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**A CSR PRACTITIONER'S COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN ENGAGING THE  
LOCAL COMMUNITY IN WATERSHED CONSERVATION: AN  
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

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### **A CSR PRACTITIONER’S COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN ENGAGING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN WATERSHED CONSERVATION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Dennis Amata has been working in communications for over a decade, specializing in public relations, development communication, and partnership development. He works as Senior PR and Communications Officer at Travel + Leisure Co. International, a global membership and leisure travel company. In this role, Dennis also leads the company's corporate social responsibility program focusing on sustainability and environmental conservation.

Before joining the corporate sector in 2021, he served as a Communications and Knowledge Manager for CARE International-Philippines, a global humanitarian organization. During his time at CARE, Dennis collaborated with the Government of Canada on the Typhoon Yolanda Recovery project and with the European Union on the Marawi City rehabilitation project. He conducted joint research projects with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and civil society organizations in the Philippines and other parts of Asia.

Dennis holds a Bachelor of Mass Communication degree from the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (University of the City of Manila). He is passionate about environmental and actively joins mountain climbing and diving expeditions. During his free time, he volunteers for non-governmental organizations focusing on environmental and wildlife conservation.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Josie. Your unwavering belief in my abilities and your constant encouragement inspired me to persevere through my studies at the University of the Philippines. Thank you for instilling in me the value of education.

To my loving family, your unwavering support and motivation fueled my determination to complete this thesis. I am grateful for your patience and understanding throughout this journey.

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## Abstract

This study aimed to answer the following questions: What are the CSR practitioner's communication practices in engaging the local community in watershed conservation and what are the underlying views and assumptions of the communication practices? By positioning himself as the primary subject, the researcher employed autoethnography to deeply explore his interactions and communication practices used to engage a local community. Autoethnography as a research framework and methodology not only allows for an in-depth and reflective examination of his personal experiences but also provides a rich, nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in community engagement.

The research methodology included gathering and review of the CSR practitioner's personal journals during the implementation of the project from 2022-2023, as well as a thorough review of related literature.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and explore recurring themes and provide insights into the patterns of his engagement with the local community. His journals were classified into two vignettes which included his communication practices when in project implementation and when the community is in conflict.

Four communication practices during project implementation emerged in the analysis of data: engaging and empowering community leaders, integrating the local community's wisdom and traditions; engaging the community in a long-term partnership; and recognizing literacy constraints. Each of these practices is made up of sub-practices, including:

- Sharing roles and responsibilities with the community
- Letting the community lead the completion of the project
- Including local voices in decision-making
- Inviting community leaders to educate employees and stakeholders
- Being mindful of local customs and traditions
- Respecting hierarchical structures
- Using the local language
- Involving community members in the storytelling process
- Bridging the language barrier
- Visiting the community to personally connect
- Immersing in the local community

The findings from this study can inform more effective CSR communication practices and contribute to the growing body of research on the role of communication in fostering successful community engagement and partnerships in sustainability initiatives.

## CHAPTER I

### RATIONALE

#### **Community Engagement as Essential to Corporate Social Responsibility**

In the modern business landscape, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a vital part of sustainable business practices, with a growing number of companies investing in environmental sustainability projects. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization defined CSR as a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders.

Corporate social responsibility is not a new concept. The earliest forms of CSR surfaced when American economist Howard Bowen coined the term in his book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* in 1953. He described CSR as the obligation of businesses to pursue policies that are 'desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society.'

In essence, CSR is the company's commitment to responsibly manage the social, environmental, and economic effects of its operations in accordance with public expectations. This commitment is crucial, as it influences the company's impact on both the natural environment and its community relationships. CSR can include reducing carbon footprints, improving labor policies, providing livelihood opportunities, and volunteering in the community.

Embracing CSR increases customer retention and loyalty, increases employee engagement, improves brand imaging, attracts investment opportunities and top talent, and makes a difference in bottom-line financials (Murphy, 2024).

By practicing corporate social responsibility, also called corporate citizenship, companies are aware of how they impact aspects of society, including economic, social, and environmental. Engaging in CSR means a company operates in ways that enhance society and the environment instead of contributing negatively to them (Fernando, 2024).

Firms that embrace CSR are typically organized in a manner that empowers them to act in a socially responsible way to positively impact the world. It's a form of self-regulation that can be expressed in initiatives or strategies, depending on an organization's goals. Many organizations communicate these efforts to external and internal stakeholders through corporate social responsibility reports (Stobierski, 2021).

Community based on elements of interaction (face-to-face or electronic) consists of people that develop social relationships, whether they are living in the same place or not (Godwin, 1997).

The value of a community is in its social capital. Social capital has a cognitive dimension through which norms and values are developed (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Failure by corporate citizens to adhere to the etiquette defined by social

norms in building a relationship can damage any prospect of long-term trust  
(Anderson and Jack, 2002)

## **The CSR Practitioners**

Central to the success of CSR initiatives is the role of CSR practitioners, who act as the pivotal bridge between companies and host communities. The effectiveness of these initiatives often stems from the quality of communication and engagement between CSR practitioners and the community involved in the project.

Key constructs that emerge from the CSR literature is that it is a social obligation (Clarkson, 1995); it consists of managerial processes (Wood, 1991); it is a stakeholder obligation (Crane and Matten, 2004); and it is ethics-driven (Carroll, 1979). It is also acknowledged that because the business has the resources, the business' management talent, functional expertise and capital should be given a chance to solve social problems (Davis, 1973).

In practice, CSR practitioners play a crucial role in driving social and environmental change within an organization and the supported communities. They develop and implement the CSR strategies, engage with internal and external stakeholders, manage, monitor and report CSR activities, manage the budget of the project, and communicate with the supported communities or project participants.

An examination of the communications tactics employed within a community by CSR practitioners, adds to the knowledge on how best to adopt international

approaches to partnership building and communicative challenges related to community engagement. This is particularly visible in contexts that involve the indigenous populations where parts of cross relations and of communication practices should be directed toward understanding and incorporating the cultural differences into the communication itself.

This study investigates the personal communication practices of the CSR practitioner. The CSR practitioner participated through interacting with the local community, thus bringing in a unique scope to this study. His perspective is based on his involvement with the community members, his work as part of the CSR program, and his understanding of the organization's goals and issues.

He also performed the functions of a development worker in an international non-governmental organization implementing some interventions that reached out to remote and indigenous communities. Seven years of work in the development sector has changed the perception and the approach through which he interacts with the local communities.

The study focuses on a particular CSR project of his company that supports the conservation of a city watershed and involves the members of a small community in that city.

The study focuses on a specific CSR project of his company to help conserve a city watershed, engaging the members of a small community in the city.

He developed the CSR plan and strategy and engaged the local community as the lead of the CSR project. The project involved planting of fruit-bearing and native trees, and bamboo within the watershed, as well as capacity building training for the involved community representatives and members (20 people).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **The Role of CSR and Practitioners in Conservation**

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is greatly defined by the Philippine Business for Social Progress as a business practice where the long-term view is not just for profit, growth and expansion but development of society, preservation of the environment and ontological improvement with the business. Such a definition underscores the realization of CSR as the integration of ethics, social issues and environmental care in doing business.

CSR is fast becoming a hugely relevant element of the strategic direction of organizations seeking to improve their environmental impact. It assists organizations in dealing with environmental issues while also meeting the expectations of stakeholders.

CSR can result in enhanced management practices that are environmentally friendly and promote sustainable development with a positive impact on the community and the environment as well (Wankie, 2018).

In most cases, CSR initiatives target community development, educational promotion and environmental conservation. For instance, industries with the adoption of CSR are known to undertake more green measures which reduces their environmental impact and improves their image and stakeholder confidence (Wankie, 2018).

CSR these days is a heightened level of responsibility that business organizations have towards their employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, communities, and the environment as a whole. This responsibility indicates that such organizations will not only be bound by laws but will also take it upon themselves to better the lives of their employees and the community (Ismail, 2009).

Furthermore, the incorporation of the "triple bottom line" framework, as discussed by Aguinis & Glavas (2012), highlights how CSR activities are integrated into the core business strategies to address economic, social, and environmental goals concurrently. This approach not only enhances societal welfare but also contributes to sustainable business practices, demonstrating a balanced approach to corporate growth, societal development, and environmental stewardship.

Organizations are indeed reducing their carbon footprint and helping to preserve natural resources by implementing initiatives that decrease environmental degradation, such as the use of renewable energy and the proper disposal of waste.

This integrated strategy helps to ensure that by the same time the business goals are met, they also serve the community and the environment, cementing the position of CSR as an integral aspect of the modern approach to business (Prasanta and Petridis, 2018).

Community workers are important in the implementation of any CSR programs, as they encourage the community to participate as well as integrate the initiatives with larger policies and programs. The initiatives portray the community

and incorporate project culture. They facilitate connections between the communities and with the construction of larger policies and programs.

When talking about community development, it is possible to refer to the concepts of social justice, equity, responsibility, possibilities, options, participation, collaboration, interdependence, and lifelong learning. Politics of community development includes three key principles: educating, enabling and empowering (Federation of Community Development Learning, 2009).

Strandberg (2018) stressed the necessity for CSR practitioners to be able to handle environmental management and conservation programs in organizations. Companies are becoming more aware of the importance of sustainability. Such developments have changed the roles of CSR professionals from active engagement in philanthropy and compliance tasks to a more proactive and integrated position.

CSR practitioners have experienced major transformations: Changes in focus from internal work to external communication and engagement; changing from dealing with the company's operations to engaging with the operational environment of the organization; and changing from carrying out tasks to providing ways and means of incorporating sustainability in their tasks (Strandberg, 2018).

These transitions have allowed the CSR practitioners to take on more strategic and unifying roles and engage with people outside the firm like communities in order to advocate for sustainable innovation.

CSR and EM are not isolated strategies but are integrated within the broader business strategy to foster economic growth, environmental sustainability, and societal benefit. Companies engaged in CSR are committed to reducing negative environmental impacts through actions such as reducing emissions, recycling materials, and enhancing resource conservation, thereby embodying the essence of responsible business practices that support both society and the environment.

### **Community Engagement in CSR**

Key constructs that emerge from the CSR literature is that it is a social obligation (Clarkson, 1995); it consists of managerial processes (Wood, 1991); it is a stakeholder obligation (Crane and Matten, 2004); and it is ethics-driven (Carroll, 1979). It is also acknowledged that because the business has the resources, the business' management talent, functional expertise and capital should be given a chance to solve social problems (Davis, 1973).

Engaging local communities is vital for the success of CSR initiatives, as it fosters trust, enhances corporate reputation, and ensures that programs are aligned with community needs (Emeka-Okoli et al., 2024).

Emeka-Okoli et al. (2024) highlighted that companies adopting transparent, dialogue-driven, collaborative, and storytelling-based communication strategies are more likely to build trust, enhance their reputation, and create positive social and environmental impact.

These include openness in information, two-way communication, constructively working together, and having a narrative. Openness means making available relevant and truthful description of the company's CSR measures, actions, and outcomes. Dialogue is about addressing the particular problems of the stakeholders and seeking their views, and any such concerns.

