



A communication framework for Chapter 9  
institutions to contribute to relationship building  
with civil society organisations towards mutual  
empowerment

**Jack Malatji**

 **orcid.org/0009-0008-2434-4445**

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Promoter: Dr EM Kloppers

Co-promoter: Prof L Bezuidenhout

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## **ABSTRACT**

Chapter 9 institutions (CH9s) refer to a group of organisations established and mandated in terms of Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution. A country founded on the principle of constitutional democracy has established CH9s to safeguard its constitution, democracy, and citizens. While CH9s are mandated to protect democracy, research reveals persistent challenges in reaching and empowering citizens, particularly due to a lack of relationships with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

The relationship between the CH9s and CSOs is fundamental to the development of democracy and collective decision-making towards empowerment, and it requires engagement and effective communication. To this end, this study proposes a communication framework for South Africa's CH9s to strengthen their relationships with CSOs towards mutual empowerment, thereby enabling both organisations to better fulfil their mandates.

The study draws on two meta-theoretical traditions to provide a comprehensive approach to communication. Firstly, the cybernetic tradition provides an understanding of interdependence and balance between systems to achieve equilibrium through the management of communication and systems through which this communication takes place. Secondly, the critical tradition emphasises a need to critically analyse dialogue, power, and development communication towards social change. From a cybernetic tradition, the study used the two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management theory towards long-term, positive and mutually beneficial relationships, while using the participatory approach within the critical tradition to facilitate mutual empowerment. Constructs from the above-mentioned theoretical perspectives were integrated to conceptualise a theoretical framework, which was then presented to selected CH9 and CSO employees for input to construct a conceptual framework that facilitates mutually beneficial, empowering partnerships.

A qualitative methodology combining a large literature review and semi-structured interviews informed by a theoretical framework was used. The study involved CH9 communication experts representing three CH9 institutions: the South African Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector and the Commission for Gender Equality, as

well as the directors of nine CSOs active in the fields of human rights, gender equality and justice, which collectively strive to protect the constitution, the public, democracy, and state resources. Thematic analysis of the data collected from the interviews revealed convergent and divergent views on communication practices, barriers to relations and cooperation opportunities. The findings show that both the CH9 and CSO recognise the need for partnership, but that current structured communication mechanisms are lacking to allow trust, transparency, and mutual empowerment. The participants agreed with and supported the proposed conceptual framework, which culminated in the final communication framework. The final framework presented in this study reflects both theoretical insights and practitioners' input and offers a guide to building long-term, positive and mutually beneficial relations toward mutual empowerment.

The study contributes to scholarship by integrating concepts and constructs from both corporate and development communication into a framework for building mutually beneficial relationships through critical dialogue towards mutual empowerment. The essence of the framework is a dialogical process guided by transparency, collaboration, participation, affirmed mutuality, and cultural diversity, resulting in transformative change, solidarity, and mutual understanding towards the mutual empowerment of both the CH9s and the CSOs. This framework also provides a practical contribution that can be adopted not only by CH9s and CSOs but also by other institutions seeking mutually empowering partnerships. Ultimately, the research positions communication as a transformative tool for improving the relationship between CH9s and CSOs in South Africa towards the fulfilment of their mandates.

**Keywords:** Chapter 9 Institutions (CH9s); Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); corporate communication; communication framework; communication guidelines; critical dialogue; critical tradition; cybernetic tradition; development communication; mutual empowerment; relationship outcomes; South Africa; synergistic relationships.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abahlali Base Mjondolo – ABM

Albinism Society of South Africa – ASSA

Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee – BaSSREC

Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation – CSVR

Chapter 9 institutions – CH9s

Civil Society Organisations – CSOs

Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities – CRL

Commission for Gender Equality – CGE

Community-based organisations – CBOs

Faith-based organisations – FBOs

Foundation for Human Rights – FHR

Human Sciences Research Council – HSRC

Ebsco Discovery Services – EDS

Lawyers for Human Rights – LHR

North-West University – NWU

Non-governmental organisations – NGOs

Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation – TRREE

Institute for Democracy in South Africa – IDASA

Treatment Action Campaign – TAC

Public Protector – PP

South African Council of Churches – SACC

South African Human Rights Commission – SAHRC

Sonke Gender Justice – SGJ

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# **CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT, PROBLEM STATEMENT, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

## **1.1 Introduction**

To provide a comprehensive communication framework to strengthen the relationship between Chapter 9 institutions (CH9s), as stipulated in the South African Constitution, and South African civil society organisations (CSOs) towards mutual empowerment, this study provides a detailed background that leads to the research problem, which in turn informs the meta-theoretical traditions, theoretical perspectives, and methodology. To this end, Chapter 1 introduces the research, formulates the problem statement, and outlines the research questions before providing an overview of the relevant meta-theoretical traditions, theoretical perspectives, and research design.

