Step 9. Reflection.** Experiential learning is a process of absorbing and transforming continual experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) and can be associated with the practice of praxis of Freire. After every mobilization, Jose's communicative acts included the evaluation of people's actual experiences, sense-making, and helping them to articulate their reflections verbally and non-verbally.

During the reflection, all of what the people learned based on their mobilizations, actions, activities, and their experiences

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would be shown or expressed. Did they learn something or not? What was the impact of these experiences on them? All these would be discussed at this stage. (Jose)

Jose stressed the importance of people having actual experiences from which they can derive lessons and apply them in their future actions to succeed. Simultaneously, it is also beneficial for the community members to possess the ability to express these learnings articulately, allowing others to learn from them. In PHD implementation, evaluation and reflection sessions serve as spaces for making sense of these experiences and sharing them regularly with others. By learning from actual experiences, community members can bring about transformation in terms of consciousness, behaviors, and ultimately, actions. Claiming that transformative communication forms the foundation of PHD, we, as PHD practitioners, also continuously learn from our ongoing practice of action and reflection when communicating and working with people.

**Table 1**

*Summary of the Transformative Communication Activities in the PHD Methodology*

<b>PHD STEPS</b>	<b>TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION</b>
Integration	Delving into the community's culture
Social Investigation	Winning the trust of the community members
Problem identification and prioritization	Facilitation of issue analysis with the community members Prioritization of collective issues by framing problems as collective Development of new ideas and activities to break complex problems into smaller issues
Ground working	Providing opportunities for people to speak and execute tasks Building people's confidence to speak (through training or practice, encouraging words) Recognizing and appreciating efforts of community
Meeting	Having a sense of humor to capture people's attention Using visual materials for better understanding Creating analogies for easier explanations Capturing people's ideas and keywords

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PHD STEPS	TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION
Roleplay	Simulating possible scenarios Preparing them for positive and negative scenarios
Acting	Bringing people to actual scenarios (e.g., meet with other stakeholders who can meet their needs) Accompanying the leaders during the actual mobilizations Letting people connect and network even with authorities
Evaluation	Processing of people’s actual experiences
Reflection	Making sense of the people’s experiences Improving people’s articulation verbally and non-verbally

Transformative communication activities conducted by Jose with LCNA leaders throughout the 9-step PHD process stimulated participation and collective action. Therefore, transformative communication, as practiced by Jose, prioritizes the voices and interests of the people, embeds their active participation, and involves an active guide and stimulator (in the form of HDF) in all development activities. Accordingly, it fosters mutual development among the community members and HDF as the experts.

### ***Mutual Development of both the Community Leaders and the Human Development Facilitator (HDF)***

The transformative communication engagements in the PHD methodology have impacted not only the community leaders but also the facilitator.

**Development of Community Leaders.** As the community leaders were engaged through transformative communication, they expressed many positive changes such as acquiring communication skills, dealing with authorities, conscientization, autonomy, and commitment to the group.

**Acquiring Communication Skills.** All five community leaders said that their communicative skills were developed throughout their collaborative work with Jose. Based on their shared experiences, they can now initiate conversations, write request letters and proposals, talk about problems collectively, and express ideas articulately. In terms of acquired communicative skills, most of the participants mentioned writing request letters and project proposals and said that they learned it from Jose. Such communication skills are deemed to be one

of the mind-opening skills that leaders learn in the PHD methodology (Cloete & Salazar, 2022). Tala highlighted the importance of learning this skill, particularly in their efforts to request assistance from resource institutions, because without knowing it, it would be impossible for them to get resources and projects for their group. As Jose deliberately provided opportunities and spaces for communication, the community leaders were able to acquire and hone their communication skills, which is a critical indicator of leadership development.

***Dealing with authorities.*** The participants have also expressed their capability to deal with authorities by facing them, communicating actively with them, reaching out to them without the facilitator, overcoming their shyness towards them, and networking with different agencies.