Collaboration is defined as cooperating with relevant parties for the purpose of jointly designing solutions and realizing the effect of CSR projects. Storytelling in this context means telling compelling stories about what the company has achieved in terms of CSR to motivate and win over stakeholders and build the company's image positively.

It is necessary to conduct a needs assessment to comprehend the concerns and aspirations of members of the local community. This strategy involves engaging with community leaders and members to gather insights that inform CSR initiatives. Tailoring communication to address these identified needs ensures that initiatives are relevant and impactful, enhancing community buy-in (McBride Sustainability, 2023).

The integration of participatory approaches within the framework of CSR initiatives, specifically through the lens of the Widus Foundation Inc. (WFI), exemplifies a shift towards more inclusive and beneficiary-centered methods. WFI engages first with the people, also consulting them to know their specific needs. This is a way to practice a participatory approach to helping, wherein beneficiaries practice self-determination in their problems.

This helps to ensure that they get the help that they really need, and which they can truly use. The participatory approach of the WFI also involves beneficiaries in carrying out the program to allow them to feel empowered as they become active agents for their self-development, rather than passive recipients (Luzon, Milan and Noveno, 2022)

In a qualitative single case study conducted by University of the Philippines Social Work and Community Development students, it was reported that the WFI aids in the self-fulfillment of its beneficiaries by providing them support — not the aforementioned tangible support, but intrinsic, emotional support, to allow them to feel fulfilled. By providing words of encouragement, WFI served as one of the factors that helped one beneficiary to finish school. Part of being active and present in engagement is being physically present and hands-on in conducting CSR programs.

Moreover, the WFI's commitment to establishing long-term relationships with its beneficiaries, through consistent support and partnership, reflects a deep understanding of the multifaceted nature of empowerment and development. (Luzon, Milan and Noveno, 2022).

The role of communication in the successful implementation of CSR initiatives cannot be overstated. Tailoring communication channels to suit the preferences of stakeholders, actively soliciting feedback, and ensuring the active participation of local communities in the design and execution of programs are critical components of effective CSR communication (Luzon, Milan and Noveno, 2022).

The focus on the engagement and ownership by local communities in conservation activities within the legal and regulatory mechanisms is a step in the right direction in terms of decentralizing conservation decision making to the people who are affected by and manage resources.

### **Communicating with Indigenous Peoples on Conservation**

In the case of Indigenous people's ways of life in relation to conservation efforts, it is particularly important to consider communication patterns and dynamics.

Since there is a direct typological congruence in their living and biophysical environment, indigenous peoples can be characterized as the most practical, knowledgeable, and generally the most eager to reserve their parts of the world under conservation projects (Bryant, 2000).

Studies highlight the necessity of taking into account cultural context when working with aboriginal communities as conservation organizations and engaging them with educational materials. This is understanding and acknowledging local protocols, local languages, or forms of linguistic communication and patterns. A study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) found that conservation efforts led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities tend to have more positive outcomes for both well-being and biodiversity conservation.

The most important social factors supporting attainment of positive conservation outcomes are not the magnitude of material benefits that indigenous

peoples attain, but rather the recognition of local social and cultural practices, and the ability of those communities to influence decision making (Bawa et al., 2007).

Relationships of trust were a prerequisite for community mobilization that in many cases had to be developed over time through conflict resolution processes, transparent and timely communication, intercultural understanding, and respect for local rights.

These factors are exemplified by research into a co-managed watershed restoration program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the establishment of mixed gender leadership through legitimate local institutions was deemed a key success factor (Sabin et al. 2019).

This relationship, however, is fraught with challenges, particularly when it comes to aligning conservation objectives between indigenous communities and external conservation entities.

While the role of indigenous peoples in community-based conservation is greatly recognized, communicating and influencing them can also be a challenge for conservationists. Institutional and Indigenous Forest management objectives have commonly been at odds particularly with respect to conservation objectives and what occurs in practice (Wiersum, 1997).

With the recent, rapid evolution of socioeconomic conditions and the changing demographics of indigenous tribes, traditional land-use and management practices may not necessarily translate into sustainable resource use over time (Bryant, 2000).

Moreover, the imposition of conservation strategies by external organizations without genuine collaboration with indigenous communities often leads to suboptimal outcomes.

Dawson (2021) emphasized that when interventions are controlled by external organizations and involve strategies to change local practices and supersede customary institutions, they tend to result in relatively ineffective conservation at the same time as producing negative social outcomes.

In a case study on local community engagement in wildlife conservation in South Eastern Zimbabwe, it was observed that there was no effective communication strategy between stakeholders in the study area.

The infrequent consultative and planning meetings have registered poor attendance, thus affecting community participation, which could help in resolving conservation conflicts in the Save Valley Conservancy (SVC).

The attendance and contribution of every stakeholder are vital for achieving a shared view and common understanding of the main issues affecting development in the SVC. The lack of an effective communication strategy in the SVC has also

affected decision-making processes, as communities are unaware of reporting and governing structures (Dhliwayo et al., 2023).

Such involvement is essential for communities to fully embrace and support all plans and implementation processes towards sustainability in the SVC. Without substantial participation by community members, wildlife conservation initiatives are likely to fail (Dhliwayo et al., 2023).

There are also a few important factors that one needs to consider while engaging Indigenous Peoples in conservation practices. For communication and collaboration to be effective, trust must be built. To do this requires patience, perseverance, and dedication to comprehending and honoring the perspectives held by the Indigenous peoples (CRP, 2023).

The Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP) underscored that traditional knowledge and expressions are owned by Indigenous Peoples who have the right to decide how these are used. Such intellectual property must be respected by conservation organizations and such knowledge must not be disclosed or shared without free, prior, and informed consent.

Effective communication recognizes and promotes Indigenous leadership in decision-making and implementation of conservation project. This involves supporting Indigenous-led initiatives and ensuring that external organizations play a facilitative rather than directive role (Dawson et al. 2021)

Effective conservation must therefore navigate these complex socio-ecological landscapes with sensitivity, recognizing indigenous peoples not as obstacles but as crucial partners in the stewardship of their ancestral lands.

### **Challenges in Community Engagement in CSR**

Engagement with the communities is the aspect where organizations and the local stakeholders are expected to collaborate and participate actively. However, there are a number of issues and challenges that can be posed by such communities, which may negatively affect the success of the CSR initiatives.

The lack of participation from local stakeholders is one of the biggest challenges in community engagement. Research indicates that many communities do not know the CSR initiatives or do not see their relevance, which leads to less involvement in these programs.

A survey conducted by Times of India with 250 companies reported that insufficient awareness and understanding of CSR activities contribute to community disengagement.

The report also showed that there is a lack of interest from the local community in participating and contributing to CSR activities. This is largely due to the little to no knowledge about CSR efforts within the local communities, as no serious efforts have been made to spread awareness about CSR and instill confidence in the local communities about such initiatives. Another factor that

contributes to it is the absence of interaction among the organization and the local populace at the bottom of the pyramid (Kumar, 2019).

The Times of India survey further emphasized that poor communication between companies and communities contributes to the lack of trust and willingness to take part in CSR initiatives. This focal point points out the importance of developing clear and coherent communication practices that are sensitive to local stakeholders.

There are communication barriers that restrain such useful discussions from taking place, such as language gaps, cultural barriers, and lack of openness. Many of the Indigenous Peoples use their native languages which are likely not familiar to corporate representatives. Such language differences create situations where CSR approaches can be misread or misconstrued.

Global studies reveal that the absence of offered services in native languages limits the opportunities to obtain important data or participate in different decision levels. Polit and Webster (2018) pointed out that the Inuit communities in Nunavut encounter such problems while trying to receive healthcare because of language differences, which can be generalized in CSR settings with comparable problems.

Multilingualism and language diversity programs can help stem anti-colonial activism and more effectively engage Indigenous communities, allowing for their voices to not only be heard, but be respected as well (Webster, 2018).

Cross-cultural issues appear to pose particular challenges in terms of Indigenous engagement. Indigenous people, however, have their own sets of values, beliefs and practices that sometimes do not conform to the norm of corporate culture. These cultures have to be appreciated and observed if the objective of trust and relationship is to be achieved.

There have been suggestions on cultural competency training to these employees in order to fill these gaps. Such training, for example, can help companies learn about indigenous peoples' ways of being and how to communicate with them respectfully, which can, in turn create better CSR outcomes (FasterCapital 2024).

Many organizations fail to communicate their CSR intentions clearly, leading to skepticism among community members. Indigenous communities are more likely to support projects when they feel adequately consulted and informed about all aspects of the initiative, including its long-term implications (Sangha, 2019).

Smaller companies are usually resource constrained and therefore are not able to reach out to communities effectively. Time, money and personnel are very important to successfully implement CSR initiatives and this can be difficult for companies that have tight budgets. This constraint can lead to superficial engagement efforts, where organizations may focus on event-based programs rather than fostering long-term relationships and sustainable initiatives.

Charity Miles's (2024) and One More Tree Foundation's (2024) sustainability report presents that the involvement of community people may also become a serious barrier towards active engagement in CSR initiatives. It is possible that some interested parties would focus on their economic gains in the short run rather than their social or environmental responsibilities, and this may create disbalance in community and corporate expectations. This resistance can stem from historical grievances or a lack of trust in corporate intentions, complicating the engagement process.

### **Understanding Indigenous Groups' Role in Safeguarding Nature**

In the Philippines, most of the forest lands and headwaters fall within the Ancestral Domains of the various Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous People have their own centuries-old knowledge, systems, and practices and have kept them alive (Perino, 2023).

In the course of indigenous people's day-to-day interactions with the forests, many of these groups have developed indigenous knowledge systems and institutions that allow them to regulate forest-use (Dove and Rao, 1990).

In an article by Eco-Business (2022), the role of the Tagbanua in Malampaya's mangrove reforestation was highlighted. Indigenous cultural belief helps the mangrove forest remain intact. The Tagbanuas believe in 'pahadlok' or mangrove-dwelling spirits. People rarely go to the area because the mangroves are

enormous and believed to be hosting evil spirits. Out of fear, the Tagbanua people don't linger in the mangrove forest, staying just long enough to gather food and sparing this ecosystem from destruction and unsustainable resource extraction.

Indigenous beliefs exemplify indigenous people's deep spiritual relationship with their natural environment, which gives them their own set of protection and management with regard to their landscape (Zerrudo, 2022).

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focused on the CSR practitioner's communication practices in engaging a local community in watershed conservation efforts from 2022 to 2023. This includes his interaction with the local community when preparing, conducting and reviewing the project activities, such as site mapping, meetings, tree planting and project monitoring.

#### **Research Framework**

Autoethnography is used both as a framework and a methodology that combines elements of autobiography and ethnography, allowing researchers to draw on personal experience to gain insights into cultural phenomena (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). It is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005).

Autoethnography uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences; acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as “reflexivity”—to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their

struggles balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity  
strives for social justice and to make life better (Adams et al., 2017)

Autoethnography can refer to research in which a researcher reflexively studies a group they belong to or their subjective experience (Marechal, 2010). Autoethnography was more narrowly defined as "insider ethnography," referring to studies of the (culture of) a group of which the researcher is a member (Hayano, 1970).