## **1.2 Background**

The South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996 outlines the CH9 institutions as institutions of the state to help strengthen constitutional democracy as opposed to parliamentary democracy, as is the case in other countries (Public Participation Framework, 2013:9). CH9s refer to a group of organisations established and mandated in terms of Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996:125). Their primary role is to support and strengthen the South African constitutional democracy by holding the state accountable for its actions (Murray, 2006:122). These institutions are the Public Protector (PP) (or, in international jargon, ombudsman), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (the CRL Commission), the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), the Auditor-General, and the Electoral Commission. Although they report to the National Assembly, these institutions are expected to be independent and impartial and must exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; Govender, 2007; Murray, 2006; De Vos, 2012; HSRC, 2007; 2016; Konstant, 2016).

The CH9s have been described as ‘watchdogs’ that protect the rights of citizens by holding the government accountable. South African citizens are the main stakeholders of

CH9 institutions, since these institutions primarily exist to protect their rights by acting as intermediaries between the citizens and the government of the Republic of South Africa (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007:12; De Vos, 2012:45-46; Murray, 2006:80). Some scholarship continues to underline that CH9s occupy a distinctive constitutional position as independent bodies intended to deepen accountability, constitutionalism and democratic oversight in South Africa (Nyane, 2021:14; Tushnet, 2019:22; Taruvinga, 2025:8). Their role is therefore not only investigatory and administrative, but also communicative, because their constitutional effectiveness depends in part on whether citizens understand their mandate and can access their services. In this sense, CH9s remain especially important in a democracy marked by persistent inequality, uneven state capacity and limited public knowledge of rights and remedies. CH9's role is primarily communicative, investigatory, and administrative. This implies that they should communicate their mandate to the citizens and be independent and impartial in their investigation of government affairs on behalf of citizens to protect and promote the rights of vulnerable citizens (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007:12; De Vos, 2012:45-46; Murray, 2006:80). CH9s are needed in a young South African democracy, where many citizens may not be aware of their rights or the services these institutions offer.

Since the mandates, roles, functions, and services of the CH9s are very diverse, all CH9s do not share the same objectives. Three CH9s whose mandates are similar and who are closely linked in their objectives are the SAHRC, the PP, and the CGE. The SAHRC's role is to promote respect and protect and fulfil the human rights of the citizen as set out in the Constitution; the PP's primary role is administrative justice in the dealings of government and its institutions, and the CGE's primary role is the attainment of gender equality. Thus, their shared mandate is to promote and protect the rights of citizens (CGE, 2018:18; PP, 2018:20; SAHRC, 2019:7; Govender & Swanepoel, 2020:15). Since these three institutions have similar mandates, they also share similar communications objectives which focus on making citizens aware of their rights, making citizens aware of the services provided by these organisations, and assisting citizens who lodge complaints to these institutions. However, the literature continues to suggest that the public-facing effectiveness of these institutions depends heavily on visibility, accessibility and understandable communication, especially for marginalised communities (Nyane, 2021:14; Taruvinga, 2025:8). These three CH9 institutions are however often criticised for their lack of clear, understandable, and accessible communication with ordinary

citizens (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006).

In addition, a survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (Muller *et al.*, 2018:2) showed that citizens remain generally unaware of the existence of these CH9s, and are poorly educated on their purpose, powers, and functions. The study showed that more than 60% of the public have either not heard of these institutions or have heard of them but does not know what their purposes are (Muller *et al.*, 2018:2). The report and other literature also indicate that citizens do not know where these institutions are situated or how to access them (Muller *et al.*, 2018:2). More recent analysis confirms this pattern, showing that CH9 awareness is shaped by structural factors such as education, income, age, race, gender, political discussion, and location, which means that unequal awareness may reproduce broader social inequalities in access to democratic oversight mechanisms (Nyagweta, 2024:14). These findings are significant because low levels of institutional awareness weaken visibility, legitimacy and public uptake, thereby limiting the capacity of these institutions to perform their constitutional role effectively.

One of the factors that has been identified as contributing to the communication challenges faced by CH9s is a lack of relationships with CSOs (CGE, 2018; PP, 2018; SAHRC, 2019). According to the HSRC (2007, 2016), a functional relationship between CH9s and CSOs is crucial in fulfilling CH9's role. CSOs constitute a valuable network for CH9s to access citizens and communities, particularly at a local level or in rural communities where the CH9 institutions have a relatively poor presence. CSOs are also often the first port of call for distressed citizens or groups in need of redress (HSRC, 2007, 2016).