At first, we were all shy, we were literally pushing each other on who should enter the office first, and who would talk to the secretary. 'You should go first', we would say. We were usually like that before. But when we did it [talking to authorities] repetitively, we became used to it. We are no longer shy. (Diwa)

When asked why they became confident in networking with resource agencies, Tala shared:

Because we wanted to have something [for the group], we needed to overcome our shyness. We needed to reach these things to achieve our goals. If we remain shy and do not communicate, nothing will happen to us. (Tala)

All the interviewed community leaders said that they were shy and afraid to talk and reach out to high officials before because they were not used to doing it and did not know how to do it. However, through their involvement in the PHD process wherein they got to have actual experiences in dealing with authorities, they gradually overcame their inherent shyness and became more confident. They also kept mentioning that Jose played a big role in boosting their confidence in trying things they hadn't tried before. These findings support Cloete and Salazar's (2022) results that when people are communicating with persons of authority, they become courageous and confident leaders. This is ascribed to the people's realization that they can bring changes to their community if they speak up and connect.

***Conscientization.*** The community's empowerment is also manifested by conscientization or the process of developing critical consciousness. The leaders manifested this by stepping out of their comfort zones, learning their rights and resources, and having an open mind.



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For Bituin, getting out of their comfort zones means going out of their houses to seek information that will enable them to be knowledgeable about their rights as citizens. Amihan revealed that before Jose's intervention in their community, she was okay with the way things were. But later on, she realized that it was not good to get stuck in her comfort zone.

The participants shared that through Jose, they learned that they could connect with different resource agencies to avail themselves of programs and services that can help them.

Before, we did not know that we could ask for assistance from those in high positions. Through the help of Jose, we learned how to write a proposal and request letter. That is the biggest thing that Jose has done for us because we had no idea back then how our concerns would reach them [the authorities]. He taught us how to do that; we learned that from him. (Tala)

In the beginning, the community leaders had a different mindset in dealing with agencies. Jose remembered that whenever he would encourage the leaders to submit a request letter to agencies, they used to decline. But this has changed, these leaders have become open-minded and eager to take risks as revealed by him.

Jose offered an alternative venue for people to develop critical consciousness to enable them to see the world differently. His transformative communication interventions that involved lots of dialogues manifested such conscientization in many ways such as their increased confidence and ability to speak out even to authorities. Such dialogues have probably sparked their motivation to have a stake in the development process and outcome – and that they should do it not only for themselves but for the group. That group consciousness from self-consciousness has elevated their own goals to a higher level.

**Autonomy.** The community leaders also believe that transformative communication has made them autonomous. They can now take the initiative to access recourse, do tasks in the group without the facilitator, and make decisions independently for the group.

I see them as critical and empowered when they have the initiative. They don't wait for someone to tell them what to do or for instructions. It's because they're empowered to think for themselves about what they can do. (Jose)

Bituin revealed that Jose enabled them to be independent by not giving out solutions to the problems of the group.

It's a very positive thing because if all problems were only resolved and decided by Jose, we would not be able to stand on our feet. He only returns the question to us, then we will find the solutions by ourselves. That's how we do it. (Bituin)

When people develop autonomy from the facilitator, they become self-sufficient because they are removing their dependence on any external factors or powerful people. Jose deliberately prepared the people to be self-sufficient by equipping them with the necessary skills and values, especially in decision-making. Consequently, the leaders learned how to deal with such scenarios and problems on their own, hence, enabling them to be free from dependency and submissiveness to someone whom they see as knowledgeable or more experienced than them. This process is empowering the community members and leaders.

***Commitment to the group.*** Because of transformative communication in the PHD methodology, the community leaders also expressed their commitment to the group by fulfilling their obligations, staying active, and supporting the group even though they are not in the position anymore.

Being a community leader entails performing obligations to the group. The participants related that they even made sacrifices just to fulfill their responsibilities as leaders, especially for Bituin.