### **Research Questions:**

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the CSR practitioner's communication practices in engaging the local community in watershed conservation?
2. What are the underlying views and assumptions of the communication practices?

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography is a useful qualitative research method used to analyse people's lives, a tool that Ellis and Bochner (2000) define as "...an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural." There are different uses of the term and it varies according to the relations between the researcher's personal experience and the phenomenon under investigation (Foster et al.,2006).

Autoethnography is characterized by its focus on the researcher as both the subject and the observer. Researchers reflect on their lived experiences to understand and critique cultural, political, and social phenomena (Adams et al., 2017). It involves:

- Critiquing cultural beliefs and practices through personal experiences.
- Recognizing the connections between the researcher and others.
- Revisiting the self with the intention of examining the connections that exist between the individual self and the larger society.
- Achieving the integration of emotional and creative aspects
- Seeking social change using narratives as a medium of research.

This approach also permits various types of self-expression – expression that may be in the form of poems, stories, visual arts, and others – giving the chances to the researchers to express various feelings and thoughts in an artistic way. Bochner

and Ellis (2016) qualify the book with this title as auto-biographical, as the authors relate the events through their life stories and presence in the culture.

Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) highlight unique advantages of autoethnography, including:

- **Insider Perspective:** It provides a voice to the researcher, allowing for an understanding of cultural contexts from within.
- **Emotional Engagement:** The method builds emotional connections and reflections, which can resonate with readers on a personal level.
- **Flexibility:** Researchers can choose diverse genres and styles, making the approach adaptable to various contexts and audiences.

Nonetheless, the evaluation and interpretation present some hurdles. Autoethnography's auto-centric design is likely to lead to divergent views, which poses a challenge to many of the conventional standards for judging the quality of the research. For example, some scholars suggest evaluating autoethnographic work in terms of substantive contribution, aesthetics, and reflexivity, as the genre integrates both art and science (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

As an autoethnographer, the CSR practitioner became both the subject and the researcher, using his own experiences to explore broader social and cultural contexts. This approach is particularly valuable in understanding complex interactions, such as those involved in CSR initiatives.

By drawing on his own experiences as a CSR practitioner engaged in watershed conservation efforts, he used autoethnography to provide an in-depth, nuanced understanding of the communication practices employed to engage the local community. This approach helped the CSR practitioner analyze how his own background, beliefs, and experiences influenced his communication practices.

The research methodology and discussion of findings, summary, conclusion and recommendations of this study were written in first person as autoethnography is typically written in first-person and can "appear in a variety of forms," such as "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science pros (Bochner and Ellis, 2016).

Writing my experience in conducting autoethnography in first person allows me to provide deeper insights into my self-reflection journey.

### **Reflexivity in Autoethnography**

Maintaining a rigorous level of reflexivity throughout the research process is crucial – continuously examining my own biases, cultural background, and experiences as a CSR practitioner.

Reflexivity is a key feature of rigor in qualitative research (Berger, 2013; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Often confused with reflection, which occurs after the fact, reflexivity is an 'in-the-moment' and ongoing self-scrutiny (Finlay, 2016).

Although reflexivity is variably defined (Gabriel, 2015), it is often described as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researchers' positionality (Berger, 2013).

Reflexivity requires researchers to critically evaluate how their backgrounds—such as gender, race, ethnicity, and professional status—impact their research questions and interactions with participants. This process is not merely reflective; it is an active engagement with one's subjectivity during the research journey, which can influence what is observed, how data is interpreted, and the conclusions drawn.

This self-awareness helped the CSR practitioner to identify and reduce the impact these factors could have on his interpretation of his experiences and the data gathered. He practiced self-reflection, which assisted him stay more objective and critical in the examination of his communication practices and their engagement results.

By bringing it to the fore, given the significance of self and self-representation, it enhances the ability to reflect on and be reflexive about one's relationships with the participants and one's actions (Duarte, 2017).

As a type of ethnography in which the autoethnographer embraces the experience and culture studied, it entails not only the subject's thinking and action but his/her relations with others that may be participants or informants (Farrell et al, 2015).

Such a level of self-reflexivity and self-reflection can indeed reveal how social relations and identities and also the historical context and the hierarchies of power in existence at the time guide the researcher (Nencel, 2014)

Although the researcher is the object of the study, this does not diminish the role of other participants in the research as they are the ones who equally, if not more, provide the findings (Ellis et al., 2011) as they are the ones who helped construct the knowledge of the research (Panhwar et. Al 2017).

The main aim of this study is to go beyond the narration of the CSR practitioner. It is this self-examination and the self-analysis that he would use to shed light on the wider cultural factors in the context of CSR activities and engagement of the communities in the protection of the environment.

This autoethnographic research provides a rich and nuanced account of how the CSR activities of a practitioner were focused on one local community in efforts to protect a watershed. The involvement of the researcher in the activities analyzed allows for efficient investigation of the peculiarities, complexities, and developmental aspects of cross-cultural communication in the CSR sphere.

### **Data Collection**

The methodology for data collection included a review of my personal journals from 2022 to 2023. I maintained detailed records of my experiences, thoughts, and

emotions in journals, which allowed me to reflect deeply on critical incidents and significant turning points that emerged throughout my engagement.

In this case, autoethnography is type of research that describes combining features of autobiography and ethnography. To achieve the autobiographical components of the autoethnography, the author will write selectively about past experiences. Further, the authors may conduct formal or informal interviews or refer to relevant materials (diaries, photographs) to recall (Adams, 2017).

As Adams (2017) pointed out, ethnography, on the other hand, involves observing and writing about culture. During the first stage, researchers will observe and interview representatives of the chosen cultural group and write thorough field notes.

Autoethnography uses aspects of autobiography (e.g., personal experiences and recall) and ethnography (e.g., interviews, observations, and fieldnotes) to create vivid descriptions that connect the personal to the cultural (Adams, 2017).

The data collection phase in autoethnography often includes various qualitative methods as listed by The American Psychological Association:

- **Introspection:** Researchers engage in deep self-reflection, examining their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the subject matter.
- **Participant Observation:** The researcher actively participates in the cultural context while observing interactions and dynamics within the community.

- **Artifact Collection:** Gathering personal and cultural artifacts (e.g., photographs, documents) that provide context and enhance the narrative.
- **Dialogue:** Documenting conversations with community members to gain insights into their perspectives and experiences

I was writing journals every after visit to the local community to also help me with reporting and documentation of the activities. I gathered all my journal entries from and also collected related company reports, published articles, letters, emails, photos, video clips and social media posts from 2022-2023 that could help provide a rich, multifaceted perspective on my experiences and the broader context of my research topic.

I reviewed all my journals using and all other related materials using my research questions to guide my inquiry and help me focus on specific themes or issues relevant to the research topic.

## **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, I employed thematic analysis of my journal entries to identify and explore recurring themes and provide insights into the patterns of my engagement with the local community.

Thematic analysis is used in qualitative research and focuses on examining themes or patterns of meaning within data (Daly et al. 1997). This method can

emphasize both organization and rich description of the data set and theoretically informed interpretation of meaning (Braun, Virginia; Clarke, Victoria (2006).

Thematic analysis is an active process of reflexivity in which the researcher's subjective experience is at the center of making sense of the data.

Thematic analysis is sometimes claimed to be compatible with phenomenology in that it can focus on participants' subjective experiences and sense-making; there is a long tradition of using thematic analysis in phenomenological research (Guest et al. 2012).

An advantage of thematic analysis is it's a flexible approach to qualitative analysis that enables researchers to generate new insights and concepts derived from data. On the other side, a disadvantage is because it is such a flexible approach, it means that there are many different ways to interpret meaning from the data set. It can feel intimidating to interpret what data is or isn't important to emphasize. But because this study is an autoethnography, this focuses on my personal experiences, interpretations and insights.

The gathering and analysis of data go hand-in-hand as theories and themes emerge during the study (Erlandson et al. 1993). The reflection involved by the researcher consistently shapes and forms the articulation of the experiences of the researcher in a self-study.

A phenomenological approach emphasizes the participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount object of study. Rooted in humanistic psychology, phenomenology notes giving voice to the "other" as a key component in qualitative research in general. This approach allows the respondents to discuss the topic in their own words, free of constraints from fixed-response questions found in quantitative studies (Dapkus, 1985).

I also referred to multiple studies and literature related to my research topic to review on communication practices employed in other CSR projects, to validate my findings and enhance the credibility of my research.

Additionally, reflexivity played a critical role in my analysis, as I continuously examined my own biases, positionality, and the ways in which they might influence my interpretations of the data.

I asked myself these questions:

- How do my experiences shape my understanding of the topic?
- What biases or assumptions might affect my interpretation?

I documented these reflections in a reflexivity diary.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that the analysis of data in a personal narrative involves a process where the researcher emotionally recalls the events of the past. The researcher looks back on specific, memorable episodes and experiences paying particular attention to the emotions and physical surroundings

during the recollection. Emotional recall is expressed through writing that includes thoughts, events, dialogue, and physical details of the particular event.

A unique aspect of a qualitative study is the ability of the researcher to let the data emerge as the research and writing is progressing. In the initial phases of my study it was not always clear what distinctive themes would emerge. As noted by Janesick (2002), “the qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data.

Firstly, I immersed myself in the data. I read through my collected materials multiple times to understand the context and nuances. This step was crucial for identifying initial impressions and insights that would inform my coding process.

### **The Coding Process**

I began the coding process by identifying significant passages in my data that resonated with my research questions. I broke down the data into smaller segments and assigned initial codes based on the content.

The initial step involves extracting relevant excerpts from the vignettes that provide insights into the communication practices and interactions during the CSR project implementation. These excerpts capture various instances of communication, participation, and interactions between the CSR practitioners and the local community.

Coding is the process of labeling and organizing your qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them. When coding the data, the researcher assigns labels to words or phrases that represent important (and recurring) themes in each response.

Coding refers to the act of associating meaningful ideas with the data of interest. In the context of qualitative research, interpretative aspects of the coding process are often explicitly recognized and articulated; coding helps to produce specific words or short phrases believed to be useful abstractions from the data (Saldana, 2012).

Unlike traditional qualitative research with predetermined codes, autoethnography focuses on meaning-making. I constantly asked myself “What does this experience reveal about myself, my communication practices, and the larger context involving my engagement with the local community?”

From these excerpts, specific codes are assigned to encapsulate the primary message or activity described. Each code represents a distinct concept or action that is relevant to the analysis of communication practices.

Coding my data wasn't as easy as I thought. It wasn't like putting things in neat boxes. The information kept evolving and became very fluid, and there wasn't always a single perfect category for everything. It took a lot of self-questioning and review to figure out where everything belonged.