It is suggested that CH9s can support their mandate through a partnership with CSOs. The HSRC (2016:2) report recommends that CH9s with limited institutional reach or insufficient capacity, resulting in communication challenges, can compensate for this by using CSOs to reach out to as wide an audience as possible. The report further suggests that the disconnection between CH9s and citizens may be bridged by means of a more structured, continuous relationship with CSOs, which are spread out all over South Africa, and which possess a wealth of knowledge that the CH9s can tap into (Ad Hoc Committee,

2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; HSRC, 2007, 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006). Relationships with CSOs may help CH9 institutions to identify issues that they may not be aware of, and devise ways of addressing them. The idea is to utilise the resources and knowledge that reside within the CSOs to assist the CH9s in fulfilling their mandates (HSRC, 2007, 2016). Similarly, CSOs also stand to gain a lot from functional relationships with CH9s, since they share the objective of empowering citizens, which can be improved by mutual cooperation.

In the classical literature on relationships, the ideal relationship outcomes include control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3). In this study, it is, however, argued that the relationship between the CH9s and the CSOs should move beyond traditional relationship management to also include mutual empowerment of CH9s and CSOs, which should better equip both institutions to better fulfil their shared mandates of empowering citizens. Finfgeld (2004:44) cites Paulo Freire's theory on consciousness raising among underprivileged groups as an inspiration for the concept of empowerment. Interpersonal processes involving the interaction of basic knowledge patterns can lead to mutual empowerment. According to Finfgeld (2004:44-55), such interactions are defined by the following: collaborative decision-making, power sharing, empathy, and mutual respect. Falk-Rafael (2021:16) indicates that behaviour, interpersonal dynamics, and sense of self undergo transformation as a result of empowerment. The mandate and the role of CH9s and CSOs are to empower the citizens in order for them to access their services. Citizens can only access these services if they are fully empowered with the knowledge about these organisations' roles. Both organisations cannot fulfil this mandate on their own without empowering each other. They need to empower each other through a relationship that will lead to mutual empowerment to fulfil their shared mandate. On the one hand, CH9s should be empowered to understand the needs and expectations of CSOs and citizens and understand how to adapt the services they offer to address these needs to lead to social change to empower citizens (HSRC, 2007:2, 2016:5; Konstant, 2016:6). On the other hand, CSOs should be empowered through a better understanding of the services of CH9s, how to make use of these services, how utilising these services contributes to social change, and how to adapt their own services to best complement the work of CH9s (Konstant, 2016:6; Murray, 2006:80). Both CH9s and CSOs should be open to adapting

their services and approaches based on the communication between them in order for them to become empowered.

To achieve the relationship outcomes of control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and mutual empowerment, a mutually beneficial relationship should be established between CH9s and CSOs through appropriate and effective communication channels (see Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). There are specific relationship-building strategies identified in the theory that can be followed to contribute to reaching these outcomes that will be considered in this study (see Hon & Grunig, 1999:8). Based on the stakeholder relationship management theory, it is imperative for CH9s and CSOs to establish a mutually beneficial relationship through interactive communication (see Hon & Grunig, 1999:8; Ledingham, 2003:181-198). The importance of managing stakeholder relationships is further highlighted in the King IV Report, which states that for an organisation to create value for itself, it depends on the ability to create value for others (King IV, 2016:19; Rensburg & De Beer, 2011:208). In this regard, CH9s institutions should aim to create value for CSOs while creating value for itself.

Moreover, Grunig and Grunig (2000:163-186) argue that two-way symmetrical communication is the most ethical and socially responsible approach to communication management (Grunig & Grunig, 2000:163-186; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:306). This theory is based on fostering a culture of participation that brings about social change, empowerment, and mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:306). Two-way symmetrical communication can also contribute to mutual understanding between role players, which in turn can contribute to positive, long-term relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 2000:163-186). Communication between the CH9s and the CSOs should serve two needs: One, communication should be crafted to communicate the goals, interests, and expectations to contribute towards a mutually beneficial relationship. Secondly, there should also be communication to understand the citizens' interests and expectations and how both institutions could potentially adapt to address this. Different authors, such as Murphy (1991), Grunig and Grunig (2000:163-186), Sriramesh (2007), as well as Huang and Lyra (1995), further alluded that the use of the two-way symmetrical theory would be most likely to result in a lasting and trusted relationship. Based on this, it is argued that communication between the CH9s and CSOs should primarily be based on the principles of two-way symmetrical communication.

As indicated above, relationship management in the context of CH9s and CSOs seems to be lacking. Relationship management in the nonprofit sector entails building and sustaining strong bonds with stakeholders and contributors via mutually beneficial communication that inspires loyalty and devotion (Waters, 2011).