For me, as a leader, I should perform my obligation. I am already here, keeping in mind Jose's advice to me that I should love this organization because I have already sacrificed and cried a lot for this. That is my obligation, even though Lawag [the CBO] already graduated [from OPT's intervention]. (Bituin)

Dalisay shared that she remained committed to the group by staying active and dedicating her time to the group and its activities. On the other hand, Amihan has been inspired by Jose, as she has seen how dedicated he was to making efforts and trying everything with them. Bituin expressed her love for the group by committing to continue supporting it even without a leadership role.

Four of these leaders did not hold any leadership positions in any other organization before their involvement in the PHD. Some of them even mentioned that they were not interested in being part of a group before because they perceived it as a distraction to their livelihood activities. But Jose constantly encouraged them to try and commit to something new for their development. As Jose mentioned, having numerous actual experiences can help these leaders and their communities learn something that would enable them to achieve their full potential. This supports Dasig's argument (in Cloete & Salazar, 2022) that once leaders find their voice and feel a sense of self and pride, they tend to be more dedicated and committed to their positions despite challenges.

The community members considered their improved communication abilities a major development after 6 years of collaborating with the facilitator. Specifically, they were now able to write request letters to agencies and authorities vital to their access to resources. They could confidently and readily talk with authority figures whom they think could provide them with resources. They have also become conscious that they were programs that they can avail themselves of, indicating conscientization. Further, they have gained the ability to plan, discuss these plans, break down complex issues into manageable ones, and develop the autonomy and commitment to being leaders in their communities.

The foregoing manifestations of development among the community leaders include those that Freire (1970) asserted to be ways of breaking the culture of silence. These are communication and conscientization, as well as the enhanced capacity to deal with authorities, develop autonomy, and commitment to being in a group vis a vis fear, passivity, dependence, and submissiveness characteristic of the underprivileged.

**Development of Community Facilitator.** For the facilitator, the major changes are related to his personal and professional development such as having more devotion and commitment to development work that includes an understanding of community organizing, a strong connection with people, patience and humility, and empathy.

**Professional Development.** Jose emphasized that his integration into the community allowed him to understand people deeper and his work as a community organizer.

In integrating [with the community], I have already learned a lot. I have experienced a lot. Aside from their personal lives, I was able to absorb all of their feelings, the issues in their lives... When they encounter failures with their partners [agencies], I absorb it too. I learned from my communications with them, from our face-to-face and heart-to-heart talks, how to perceive and, how to analyze every word they say, I was able to understand them better. (Jose)

**Transformed Personhood.** Aside from professional changes, there were also positive changes in the personhood of the facilitators or a 'change of heart' such as increased patience, humility, and empathy.

For me, I was able to personally learn how to be patient, to be understanding in each situation. In the past, I had a temper. I was unfriendly because I was in the government, and I was accustomed to being referred to as "Sir." I was always the

trainer. I admit that I saw myself as of higher standing, I was bossy. But here [in the community], I learned to be humble. I experienced being patient in all things. (Jose)

The testimonies of Jose as a community organizer, and a PHD implementer, revealed that he developed throughout the process together with the community members. PHD alters the relationship between the development facilitator and the community members through dialogues. Extracting from the terms of Freire (1970) in the context of pedagogy, dialogical communication brings about teacher-students with student-teachers based on his assumption that “no one teaches another, nor anyone is self-taught,” thus, people are teaching each other. Being devoted and committed, as manifested by Jose, to implementing the PHD methodology is critical in being an authentic facilitator of participatory development amongst the underprivileged. Whereas, being patient, persevering, and humble in working with the communities is conducive to employing transformative communication that adheres to non-dominating and empathetic ways of learning and development.