## Data Analysis Tables

**Table 1.**

*When in Project Implementation.*

<b>Excepts</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme/ Description</b>
<p><i>“The community reps thanked us for bringing the bamboo seedlings, as they had long requested them but couldn’t get them from the DENR due to the need to pick them up from the Arayat nursery and lack of budget for transportation and a pickup vehicle. Luckily, through partnering with us, they were able to get the seedlings picked up from the DENR nursery.”</i></p>	<p>Support to the community</p>	<p>Partnership Building</p>	<p>The participation of the CSR practitioner and the local community in implementing the CSR project across all phases.</p>
<p><i>“We stored the seedlings at their house temporarily, and Tatay Henry said they would handle transporting the seedlings to the planting site inside the watershed so the employees wouldn’t have to carry them. They also pre-dug the holes for the seedlings. It was nice because I hadn’t told or asked Tatay Henry to do this; they voluntarily offered to help.”</i></p>	<p>Support to the CSR practitioner</p>		
<p><i>“Tatay Henry and the people from Sitio Target assisted with the planting. They helped dig and plant, and also chatted with some of the employees. In our group pictures, I called the community reps to join.”</i></p>	<p>Participation in planting</p>		

<p><i>“We planted along the side of the stream while the community reps dug holes for us. It was delightful to see the interaction between the community reps and our employees. Our foreign executives also enjoyed the experience and even called me over to translate their thanks to the community reps.”</i></p>	<p>Collaboration in planting</p>		
<p><i>“I stayed behind for a moment to discuss some additional needs with the community reps. They also explained that for future plantings, especially during the rainy season, they would need fuel for the grass cutter. The grass grows quickly in the areas where we were planting.”</i></p>	<p>Needs assessment</p>		
<p><i>“Our strategy for helping with watershed conservation is to let the Aeta lead in finding planting locations because they know the watershed extensively well and understand which areas need trees, especially parts damaged by storms or by the strong flow of water when the streams overflow. I told the community reps to just suggest locations, and we would handle gathering seedlings and finding volunteers for planting, so they wouldn't need to worry about picking up the seedlings from Arayat.”</i></p>	<p>Finding planting location</p>	<p>Indigenous Wisdom</p>	<p>The consideration of traditional knowledge and practices of the local community in conservation to guide the project.</p>
<p><i>“We also share knowledge from our technical resource persons from the DENR, but we respect the methods and strategies of the Aeta in managing the watershed. Even the placement of the seedlings was their decision.”</i></p>	<p>Watershed management</p>		

<p><i>“We then proceeded to the area where we would plant, located just at the entrance of the watershed because the community reps had developed a site there suitable for planting. It was closer to the homes and a small well, making it easier for them to water the seedlings when the weather is hot.”</i></p>	<p>Site preparation</p>		
<p><i>“Tatay Henry also shared how the bamboo could help them. Besides preventing soil erosion near the stream and overflow during heavy rain. Tatay Henry shared that they use bamboo to make household items and structures. He used the meeting area where we were as an example, pointing out its bamboo walls and seating.”</i></p>	<p>Bamboo benefits</p>		
<p><i>“One thing I appreciate about Sitio Target as our adopted community is their proper care of the trees we planted. Tatay Henry said they water the trees daily when the weather is hot. The location of Sitio Target is also beneficial because it often has light rain in the afternoons, even during summer, which promotes better growth of the trees.”</i></p>	<p>Watering routine</p>		
<p><i>“I also let Tatay Henry share some “facts” about the barangay, the watershed, and the types of trees they plant. I let Tatay Henry and the others share their planting methods and how they care for the trees. I believe it’s important that they feel like partners in our program and that they are the experts in this field.”</i></p>	<p>Planting methods</p>		

<p><i>“We had an informal meeting or interview where I asked Tatay Henry and several community members about their traditions and culture. That’s where I learned about some of their traditions. It has become my habit to ask them numerous questions when speaking with them because I am also interested in the culture of the Aetas and the traditions they have.”</i></p>	<p>Community traditions</p>	<p>Local Culture</p>	<p>The efforts in understanding and appreciating the local culture to effectively engage the community.</p>
<p><i>“I asked the people there if I could take a picture of the tarpaulin, and they said they would first need to ask the elders. An elder came out and asked what my purpose was. I mentioned that I was working with Tatay Henry on our watershed project, but they frowned and didn’t pay much attention to me. They also didn’t allow me to take a picture, making me feel there was a problem. When I mentioned I was with Tatay Henry, they just said, “Even so.” I immediately felt something was off, so I didn’t insist and returned to Tatay Henry’s house to meet Carlos again.”</i></p>	<p>Photo taking restrictions</p>		

<p><i>“He [Tatay Henry] explained why their place is called Sitio Target. He was born and raised there. When he was young, the area where the sitio is now was formerly a practice area for American soldiers doing target shooting. The sitio was close to Clark Airbase at that time. So, it was normal for them in their youth to hear gunshots. Whenever they heard that, they knew that the soldiers were training. After the American soldiers left, they moved to the area from a higher part of the mountain, and since then it has been called Sitio Target. Actually, I had heard of Sitio Target and seen it on Google Maps but never really thought about why it was named that. It's good that Kuya Henry shared this, and now I know the origin of their community's name and we are better prepared for tomorrow's sharing with our employees and executives.”</i></p>	<p>Community history</p>		
<p><i>“Upon my arrival, I happened to see Kuya Henry in front of his house, and we first stopped by some elders to show our faces and check on them.”</i></p>	<p>Courtesy call</p>		
<p><i>“I had thought about conducting the workshop using cue cards, but since they could neither read nor write, I decided it would be better to just have a conversation. During this, they shared some changes.”</i></p>	<p>Face-to-face conversation</p>	<p>Communication Needs</p>	<p>Approaches to meet the specific communication needs and preferences of the community.</p>

<p><i>"I couldn't text or call them because they don't have cellphones. There's no signal in the area, so I really couldn't contact them. I have the number of Tatay Henry's daughter, but she never replied or answered me. I remembered they mentioned that there are only a few spots in the sitio with signal, and they need to climb to a high part of the mountain to catch a signal. When the weather improved, I traveled to Sitio Target. It was a weekend, but since I live close to Sitio Target, I visited them."</i></p>	<p>Physical visit</p>		
<p><i>"As usual, Tatay Henry gave an introduction about the sitio, the watershed, and the trees we had planted. However, since we had foreigners with us, I translated Tatay Henry's remarks into English, and whenever our foreign colleagues had questions, I translated those into Tagalog for Tatay Henry to understand."</i></p>	<p>Translating remarks</p>		

Table 2.

*When the Community is in Conflict.*

<p><i>“Their perspective differs, as they oppose the conservation project and prefer livelihood projects. A lawyer and businessman had approached them [other group] to build a resort in the area, which Tatay Henry’s group opposed because it is their ancestral domain and they have the title to it. They refuse to allow structures, especially a resort, as it would harm the environment and negate their conservation efforts. However, the other group sees it as a job opportunity and financial aid. Tatay Henry was quite concerned when he saw me speaking with them. Carlos reassured him that I was unaware of their dispute and likely just making conversation.”</i></p>	<p>Difference in perspectives</p>	<p>Community issues</p>	<p>Being mindful of the conflict and tension within the community related to the conservation project</p>
<p><i>“I realized I need to be mindful and aware of such community issues. Luckily, I talked to the other group. They didn’t say anything bad about Tatay Henry, but they made me feel unwelcome. Carlos explained that this is typical of people who work with Tatay Henry and our project’s community representatives, especially those pushing for conservation. But I also told Carlos that it’s difficult to mediate such conflicts because their reasons seem deeply rooted.”</i></p>	<p>Cold treatment</p>		
<p><i>“I really appreciate the efforts of Tatay Henry and the other community leaders in conserving the watershed. They put so much effort into monitoring the planting sites especially during the rainy season. They have strong ties to the watershed that’s why they told me they really value the partnership and they hope to continue the project for many more years to come.”</i></p>	<p>Community’s role</p>	<p>Community’s commitment</p>	<p><i>The community’s participation in the CSR project despite conflict within the community</i></p>

<p><i>"I feel like the partnership won't be a success without the contributions and support of the community members who advocate for the watershed conservation. They wholeheartedly welcomed our team and treated us like family whenever we visited Sitio Target. Despite some challenges in their community, they continue to believe in the mission of the project."</i></p>	<p>Community support</p>		
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The codes are then grouped into sub-themes that represent broader categories of related activities or concepts. This step involves identifying patterns and relationships between the codes to form coherent sub-themes.

Finally, the sub-themes are consolidated into overarching themes that encapsulate the main aspects of the communication practices observed during the CSR project implementation. These themes provide a high-level understanding of the key areas of focus and interaction between the CSR practitioners and the local community.

After classifying my data according to codes, subthemes, themes, with the corresponding excerpts from my journals, I then evaluated the data to ensure that I had coded them properly and thoroughly.

I explored the relationships between my categories, analyzing how they connect, contradict or build upon each other. Then I found a core theme or concept that captures the essence of my communication practices and their significance within the larger social or cultural context.

My own constructions of the context were enhanced and more informed as my reviews of the data continued. I even kept a reflexivity diary to take note of my interpretations, side thoughts and impressions.

This greater understanding can be attributed to what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as ontological authenticity – an understanding derived about the researcher's own point of view.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Implementing a CSR project engaging the local community of Sitio Target has been both enlightening and challenging. My communication practices center around a small group of community representatives, led by a community leader who serves as the bridge between our CSR team and the broader community. These representatives, in turn, engage with community elders and other stakeholders, forming a dynamic, multilayered communication network

Through autoethnography, I examined my personal journals to determine my communication practices as a CSR practitioner in engaging the local community and understand the underlying issues and assumptions behind those practices.

#### **COMMUNICATION PRACTICES DURING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

Four communication practices during project implementation emerged in the analysis of data: engaging and empowering community leaders, integrating the local community's wisdom and traditions; engaging the community in a long-term partnership; and recognizing literacy constraints. Each of these practices is made up of sub-practices, including:

- Sharing roles and responsibilities with the community
- Letting the community lead the completion of the project
- Including local voices in decision-making
- Inviting community leaders to educate employees and stakeholders

- Being mindful of local customs and traditions
- Respecting hierarchical structures
- Using the local language
- Involving community members in the storytelling process
- Bridging the language barrier
- Visiting the community to personally connect
- Immersing in the local community

### **Engaging and empowering community leaders**

My relationship with the local community was significantly enhanced by involving community leaders like “Tatay Henry” and other community members in the implementation phase. Their involvement increased the project’s relevance and fostered a collaborative atmosphere.

Community leaders serve as vital intermediaries between corporations and the communities they aim to serve. Their unique position allows them to articulate local needs and priorities, ensuring that CSR projects are relevant and impactful. During our tree planting activities, we further empower local voices by inviting community leaders like Tatay Henry to share their extensive knowledge about bamboo and its uses. Tatay Henry’s insights not only enrich the learning experience for everyone involved, including visitors, but also authenticate the project by integrating traditional practices with our contemporary conservation efforts.

*“We engaged Tatay Henry and other community leaders. He is considered the eco champion in the community so he became our primary point of contact. I’ve noticed that he is respected by the community members.” (Journal, March 11, 2023)*

*“Tatay Henry also shared how the bamboo could help them. Besides preventing soil erosion near the stream and overflow during heavy rain, Tatay Henry shared that they use bamboo to make household items and structures. He used the meeting area where we were as an example, pointing out its bamboo walls and seating.”*

***Sharing roles and responsibilities with the community.*** Sharing of roles and responsibilities appeared to support collaboration and building relationships with the local community. An example was seen in how I handled the logistics of our conservation activities. Our team was responsible for sourcing and transporting seedlings from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) nursery in Arayat, Pampanga. Meanwhile, the community took charge of the groundwork, such as preparing the planting site.

This division of labor not only supported the local leaders, making their tasks less burdensome but also fueled their enthusiasm and ongoing cooperation. Furthermore, my role often extended to facilitating the acquisition of resources like tree seedlings, which were inaccessible to the community on their own.

*“The community reps thanked us for bringing the bamboo seedlings, as they had long requested them but couldn't get them from the DENR due to the need to pick them up from the Arayat nursery and lack of budget for transportation and a pickup*

*vehicle. Luckily, through partnering with us, they were able to get the seedlings picked up from the DENR nursery.” (Journal, February 16, 2023)*

*“We stored the seedlings at their house temporarily, and Tatay Henry said they would handle transporting the seedlings to the planting site inside the watershed so the employees wouldn't have to carry them. They also pre-dug the holes for the seedlings. It was nice because I hadn't told or asked Tatay Henry to do this; they voluntarily offered to help.” (Journal, February 16, 2023)*

Successful CSR initiatives often involve shared responsibilities and resources. By empowering community leaders to take charge of specific tasks, companies can cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment to the project. This collaborative approach not only enhances project outcomes but also strengthens community ties. Ahead of any tree planting activity, my preparations began a day earlier. I would meet with the community members, particularly with Tatay Henry, to discuss the event's flow and plan the content meticulously. This preparation was crucial in ensuring everyone was well-aware of their roles, thus minimizing any potential misunderstandings. Such detailed planning and clear communication are essential, especially when the event involves participants from diverse backgrounds.

*“We planted along the side of the stream while the community reps dug holes for us. It was delightful to see the interaction between the community reps and our employees. Our foreign executives also enjoyed the experience and even called me over to translate their thanks to the community reps.” (Journal, February 17, 2023)*

From the onset, my communication practice was clear: to ensure that the community was not merely participating but leading and sharing in the process. This included regular meetings with community representatives to discuss project goals, roles, and logistics.

During the tree planting activities, I included community representatives in group photos and encouraged their active participation in the planting itself. This was not just about having a more hands-on deck; it sent a message about the importance of teamwork and equal contribution, regardless of one's role.

*“Tatay Henry and the people from Sitio Target assisted with the planting. They helped dig and plant, and also chatted with some of the employees. In our group pictures, I called the community reps to join.”*

*“We then proceeded to the area where we would plant, located just at the entrance of the watershed because the community reps had developed a site there suitable for planting. It was closer to the homes and a small well, making it easier for them to water the seedlings when the weather is hot.”*

**Letting the community lead the completion of the project.** We also entrust the community with the care of fruit-bearing trees. Recognizing and supporting their proactive efforts reinforces their ability to manage and benefit from these resources sustainably. This empowerment is pivotal as it helps transition from dependency on aid to self-sufficiency.

*“One thing I appreciate about Sitio Target as our adopted community is their proper care of the trees we planted. Tatay Henry said they water the trees daily when the weather is hot. The location of Sitio Target is also beneficial because it often has light rain in the afternoons, even during summer, which promotes better growth of the trees.” (Journal, September 22, 2023)*

*“The trees we planted are fruit-bearing, so the community reps said they take good care of them because they believe the trees will help their livelihood once they start bearing fruits.” (Journal, September 22, 2023)*

***Including local voices in decision-making.*** When I began my journey into implementing CSR projects, I knew that the success of our projects would largely depend on our partnership with the local communities. This understanding, developed through my seven years in development work with a non-government organization, guided my approach to actively engage community members in decision-making processes and problem-solving during the implementation stage of our project.

*“Tatay Henry mentioned that they were clearing another area deeper in the watershed that could be used for planting. He asked if we were okay with planting there and we said yes and planned to do so.” (Journal, August 25, 2023)*

*“The community explained that for future planting, especially during the rainy season, they would need fuel for the grass cutter. The grass grows quickly in the*

*areas where we were planting. And we considered that adding to our next steps.”*

*(Journal, June 16, 2023)*

***Inviting community leaders to educate employees and stakeholders.*** The project has also allowed community leaders, particularly Tatay Henry, educate our employees about the conservation efforts, the flora and fauna inside the watershed, and the situation inside the watershed.

*“Tatay Henry also shared how the bamboo could help them. Besides preventing soil erosion near the stream and overflow during heavy rains. He shared that they use bamboo to make household items and structures.” (Journal, September 22, 2023)*

*“Tatay Henry showed us some trees that had died or struggled to grow, He explained that since the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, they had difficulty growing trees and vegetables in parts of the watershed because the soil had been mixed with lahar.” (August 25, 2023)*

### **Integrating the local community’s wisdom and traditions**

In the heart of our CSR project lies a deep respect for the local community's wisdom and traditions. This approach not only honors their profound knowledge of the land but also highlights the empowerment that is central to community-led initiatives.

Allowing the local community of Sitio Target to lead in selecting planting sites within the watershed respects their intimate understanding of the environment and their specific needs. By involving them in such critical decisions, I foster a sense of ownership and accountability, both of which are crucial for the success of our project.

*“Our strategy for helping with watershed conservation is to let the local community lead in finding planting locations because they know the watershed extensively well and understand which areas need trees, especially parts damaged by storms or by the strong flow of water when the streams overflow. I told the community reps to suggest locations, and we would handle gathering seedlings and finding volunteers for planting, so they wouldn't need to worry about picking up the seedlings from Arayat.” (Journal, March 11, 2022)*

*“We also share knowledge from our technical resource persons from the DENR, but we respect the methods and strategies of the local community in managing the watershed. Even the placement of the seedlings was their decision.” (Journal, August 25, 2023)*

In every aspect of our project, I ensure that we deeply value the indigenous wisdom. By giving community leaders like Tatay Henry significant roles during our sessions, I acknowledge their skills and knowledge. This strategy enhances their sense of ownership and enriches the experience for all participants, including volunteers and company executives. Demonstrating such respect for local expertise is essential for the success of community-driven conservation projects.

*“I also let Tatay Henry share some “facts” about the barangay, the watershed, and the types of trees they plant. I let Tatay Henry and the others share their planting methods and how they care for the trees. I believe it's important that they feel like partners in our program and that they are the experts in this field.” (September 22, 2023)*

Also, I prioritize valuing local observations and experiences. By inviting communities to think about their experiences and about changes that can be seen since the start of the project, their views are reinforced and they are actively engaged in a self- appraisal and empowerment process.

Bringing local communities’ experiences and voices into the CSR initiatives’ processes not only recognizes local people’s lived experiences but also enhances their engagement in project results. Letting the community members, for instance, present their narratives and talk about what has changed since the start of the project, makes them feel empowered and involved in the processes.

***Being mindful of local customs and traditions.*** An essential element of successful CSR programs is the sensitivity to and understanding of local peoples and cultures.

Local community members possess unique cultural identities, traditions, and ecological knowledge that are crucial for the success of any CSR project.

Working closely with the local community on our conservation project, I've always prioritized understanding and respecting their culture. My approach is rooted in active listening and asking numerous questions about the local culture and traditions. This not only demonstrates respect for their knowledge but also deepens my understanding of the community, ensuring that our project aligns with their needs and respects their traditions.

*“We had an informal meeting or interview where I asked Tatay Henry and several community members about their traditions and culture. That's where I learned about some of their traditions. It has become my habit to ask them numerous questions when speaking with them because I am also interested in the culture of the community members and the traditions they have.” (Journal, August 25, 2023)*

*“They shared that they still have a spiritual healer in their community whom they believe could communicate with spirits. When a community member is sick, they ask the spiritual healer to talk to the spirits to know the type of sacrifice they could make to heal the person.” (Journal, August 25, 2023)*

*“Also, before they harvest fruits and vegetables inside the watershed, they chant so the spirits would allow them and provide a bountiful harvest.” (Journal, October 20, 2023)*

Active listening and asking questions about local customs not only demonstrate respect but also facilitate deeper connections between CSR

practitioners and community members. They appreciate it when they see that you are interested in their stories and respect their local traditions.

This approach aligns with the principles of participatory development, which advocate for the inclusion of local voices in decision-making processes to ensure that projects are culturally relevant and accepted by the community.

***Respecting hierarchical structures.*** One experience that underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity occurred when I was asked to photograph a tarpaulin during the project. The elders expressed their discomfort with this, and respecting their wishes, I did not insist on taking the photo.

*“I asked the people there if I could take a picture of the tarpaulin, and they said they would first need to ask the elders. An elder came out and asked what my purpose was. I mentioned that I was working with Tatay Henry on our watershed project, but they frowned and didn’t pay much attention to me. They also didn’t allow me to take a picture, making me feel there was a problem. When I mentioned I was with Tatay Henry, they just said, “Even so.” I immediately felt something was off, so I didn’t insist and returned to Tatay Henry’s house to meet Carlos again.” (Journal, August 25, 2023)*

This decision, while small, was a crucial demonstration of respecting community norms and the hierarchical structures within the culture, such as seeking elders' approval.

In the local community, elders hold significant authority and are often consulted in community decisions. Their wisdom is sought in matters ranging from resource management to conflict resolution. This practice not only honors their experience but also reinforces their status within the community as leaders and advisors.

My curiosity about local traditions and history, such as my interest in the origin of the name "Sitio Target," further reflects my respect for the community's heritage. Learning from local leaders like Tatay Henry about their history not only builds trust but also enhances the community's sense of pride and ownership in our joint efforts.

*“He [Tatay Henry] explained why their place is called Sitio Target. He was born and raised there. When he was young, the area where the sitio is now was formerly a practice area for American soldiers doing target shooting. The sitio was close to Clark Air Base at that time. So, it was normal for them in their youth to hear gunshots. Whenever they heard that, they knew that the soldiers were training. After the American soldiers left, they moved to the area from a higher part of the mountain, and since then it has been called Sitio Target. Actually, I had heard of Sitio Target and seen it on Google Maps but never really thought about why it was named that. It's good that Kuya Henry shared this, and now I know the origin of their community's name and we are better prepared for tomorrow's sharing with our employees and executives.” (Journal, August 25, 2023)*

Each time I visit, I make it a point to check in on the elders and engage with leaders like Tatay Henry right upon arrival. This practice respects and acknowledges

the community's hierarchy and customs, which is essential for building and maintaining trust. Such gestures are vital in laying a strong foundation for our collaborative efforts.

*“Upon my arrival, I happened to see Kuya Henry in front of his house, and we first stopped by some elders to greet and check on them.” (Journal, September 22, 2023)*

The traditions of the local community in respecting elders are integral to their cultural identity and social structure. By honoring their elders, the local community not only preserves their heritage but also strengthens community bonds and ensures the continuity of their knowledge and practices. As external pressures threaten these traditions, it is essential for CSR practitioners to support initiatives that empower indigenous communities to maintain their cultural practices and respect for elders, thereby fostering resilience and sustainability in their way of life.