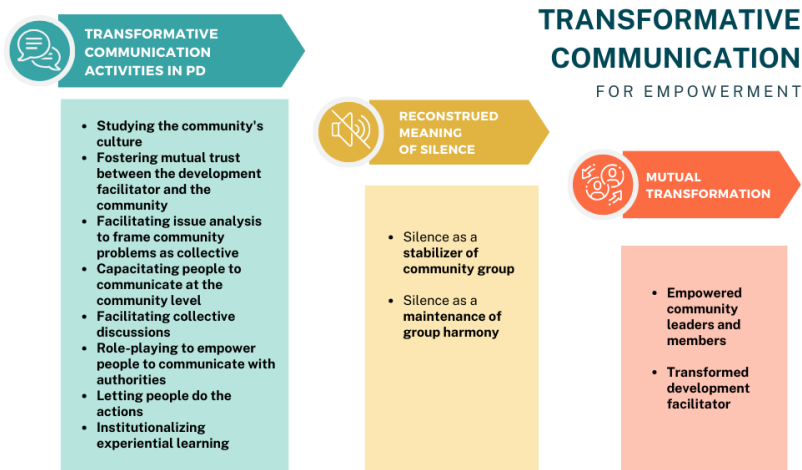
### ***Framework for Transformative Communication for Empowerment***

A framework for transformative communication for empowerment is presented from the lived experiences of the participants. In participatory development, transformative communication activities take place in collaborations between the facilitator and the community members. Aside from these, it underscores the reconstrued meaning of silence in achieving the mutual transformation characterized by empowered community leaders and members and development facilitators.

**Transformative Communication in Participatory Development.** The following are transformative communication activities that can be embedded in the communication sharing between the facilitator and the community members as they engage in a participatory development approach. These include the following principles, which will be explained more in the next section.

Figure 2

*Proposed Framework for Transformative Communication Empowerment*



*Transformative Communication Activities in Participatory Development (PD)*

1. **Studying the community's culture.** It is crucial to move beyond the conventional banking concept of development and instead immerse oneself in the lives of community members. This can be achieved by investing time in direct interaction with the people, aiming to gain firsthand experiences and gather comprehensive information about the community.
2. **Fostering mutual trust between the development facilitator and the community.** This is pivotal for transformative communication to unfold. Consequently, it is imperative for the development worker to seamlessly integrate into the community, cultivating a sense of trust from both sides. This involves actively socializing with community members and establishing a visible presence within the community. The goal is to eradicate the perception of the development worker as a stranger or outsider, ensuring that community members feel comfortable openly sharing their concerns and issues.
3. **Facilitating issue analysis to frame community problems as collective.** Facilitators need to work with the community in analyzing issues to create issue statements. As many marginalized people tend

to be silent, they may lack the capacity to relate their issues to broader socio-political contexts. Facilitators can bring people together and help them perceive their problems as collective ones that concern other members of the community to stimulate collective and sustainable actions. Ideally, the facilitator must try his/her best to help the people prioritize a simple issue that can produce immediate results or to break down a complex problem into manageable issues.

4. ***Capacitating people to communicate at the community level.*** Initially, community members tend to be shy and reticent especially in community activities because they have been so used to being just listeners, and never speakers. So, to break from this status quo, facilitators can conduct ground working to capacitate the community members to communicate with their fellow members. The former can provide community members with opportunities to speak and execute tasks, build their confidence to speak and recognize and appreciate their exerted efforts. All of these give them the chance and develop the ability to express themselves, which can transform them into more confident and vocal individuals in their communities.
5. ***Facilitating collective discussions.*** Meetings are opportunities for collaboration and sustained communication between development facilitators and community members. Communication strategies for a facilitator include having a sense of humor, using visual materials, creating analogies, and capturing keywords from the community members. Such strategies ensure that topics are discussed and understood using the participants' language and contexts so that they can actively participate in collective discussions.
6. ***Roleplaying to empower people to communicate with authorities.*** Before any action or mobilization, roleplaying can help to prepare the community members in communicating with authorities for successful resource access or networking. Facilitators can simulate possible scenarios in an actual mobilization and prepare the leaders for both positive and negative outcomes of their actions.
7. ***Letting people do the actions.*** A facilitator can prepare and accompany the community leaders in their earlier mobilizations and then gradually withdraw and allow the latter to discover and try new experiences. These experiences will later build up the community leaders' confidence, capacity, and critical consciousness that is conducive to personal development and empowerment. The role of the facilitator is to be an active guide in the initial steps and then gradually let the community members assume a greater role for themselves.