### **Recognizing literacy constraints**

During our project with the local community, I consciously adapted my communication practices to meet the language needs and preferences of community members. Recognizing literacy constraints, I shifted from using cue cards to conducting verbal sharing sessions. This flexibility was crucial for engaging effectively with the community and achieving meaningful outcomes.

*“I had thought about conducting the workshop using cue cards, but since they could neither read nor write, I decided it would be better to just have a conversation and let them tell stories. During this, they shared some changes.”*

**Using the local language.** By using language and communication methods that resonate with the local population, companies can ensure that all voices are heard, particularly those of marginalized groups. One of the communication approaches that I found effective is storytelling.

*“Many community members are more comfortable speaking in Tagalog and Kapampangan. During meetings, we also try to simplify some of the jargon and technical terms in conservation for them to understand.” (Journal, March 11, 2022)*

**Involving community members in the storytelling process.** Stories are integral to shaping and reinforcing community identity. By involving community members in the storytelling process, CSR practitioners can empower individuals to see themselves as vital parts of a larger narrative. Highlighting how community members contribute to CSR initiatives can foster unity and pride within the community, reinforcing their collective identity and encouraging ongoing participation.

*“I had thought about conducting the workshop using cue cards, but since they could not read nor write, I decided it would be better to just have a conversation and let them tell stories.” (Journal, December 8, 2023)*

Local communities possess rich knowledge derived from their long-term interactions with their environments. This knowledge can significantly enhance the understanding of ecological dynamics, particularly in areas where scientific data may be limited.

*“The changes they shared included the watershed becoming more vibrant. They remembered when parts of the watershed were covered with ashfall and lahar, killing many trees and damaging several water streams, rivers, and waterfalls. Now, after the watershed had a chance to recover during the pandemic lockdowns and continuous planting efforts, a large part of the watershed has turned green again.”*  
(Journal, December 8, 2023)

*“They noted that the streams and small waterfalls were beginning to flow again. The watershed is also a source of water for Angeles City, Clark, and neighboring towns such as Mabalacat and Bamban, Tarlac. Therefore, the more trees there are, the more water the watershed can produce. This is especially important as the water consumption and demand in Angeles City are increasing due to development and the growth of Clark.”* (Journal, December 8, 2023)

*“Another observation they made was the return of some animals they had not seen in the watershed for a long time, such as the wild boars, monitor lizards, snakes, and birds. Tatay Henry also mentioned that he had even seen an eagle and what they call ‘buot,’ a type of large rat found only in the mountains.”* (Journal, December 8, 2023)

*“I notice that the community members are excited to share stories of the past and even their experiences.” (Journal, December 8, 2023)*

***Bridging the language barrier.*** In meetings involving foreign company executives, I often took on the role of translating between Tatay Henry and the executives. By bridging the language barrier, I facilitated effective communication and mutual understanding, which are essential in multicultural settings. This effort not only built respect and appreciation among all project participants but also enhanced collaboration across different cultures.

*“As usual, Tatay Henry gave an introduction about the sitio, the watershed, and the trees we had planted. However, since we had foreigners with us, I translated Tatay Henry's remarks into English, and whenever our foreign colleagues had questions, I translated those into Tagalog for Tatay Henry to understand.” (September 22, 2023)*

### **Engaging the community in a long-term partnership**

After our employees had left the site, I often stayed behind to discuss with the community representatives about their future needs. This ongoing dialogue ensures that our relationship is sustained beyond single events and looks toward future collaboration.

*“I stayed behind for a moment to discuss some additional needs with the community reps. They also explained that for future plantings, especially during the rainy*

*season, they would need fuel for the grass cutter. The grass grows quickly in the areas where we were planting.”*

These interactions are crucial in building trust and support within the community. By actively seeking ways to involve and benefit community members and clearly communicating these opportunities, I am nurturing a relationship that extends beyond the immediate needs of the tree planting project. This fosters long-term trust and cooperation, which are vital for the sustainability of any community-led initiative.

***Visiting the community to personally connect.*** Despite challenges like the lack of cell phone signal, I made a concerted effort to maintain open lines of communication. This persistence is crucial for managing any long-term project in remote or under-resourced areas. I took the effort to visit them personally as there’s no phone signal in the area.

*“I couldn’t text or call them because they don’t have cellphones. There’s no signal in the area, so I really couldn’t contact them. I have the number of Tatay Henry’s daughter, but she never replied nor answered me. I remembered they mentioned that there are only a few spots in the sitio with signal, and they need to climb to a high part of the mountain to catch a signal. When the weather improved, I traveled to Sitio Target. It was a weekend, but since I live close to Sitio Target, I visited them.”*  
*(Journal, August 20, 2023)*

My CSR engagement with the local community is not just about conservation; it is also about cultural exchange, empowerment, mutual respect and giving a voice to the protection of the heritage.

***Immersing in the local community.*** I have taken the time to immerse myself in their rich traditions and customs, recognizing the invaluable ecological wisdom they have honed over generations. This indigenous knowledge is pivotal in our conservation efforts, providing sustainable practices that are both time-tested and in harmony with nature.

*“I really appreciate the efforts of Tatay Henry and the other community leaders in conserving the watershed. They put so much effort into monitoring the planting sites especially during the rainy season. They have strong ties to the watershed that’s why they told me they really value the partnership and they hope to continue the project for many more years to come.”*

Local community members possess invaluable ecological wisdom that has been developed over generations. This knowledge is crucial for sustainable conservation practices.

Some community members have a different view of development, which focuses more on building infrastructures and businesses within the watershed. But the partnership has provided a platform and space for environmental champions, like Tatay Henry, within the community to continue and sustain their advocacy, which is

to protect the watershed. The watershed that these passionate community members call “home.”

*“I feel like the partnership won’t be a success without the contributions and support of the community members who advocate for the watershed conservation. They wholeheartedly welcomed our team and treated us like family whenever we visited Sitio Target. Despite some challenges in their community, they continue to believe in the mission of the project.” (December 8, 2023)*

## **COMMUNICATION PRACTICES WHEN THE COMMUNITY IS IN CONFLICT**

Two communication practices constitute the CSR’s work when the community is in conflict: Recognizing differences in development perspectives and understanding local dynamics and politics

### **Recognizing differences in development perspectives**

Conflicts within communities pose significant challenges for CSR practitioners implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Conflict within communities can arise from various sources, including differing interests, values, and expectations among community members.

My discovery of underlying tensions between different groups within the Sitio Target community underlines the importance of understanding local dynamics and politics. My interaction with the group opposing Tatay Henry’s initiatives underscores

the need for careful navigation of community relations and highlights the complexities involved in managing community-led projects.

*“Their perspective differs, as they oppose the conservation project and prefer livelihood projects. A lawyer and businessman had approached them [another group] to build a resort in the area, which Tatay Henry’s group opposed because it is their ancestral domain and they have the title to it.” (Journal, February 17, 2022)*

*“They refuse to allow structures, especially a resort, as it would harm the environment and negate their conservation efforts. However, the other group sees it as a job opportunity and financial aid. Tatay Henry was quite concerned when he saw me speaking with them. Carlos reassured him that I was unaware of their dispute and likely just making conversation.” (Journal, February 17, 2022)*

### **Understanding local dynamics and politics**

Understanding local dynamics and politics is crucial in community projects. Interactions with groups opposing initiatives can shed light on different perspectives. The opposition to Tatay Henry's conservation project in favor of livelihood projects highlights conflicting priorities. Therefore, careful navigation in community relations is important to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.

*“I realized I need to be mindful and aware of such community issues. Luckily, I talked to the other group. They didn’t say anything bad about Tatay Henry, but they made me feel unwelcome. Carlos explained that this is typical of people who work with*

*Tatay Henry and our project's community representatives, especially those pushing for conservation. But I also told Carlos that it's difficult to mediate such conflicts because their reasons seem deeply rooted.” (Journal, February 17, 2022)*

Navigating local dynamics and dealing with community conflict are essential for the success of CSR initiatives. Understanding the socio-political context in which the local community members operate is crucial for fostering trust and collaboration.

## **UNDERLYING ISSUES AND ASSUMPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION PRACTICES**

The views and assumptions that emerged from my study of communication practices provide valuable insights into the underlying dynamics and patterns within these interactions. These views and assumptions helped me have a deeper understanding of the perspectives and beliefs that shape my communication practices in engaging the local community. The views and assumptions include:

- Community leadership is an essential component of community engagement for CSR work
- Community engagement for CSR work is a partnership
- Quality of community engagement for CSR work is dependent on shared knowledge
- Language plays an important role in community engagement for CSR work
- Partnership in community engagement for CSR is to be sustained
- Understanding local culture builds cultural sensitivity

## **Community leadership is an essential component of community engagement for CSR work**

Effective community leadership is foundational to CSR initiatives, particularly in environmental conservation. Leaders serve as catalysts for mobilizing community efforts, fostering collaboration, and inspiring collective action. They help to articulate the community's needs, aspirations, and concerns, ensuring that CSR initiatives are relevant and impactful.

My study highlights that strong leadership not only enhances the visibility of conservation efforts but also builds trust within the community. Leaders can effectively communicate the CSR objectives, thereby encouraging community members to participate actively in the activities.

*“Tatay Henry is a great example of a community leader. He has been a community leader for more than a decade and the community members respect him. He is also known as an environmental champion within the community and people listen to him when he is discussing things about our project.” (Journal, September 22, 2023)*

Leaders set the tone for ethical behavior and social responsibility, encouraging their teams to embrace these values. When leaders demonstrate a commitment to the CSR project, it inspires others to follow suit, creating a ripple effect that amplifies the impact of the project. This aligns with the notion that

leadership is instrumental in shaping community norms and values around environmental stewardship.

### **Community Engagement for CSR work is a partnership**

The success of CSR initiatives in watershed conservation relies heavily on partnerships among various stakeholders, particularly with the community members. My research emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts, as these partnerships leverage diverse resources, expertise, and perspectives.

In my study, the local community members possess invaluable knowledge about their environment, including historical practices, local flora and fauna, and traditional ecological knowledge. On the other hand, the CSR practitioner often has experience in mobilizing community action and implementing conservation projects.

Engaging local stakeholders in the decision-making process fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, which is crucial for the sustainability of conservation efforts. When community members are involved in shaping conservation initiatives, they develop a sense of ownership over the outcomes. This ownership fosters accountability, as community members are more likely to invest time and effort into initiatives they helped create.

*“The community members are more likely to continue the project and adhering to the practices and standards set by the project because they are involved in creating those practices.” (December 8, 2023)*

Through partnerships, organizations can create a more significant impact by pooling resources and knowledge, ultimately leading to more effective conservation strategies. By collaborating, stakeholders can share financial resources, technical expertise, and human capital, enabling them to tackle larger projects that would be challenging for any single entity to undertake alone.

### **Quality of Community Engagement for CSR work is dependent on shared knowledge**

Shared knowledge among stakeholders is crucial for improving the quality and effectiveness of community engagement for CSR initiatives. In the realm of watershed conservation, a comprehensive understanding of local environmental issues is essential.

According to the study, sharing of information and best practices between community members and the CSR practitioners leads to a better understanding of watershed problems and their conservation approaches.

*“The local community members have been living in the watershed for decades and they have developed unique practices that work for them and the environment, which also contributes to our strategies” (Journal, March 11, 2022)*

The local populations are also aware of changes in certain aspects of the environment, for example, they are able to perceive lowering water bodies' quality or changes in populations of specific animal species. The integration of such practical

knowledge along with scientific studies either be it conducted by CSR's practitioners, other technical specialists or those in higher learning institutions gives a better perspective on the well-being of the watershed. With this enhanced understanding, stakeholders are able to determine key target areas of concern and formulate helpful interventions.

Community forums, training, and educational activities can equip members of a community with knowledge to enable them to make informed decisions with respect to the conservation practices. Thus, it brings together a community of practice essential for addressing evolving challenges of watershed management.

### **Language plays an important role in community engagement CSR work**

Language plays a crucial role in CSR work, particularly in how organizations communicate their initiatives and engage with local communities.

*"I've realized effective communication is not just about transmitting information. It is about ensuring that messages are understood and resonate with the community." (From my reflexivity diary)*

My research reveals that the use of clear, accessible language significantly affects community engagement levels. When communication is tailored to the audience's understanding, it ensures that messages about watershed conservation become more understandable. This is especially relevant with watershed protection

because the use of technical terms may prevent community members from engaging, especially those who do not have a background in the field.

Effective CSR communication requires tailoring messages to the audience's understanding and cultural context. This involves simplifying language and using examples and references that reflect the community's experiences and values. When organizations engage in culturally relevant communication, they are capable of involving the people and motivating them to support conservation initiatives.

It is important to understand that the communication in CSR campaigns is not only sending a message but building relationships. Providing a two-way dialogue encourages the community to share their opinions so that the organization can make their voices heard.

### **Partnership in CSR is to be sustained**

Sustaining partnerships in CSR work is essential for ensuring the long-term success and impact of conservation initiatives.

*“While initial collaboration may yield positive results, the true measure of success lies in the ability to maintain and strengthen these partnerships over time.”*

*(Journal, December 8, 2023)*

*“Ongoing engagement and communication with our community partners are necessary to maintain momentum and adapt to changing environmental conditions.”*

*Through these regular conversations, I get to know the issues and challenges that arise during the implementation, such as pests, typhoons, community priorities, and more.” (December 8, 2023)*

Regular follow-ups, feedback mechanisms, and shared goals help reinforce the commitment of all stakeholders. By nurturing these relationships, organizations can ensure that conservation efforts remain relevant and impactful, ultimately leading to sustained community involvement.

Shared goals are fundamental to sustaining partnerships in CSR work. When all stakeholders are aligned around common objectives, it creates a sense of purpose and direction that drives collective action. Establishing clear, measurable goals ensures that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities within the partnership.

### **Understanding local culture builds cultural sensitivity**

Cultural sensitivity is paramount in designing effective communication strategies for CSR initiatives. My study highlights that when CSR practitioners take the time to learn about the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of a community, they can tailor their messages and initiatives accordingly.

“My experience in the community has taught me the community’s norms and political dynamics which made me become more sensitive and mindful of the way I communicate with the community members.”

Adapting messages and activities to the culture of the people encourages understanding and receptiveness towards conservation activities. The involvement of the people's leaders or influencers would also help in overcoming cultural barriers as communication would not only be informative but also considerate of the customs and practices of the society. This social integration is critical in ensuring ownership of and devotion to the conservation initiatives in the local community.

## **Discussions**

### **Community leadership in engaging community for CSR**

Community leaders are essential when it comes to the interface between companies and communities. As stated by Boehm (2003), these leaders are the ones who properly recognize the problems in the community and liaise with the rest of the community. This is critical for ensuring that CSR activities are tailored to satisfy the particular requirements of the area in question.

The community leaders possess established relationships within the community and this ensures that there is dialogue and trust. Lindgreen et al. (2009) assert that productive discussions with stakeholders offer the organization an opportunity to appreciate the concerns and needs of the community. This is important in embedding the business in the community as the target CSR objectives will be met and people will feel ownership towards the endeavors.

Collaborating with respected local figures signals a commitment to genuine engagement and social responsibility.

Lindgreen et al. (2009) stressed that the necessary trust in the community is built through transparency and collaboration which are interrelated with the community leaders who serve as the facilitators of these processes.

The idea behind sharing roles and responsibilities brings out the idea that CSR is a team effort. The division and sharing of roles and responsibilities in the undertaking of CSR activities makes it even more sustainable. When communities participate in all phases of a project, planning, implementation, evaluation, and all processes involved actively, they become more responsible towards it and feel the urge to defend the project (Prajapati, 2023).

Shared roles and responsibilities also enable businesses to tailor their CSR initiatives to align with local priorities and cultural values.

The stakeholders understand the issues and possibilities that exist in their locality. Therefore, working together with local communities, businesses can utilize the existing local knowledge to make sure that their CSR activities are effective and appropriate (Susanto et al., 2021).

By working together towards common goals, both parties develop a better understanding of each other's needs, capabilities, and constraints. This mutual

understanding fosters trust, respect, and a willingness to engage in future collaborations (Boehm, 2003).

### **Integrating the local community's wisdom and sharing of knowledge**

The incorporation of indigenous wisdom and expertise of the local community is crucial for the successful implementation of CSR projects. Local wisdom guides local people in fulfilling their needs, facing life's problems, and improving their quality of life (Rosilawati et al., 2019).

Indigenous communities possess deep insights into their cultural, social, and environmental contexts, which can guide businesses in developing relevant and impactful initiatives (Schneider et al., 2012).

This alignment not only enhances the effectiveness of CSR projects but also demonstrates respect for local knowledge and traditions.

CSR initiatives that incorporate traditional ecological knowledge tend to be more successful. Local wisdom can guide sustainable practices that align with the community's cultural values and environmental needs. CSR activities that consider local wisdom lead to better community empowerment and environmental outcomes (Susanto et al., 2022).

Local wisdom not only reflects knowledge gained from direct experience, but also describes how local communities implement it in real terms to protect the

environment, maintain culture, and live their daily lives sustainably (Antweiler, 1998; Firdaus et al., 2023; Mazzocchi, 2006).

Local wisdom can include knowledge about sustainable ways of managing natural resources, understanding the dynamics of local ecosystems, and strategies for overcoming specific environmental challenges (Abas et al., 2022; Aminpour et al., 2021; Head, 2022).

Local observations and experiences serve as essential indicators of community needs and environmental changes.

Cultural consciousness is an integral part in achieving real community participation in the execution of CSR programs. When practitioners of CSR seek to appreciate the cultural dimensions, and values or traditions of the society, they are able to come up with projects that would be meaningful to the community members.

According to Prajapati (2023), effective CSR initiatives must prioritize the needs and aspirations of the community, which can only be achieved through a thorough understanding of local culture. Engaging with the community in a culturally sensitive manner not only enhances participation but also builds trust and goodwill, essential for the success of CSR projects.

Active listening and inquiring about local traditions goes a long way in building respect with local communities for CSR practitioners which enhances relations. They

find it gratifying that you are interested in their narratives and appreciate their local customs.

Jangra (2024) stressed the importance of observing nonverbal cues like body language, facial expressions and gestures. These can differ from culture to culture and have different implications. Knowledge of these cues can help CSR practitioners in comprehending and reading the messages accurately.

Cultural differences should be considered in a more open and respectful manner. Stereotypes should not be used to generalize or judge a specific culture. Rather, it is essential to comprehend and respect their ways of doing things (Jangra, 2024).

In communities with indigenous ethnic groups, Tebtebba Foundation (2008) in its report mentions that within the framework of the Aeta tribe, all traditional authorities are represented by the elders' council. In such an indigenous political system, Aetas respected for their experience and understanding are appointed as a power-wielding class. A tribal elder's council in conjunction with a tribal council acts as mediators in inter-tribal disputes, and offers spiritual and cultural guidance.

According to a study by Davies et al. (2020), companies that demonstrate cultural competence in their CSR efforts are better positioned to foster positive relationships with local stakeholders.

According to various studies, the incorporation of local knowledge into CSR practices leads to better sustainability performance. Local knowledge systems are more likely to incorporate such practices as sustainable agricultural practices, traditional ecological knowledge and cultural ceremonies that encourage caring for the environment (Menkshi et al., 2021; Mladenović, 2023).

### **Recognizing literacy constraints and the role of language in CSR**

Adapting communication methods to literacy levels helps to promote inclusivity and ensure that no community members are left behind. The UNHCR (2023) highlighted the importance of considering under-represented groups and their specific communication needs.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) added that by using a range of communication methods, such as visual aids, audio recordings, and simplified written materials, businesses can reach out to community members with low literacy skills or those who prefer alternative communication formats.

This inclusive approach demonstrates a commitment to equity and ensures that everyone has access to information about CSR initiatives, regardless of their literacy proficiency.

Effective communication is crucial to manage relationships with stakeholders, address environmental and social challenges, and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements (Madumere, 2021, Okeke, 2021, Shah, et. al., 2022).

When companies adapt their communication styles to reflect the cultural norms and values of the community, they demonstrate respect and understanding. This approach can lead to increased openness and willingness from community members to engage with the CSR initiatives (FasterCapital).

In their study, Emeka-Okoli et al. argue that companies (broadly CSR practitioners) that practice clear communication with different stakeholders in the form of focus dialogues, and use collaborative storytelling strategies are able to build trust, improve their image and generate a positive social and environmental impact.

Storytelling is an essential method for community members to share the CSR projects' impact, providing a platform for authentic narratives that can influence perceptions, facilitate engagement, and drive action.

In CSR communication, storytelling is a powerful tool, as it can inspire and connect with stakeholders on an emotional level (Emeka-Okoli et. al. 2024). Storytelling serves as a powerful tool for knowledge sharing among community members and stakeholders involved in CSR projects.

As highlighted by Investis (2023), effective CSR storytelling can create a compelling audience experience that not only informs but also engages. Community members can educate others about the challenges and successes of CSR initiatives by sharing their experiences and insights. This sharing of knowledge can lead to improved practices and strategies for future projects.

One of the key benefits of storytelling in CSR is its ability to build emotional connections between businesses and the communities they serve. As noted by PRNEWS (2023), personalized storytelling helps to humanize CSR efforts, allowing community members to see the real-life impact of these initiatives.

**Sustainability and long-term community partnership.** Partnering with local communities is essential for effective community development. The principle of equal decision-making emphasizes the importance of involving the community in the CSR process.

Emeka-Okoli, et al. (2024) emphasized that effective CSR communication goes beyond one-way information sharing; it involves engaging the stakeholders including communities in meaningful dialogue. This allows companies to understand stakeholder perspectives and identify areas for improvement.

This approach not only enhances transparency but also builds trust, as the community members feel their voices are heard and valued. Chanza & Musakwa (2022) highlighted that locals have a keen interest to closely observe changes occurring in their environment, including finer accounts of experiences with climatic events, owing to their predominantly climate-sensitive livelihoods.

Local observations can provide critical insights into climate change impacts, filling gaps in scientific research and informing adaptive strategies (Chanza & Musakwa, 2022).