8. ***Institutionalizing experiential learning*** Experiential learning is about deriving lessons from experiences; hence, people must gain experiences from which they can derive lessons to be applied in their next actions. To do this, both the facilitator and community members must have time and opportunities to evaluate and make sense of people's experiences regularly, and the capacity to express their realizations articulately. Such reflections would allow them to reflect and learn from such experiences collectively. And by institutionalizing experiential learning, they can bring about transformation in terms of consciousness, behaviors, and eventually, actions.

**Reconstrued Meaning of Silence.** Because of upbringing and situations, some community members may not be verbal and expressive or may be culturally conditioned to remain silent to keep the peace. For transformative communication to empower, development workers must reconstrue silence taking into consideration how the community views and uses silence to maintain group stability and sustain harmony. Silence can stabilize a community group as it is used to counter negativity, cutting endless exchanges, and de-escalating worsening situations. Further, silence can be a maintenance of harmony in a group as it encourages understanding, respect among members, and an individual's humility.

Hence, cultural silence can be a significant communication concept to consider in delivering authentic and emphatic participatory communication and empowering partner communities.

**Mutual Transformation.** As opposed to the banking concept of development that intends to change the marginalized, transformative communication in participatory development enables the mutual transformation of both the community and the implementers/ facilitators. Mutual transformation in this context is characterized by empowered community leaders and members and transformed development facilitators.

Empowered community leaders possess a range of skills, including effective communication abilities such as drafting request letters and resource proposals, self-assuredness when interacting with authority figures, a critical awareness of issues, the capacity for independent decision-making, and a strong dedication to their community. Through these communicative actions, they exercise their influence and assert their right to play a crucial role in both their personal growth and community development.

Conversely, transformed development facilitators undergo a profound change in the practice of transformative communication. This transformation encompasses both their professional development as they transition into more



dedicated and committed development workers, as well as their personhood as they evolve into patient, humble, and empathetic individuals.

### Conclusion

As this research has illuminated the lived experiences of community leaders within a marginalized community regarding the utilization of silence, it becomes imperative for development workers to enhance their awareness of the culturally nuanced significance of silence in sustaining stability and harmony within their communities. By acknowledging the often overlooked ‘voiceless’ through an understanding of their silence, development workers can foster more productive, participatory, and human-centered communication methods toward development.

Findings have also revealed that Transformative Communication is embedded in all steps of the Participatory Human Development (PHD) methodology as the facilitator and the community leaders work together to understand each other’s needs, plan for change, and move in unison toward the goal. The transformative communicative actions that the facilitator performed included studying the community’s culture, fostering mutual trust between himself and the community, facilitating issue analysis to frame problems as collective, capacitating people to communicate at the community level, facilitating collective discussion, role-playing to capacitate people to communicate with authorities, letting the people do the actions, and institutionalizing experiential learning among the community members. These communicative activities empowered community leaders as they developed better communication skills, confidence to deal with authorities, critical consciousness, autonomy, and commitment to their group, and have also transformed the development facilitator into a committed, dedicated, humble, and patient individual.

Therefore, Transformative Communication for Empowerment entails a re-evaluation of silence’s connotations among community members within the framework of their language, customs, and specific contexts, employment of transformative communication activities in a participatory development approach, and a mutual transformation of community leaders and development facilitators.

### Implications and Recommendations

This study forwards the following implications and recommendations on usage of silence and transformative communication in facilitating participatory development and development communication activities for empowerment.