This participatory approach aligns with principles of community-based conservation, where local insights are integral to developing effective and culturally relevant strategies for environmental stewardship (Reyes-Garcia et al. 2019).

### **Recognizing differences and understanding local dynamics**

Effective conflict resolution mechanisms are essential for navigating community disputes. Cedillo (2013) proposes a model for company-based grievance mechanisms that includes negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

This model is grounded in the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which advocate for non-judicial remedies to address grievances. The implementation of structured grievance procedures allows companies to engage with affected communities constructively, fostering trust and collaboration.

Günther et al. (2022) explore the relationship between CSR and local conflicts, particularly in African mining communities. They propose a conceptual framework that illustrates how CSR can both mitigate and exacerbate conflicts.

The authors emphasized that understanding local dynamics, including historical grievances and socio-economic conditions, is crucial for designing effective CSR strategies. Companies that fail to consider these factors may inadvertently deepen existing tensions, leading to resistance and conflict.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a critical framework for businesses to engage with local communities, particularly in the realms of cultural preservation and environmental conservation.

By fostering partnerships with local communities, companies can create CSR programs that not only protect the environment but also celebrate and sustain local cultures.

CSR is not a one-time effort; it requires sustained commitment from companies to maintain partnerships with local communities. Long-term engagement allows companies to adapt their strategies based on community feedback and changing needs, ensuring that CSR initiatives remain relevant and impactful (Mladenović, 2023; Guzzo et al., 2020).

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

In this study, I explored my communication practices as a CSR practitioner in engaging the local community for watershed conservation. The success of this project hinges on active partnerships with local communities.

#### **Communication practices during project implementation:**

##### **Engaging and empowering community leaders**

- Sharing roles and responsibilities with the community
- Letting the local community lead the completion of the project
- Including local voices in decision-making
- Inviting community leaders to educate employees and stakeholders

##### **Integrating the local community's wisdom and traditions**

- Being mindful of local customs and traditions
- Respecting hierarchical structure

##### **Recognizing literacy constraints**

- Using the local language
- Involving community members in the storytelling process
- Bridging the language barrier

### **Engaging the community in a long-term partnership**

- Encouraging community members to reflect on experiences and changes observed
- Visiting the community to personally connect
- Immersing in the local community

### **Communication practices when the community is in conflict:**

**Recognizing differences in development perspectives**

**Understanding local dynamics and politics**

### **Underlying views and assumptions on these communication practices:**

- Community leadership is an essential component of community engagement for CSR work
- Community engagement for CSR work is a partnership
- Quality of community engagement for CSR work is dependent on shared knowledge
- Language plays an important role in community engagement for CSR work
- Partnership in community engagement for CSR work is to be sustained
- Understanding local culture builds cultural sensitivity

Collaborative efforts, such as dividing tasks between the CSR practitioner and the community, have proven effective in fostering enthusiasm, cooperation, and a sense of shared ownership over the project.

Every community has its own political, cultural or sociological context. In the case of Sitio Target, the differences in their views on development and conservation also became a challenging factor to ensure acceptance from the entire community. Considering indigenous wisdom, cultural sensitivity and various perspectives from community members are important aspects of implementing the project.

It is critically important to build trust, build mutual respect, and empower community members by understanding and respecting their cultural beliefs and community dynamics, which I found to be essential for successful community engagement.

A central theme of my thesis is the role of CSR practitioners like myself as crucial intermediaries who connect corporate objectives with community needs. My strategic communication ensures that conservation projects not only meet corporate sustainability goals but also enhance the welfare of the local community and emphasize their important role in implementing a CSR project. This alignment is pivotal in fostering a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship between corporations and community stakeholders.

Using autoethnography as my research method has allowed for an in-depth reflection on my experiences, thoughts, and emotions throughout the engagement process. This approach added a personal, introspective dimension to my study, shedding light on how such engagements affect both the communities involved and the practitioners. The transformative nature of autoethnography was instrumental in

uncovering deeper insights that might not have been apparent through other research methodologies.

## **Conclusion**

My study gives great importance to the contribution of CSR practitioners towards various environmental protection initiatives. Also, self-narrative employs autoethnographic methodology as a creative research tool, which helped to expand knowledge about CSR in practice and revealed the significance of such activities personally and professionally.

CSR practitioners are referred to play the role of “bridges” in enabling relations between corporations and the local communities. Our concern for the environment allows us to align business objectives with sustainable development concerns.

Because of being close to other stakeholders, CSR practitioners can activate, establish, and sustain effective interaction and cooperation among the parties even where cultural and other contextual differences exist.

The autoethnographic approach allows for the combination of real life and theory, allowing for a more comprehensive view of CSR. The application of autoethnography based research helps the researchers to bring out the things that may be overlooked by the conventional research methodologies, hence complementing the understanding of community engagement and its consequences.

Additionally, my work contributes to the broader discourse on CSR by suggesting that the success of corporate participation in conservation projects relies significantly on the interpersonal skills and cultural competencies of the CSR practitioners involved. The personal reflections I captured through autoethnography unveil layers of interaction and impact that traditional research methods might overlook, presenting a strong case for its use in social and environmental research.

In conclusion, my study focuses on the complexities of community engagement in conservation efforts and also highlights the transformative potential of reflective practice in enhancing professional development and shaping CSR communication practices.

## **Recommendations**

The research results and discussions provide valuable insights into effective community engagement, CSR communication practices, and the importance of cultural sensitivity, highlighting the need for tailored recommendations that can enhance the impact of CSR initiatives in local communities.

## **Theoretical Recommendations**

1. **Community-Centric Models:** Emphasize the importance of community-led initiatives in CSR projects. By prioritizing the needs and requirements of local communities, projects can be tailored to address specific challenges and opportunities. This ensures that initiatives are not only relevant but also more

likely to succeed due to community buy-in and support. This approach aligns with theories of participatory development, which advocate for empowering communities to enhance the relevance and sustainability of initiatives.

2. **Communication Theory:** Explore communication models that highlight the role of intermediaries, such as community leaders, in facilitating dialogue between corporations and communities. This can include theories on horizontal communication and the significance of building trust through consistent engagement. The top three theoretical frameworks adopted most often in CSR communication are stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, and attribution theory (T. Lee, 2017).

3. **Cultural Sensitivity Frameworks:** Integrate frameworks that stress the importance of cultural respect and understanding in CSR initiatives. Theoretical perspectives on local knowledge can be beneficial in framing the role of local wisdom in project design and implementation.

CSR initiatives must resonate with the cultural values and norms of the communities they aim to serve. Understanding local customs, beliefs, and priorities ensures that projects are relevant and accepted by community members.

Culturally sensitive approaches facilitate more effective stakeholder engagement. By recognizing and respecting cultural differences in communication styles and social structures, CSR practitioners can foster

meaningful dialogue with community members and leaders. Cultural sensitivity extends to ethical considerations, where CSR initiatives must align with local ethical norms and respect cultural heritage and traditions.

## **Methodological Recommendations**

1. **Autoethnographic Approach:** Utilize autoethnography as a primary method to reflect on personal experiences and communication practices within the CSR context. This qualitative research framework and method can provide deeper insights into the dynamics of community engagement and the practitioner's role.

As an active participant in CSR initiatives, the researcher has access to unique insights and experiences that may not be readily available to external observers. Autoethnography allows CSR practitioners to share their first-hand accounts of the challenges, successes, and lessons learned during the implementation process.

The autoethnographic approach encourages researchers to engage in reflexivity, which involves critically examining their own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. By acknowledging their role in shaping the research process and outcomes, CSR practitioners can enhance the credibility and transparency of their findings.

Autoethnographic research can help bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing practical insights and recommendations that are grounded in real-world experiences. This can inform the development of more effective and relevant CSR frameworks.

By sharing personal stories and emotions, autoethnographic accounts can evoke empathy and emotional engagement from readers. This can help raise awareness about the challenges and successes of CSR initiatives and inspire others to engage in similar efforts.

**Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Implement PAR methodologies to involve community members actively in the research process. Unlike traditional research methods, which often position researchers as external observers, PAR promotes a partnership between researchers and participants, allowing for the co-creation of knowledge and building a sense of ownership among community stakeholders.

Participatory action research is an approach to research that prioritizes the value of experiential knowledge for tackling problems caused by unequal and harmful social systems, and for envisioning and implementing alternatives. PAR involves the participation and leadership of those people experiencing issues, who take action to produce emancipatory social change, through conducting systematic research to generate new knowledge (Cornish, F. et al., 2023).

In PAR, knowledge is not merely extracted from participants but co-created. Community members contribute their lived experiences, insights, and expertise, which enrich the research findings and make them more relevant to local contexts.

2. **Mixed-Methods Research:** For future studies on CSR communication approaches, combine qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the impact of CSR initiatives comprehensively.

Qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and open-ended surveys, provide in-depth insights into participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. They allow researchers to explore the complexities of human behavior and the meanings individuals attach to their experiences.

Quantitative methods involve the collection and analysis of numerical data, often through structured surveys or experiments. Quantitative research can measure variables, identify patterns, and quantify relationships, providing statistical evidence of trends and impacts.

By combining qualitative and quantitative data, researchers can triangulate findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the results. For instance, if survey data indicates high levels of community satisfaction, qualitative interviews can help explain why community members feel that way, uncovering the underlying factors contributing to their perceptions.

## Practical Recommendations

1. **Establish Clear Communication Channels:** Develop a structured communication strategy that includes regular meetings with community representatives. This will ensure that community voices are heard and integrated into project planning and execution.
2. **Empower Local Leaders:** Actively involve community leaders in decision-making processes. Their insights are invaluable for identifying local needs and priorities, which can enhance project relevance and acceptance. They also bridge the CSR practitioner and the rest of the community members.
3. **Enhance Community Engagement.** Continuously involve community leaders and members in all stages of CSR projects, particularly in the implementation phase, to ensure relevance and foster a sense of ownership.
4. **Respect and Integrate Indigenous Knowledge:** Acknowledge and incorporate local wisdom and traditions into project planning and implementation. Provide platforms for community elders and leaders to share their knowledge, thus validating their contributions and fostering empowerment.
5. **Adapt to Local Contexts:** Customize communication and engagement strategies to fit the literacy levels and cultural contexts of the community. For example, using storytelling instead of written materials can be more effective

in engaging community members. Train CSR teams on cultural sensitivity to ensure respectful and effective interactions with local communities.

6. **Foster Long-Term Relationships:** Focus on building sustained partnerships with the community beyond single projects. Regular follow-ups and discussions about future needs can help maintain trust and cooperation.
  
7. **Respect Cultural Norms:** Prioritize cultural sensitivity by actively listening to community members and respecting their traditions. This can include seeking permission from elders before taking photographs or making decisions that affect the community.
  
8. **Navigate community conflicts:** Develop conflict resolution strategies that recognize and respect differing community perspectives. Engaging in dialogue with opposing groups can help uncover underlying tensions and facilitate collaborative solutions.

By implementing these recommendations, CSR projects can achieve greater sustainability, foster deeper community ties, and ensure meaningful contributions to both environmental conservation and community development.

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