### ***Silence as important concept in Facilitation***

Remarkably, the findings conveyed that LCNA leaders are aware of the fluidity of silence. These findings show that leaders in the marginalized community are consciously opting for silence depending on their assessment of a situation. As practiced by these leaders, silence is a deliberate choice that coincides with Bao's (2014) assertion that "silence signifies autonomy". Also, the leaders have also proved that silence is not always a manifestation of passiveness, but a way of critical thinking and a means to stabilize and harmonize the group which is beneficial for self-sustaining and stronger CBOs. Ergo, participatory development facilitators must treat silence equally as talk and must be explored to leverage this for the effective facilitation of group activities in the community toward learning and empowerment.

### ***Transformative Communication in OPI's Participatory Human Development methodology***

As a situational-based development process, PHD must establish its flexibility in all instances and scenarios. It was arguably possible because of the practice of transformative communication throughout the PHD implementation facilitated by the HDF. As forwarded by this study, Jose - the assigned HDF in Caridad Norte did not only act as a community organizer but also became a transformative communicator. This was evident when he shared that new activities, strategies, and perceptions were formed throughout his consistent dialogues and group discussions between him and the community members. So, an HDF should deliberately practice transformative communication by recognizing the views, and capacities of the community members; and actively guiding and stimulating them until they become organized and empowered so that together they can induce transformations in the community.

### ***The Vitality of Transformative Communication in Development Communication (DevCom)***

The lived experiences of both community leaders and the development facilitator substantiate the presence and efficacy of transformative communication in empowering both entities. PHD, as a methodology embodying the essence of Development Communication (DevCom) by placing communication at the heart of development, underscores the crucial role of Transformative Communication in DevCom, particularly for community empowerment. It challenges conventional views of communication, positing that genuine development surpasses mere transmission or ritualistic communication. Anchored in Freire's concept of authentic empowerment, emerging from transformative and liberatory processes, the participants' encounters affirm the practicability of these principles within

the realm of transformative communication in participatory development communication.

Moreover, drawing on Pea's (1994) assertion, transformative communication facilitates generativity, fostering new developments in learning settings. Learning, viewed not as a conservative endeavor but as a quest to expand ways of knowing, aligns with the transformative communication paradigm. Additionally, aligning with Dr. Quebral's (2013) conceptualization, development communication embodies generativity by continually instigating innovative communicative actions to promote growth, equity, and the advancement of human potential. Dr. Quebral (2013) concludes that it is caring and enlightened individuals who, through effective communication, bring about changes and developments in their societies and communities.

In light of these perspectives, this study underscores the vital nature of transformative communication within Development Communication, emphasizing its capacity to induce genuine and sustainable development in communities. Despite being underexplored, transformative communication holds promise as a novel and essential concept, particularly in community practices. Thus, further exploration and studies are warranted, especially within communities collaborating with NGOs and development communication practitioners.

### ***Transformative and Empowering Development Facilitators***

The study showed that Jose's strategies as community facilitator such as speaking in the dialect, using the Filipino trait of humor, using visuals, and taking words from the participants and transforming these into keywords (or from the community members' own words) can facilitate better understanding and action between him and community members.

Considering the vital role of facilitators in ushering development in communities, a manual on best practices and principles on development communication and transformative communication can be compiled as a menu guide to those new in the field. Training academies can also use these principles in capacitating facilitators so that they can in turn enable more community members to speak and participate.

### ***Transformative Communication for Participatory Development Programs or Projects***

It is important to highlight that the transformative changes manifested by the leaders during this study stem from a dedicated 5-year collaboration with OPI's HDF, which diligently implemented the PHD process and steered the community toward self-sufficiency. The manifestation of these developmental

changes required considerable time and effort. Furthermore, at the core of participatory development lies the empowerment of individuals to engage willingly in activities that contribute to the development of both them and their communities.

Hence, the policymakers and funders must value development outcomes over immediate results, as it would be more efficient if they wanted to see transformation or changes (Nawaz, 2013). If they intend to fund development programs or projects that are genuinely participatory and empowering, they must recognize and accept that these would need more time, resources, and effort as real empowerment must come from within and be realized by the self (Nawaz, 2013). In doing so, they could adhere to and use transformative communication in their supported development programs to empower and transform both the communities and their implementers.

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