There is a need for a communication framework for CH9s to guide their communication with CSOs to build and maintain relationships between them that can empower both institutions to fulfil their mandates. This framework should be informed by the theoretical fields of two-way symmetrical communication and relationship management (see Hon & Grunig, 1999; Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Ledingham, 2003). However, such a framework alone will not be sufficient in bringing about social change and the mutual empowerment of both sectors towards the empowerment of citizens. Empowerment is not addressed in the current theory of relationship management as discussed above but rather in development communication. Therefore, there is a need to integrate theory from development communication with that from relationship management theory to establish mutually beneficial, long-term relationships that can facilitate mutual empowerment (see Hallahan *et al.*, 2007). The participatory approach to development communication is accepted as the normative approach in the field, with empowerment being one of the core focuses of this approach (see Kheerajit & Flor, 2014; Servaes, 2000; Srampickal, 2006; Tufte & Mefalopulo, 2009). In the participatory approach, the focus is primarily on the empowerment of beneficiaries in a development context. This approach will be followed, together with communication and relationship management in the current study to be applicable for the facilitation of mutual empowerment between organisations working together in the context of a mutually beneficial relationship. The arguments above highlight the importance of including the participatory approach in a communication framework towards the mutual empowerment of CH9s and CSOs.

There is currently no conceptual framework available for CH9s and CSOs that facilitates mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment of the role players. Current frameworks mostly focus on communications management and stakeholder relationship management (see Cho, 2012; Matsika, 2017; McLeod, 2006; Meintjes, 2012; Mmutle, 2018; Meyer, 2017; Oksiutycz, 2006; Selebi, 2019; Tam *et al.*, 2020; Van der Walt, 2016; Wiggil, 2009), which may facilitate mutually beneficial relationships, but neglect mutual empowerment.

This research, therefore, develops a conceptual framework that integrates principles from relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication, and the participatory approach to development communication, to facilitate communication that can contribute to both mutually beneficial relationships and mutual empowerment in relationships.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

One of the factors that has been identified as contributing to the communication problems of CH9s is a lack of partnerships with CSOs. Part of CH9's mandate is to have a functional relationship with CSOs to be able to fulfil their mandate, while also supporting CSOs to be able to fulfil their own mandates. Therefore, CH9s should build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with CSOs towards mutual empowerment. CSOs constitute a valuable network for CH9s to access citizens and communities, particularly at a local level or in rural communities where the CH9 institutions have a relatively poor presence. Within a relationship aimed at mutual empowerment, both organisations should be empowered to fulfil their mandate.

However, it seems that there is currently no mutual empowerment in the relationship between CH9s and CSOs. This absence can be traced back to the absence of mutually beneficial relationships. In other words, mutual empowerment hinges on the presence of relationship building in the first place. Relationship building between CH9s and CSOs is therefore a precursor of mutual empowerment between CSOs and CH9s, towards the empowerment of society. In this study, it is argued that both mutually beneficial relationships as well as mutual empowerment depend on the nature of communication between CH9s and CSOs.

There is a need for a communication framework for CH9s to guide their communication and build and maintain relationships with CSOs towards mutual empowerment, as no such framework currently exists. This study will therefore develop a conceptual framework that integrates principles from corporate and development communication that will assist CH9s and CSOs to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment.

## **1.4 General research question**

What should a communication framework for CH9s include to contribute to relationship building with CSOs towards the mutual empowerment of both institutions?

The general research question will be addressed by answering a number of specific research questions:

### **1.4.1 Specific research questions**

1. What theoretical concepts and constructs should be included in the conceptualisation of a communication framework for CH9s for relationship building with CSOs towards mutual empowerment?
2. What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework?
3. What are the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework?

### **1.4.2 Specific research aims**

The general research aim is to develop a communication framework for CH9 institutions to contribute to relationship building with CSOs towards the mutual empowerment of both institutions.

To reach this general aim, the following specific research aims will be addressed:

1. To identify theoretical concepts and constructs that will be included in the conceptualisation of a communication framework for CH9s for relationship building with CSOs towards mutual empowerment, through a literature study.
2. To explore the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework for CH9s through semi-structured interviews.
3. To explore the perspectives of CSOs directors regarding the proposed communication framework, through semi-structured interviews.

## **1.5 Conceptualisation and meta-theoretical framework**

In order to address the primary research objective, the study was conceptualised from two meta-theoretical traditions: the cybernetic tradition and the critical tradition. The research argued that there are some discrepancies between the cybernetic and critical traditions since one is focusing on keeping a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, while the other aims to change the status quo (see Drack & Pouvreau, 2015: 523–571; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). From a cybernetic view, the aim is to keep the system in a state of equilibrium and consistency by managing communication to maintain power structures, while the critical tradition questions the institutional power towards societal transformation. The use of both the cybernetic and critical traditions is essential for this study, as each offers unique and complementary perspectives. The cybernetic tradition provides a framework for analysing how systems achieve stability and coherence through feedback mechanisms and the regulation of information flow, thereby facilitating organisational equilibrium (Bateson, 1972: 20–35). In contrast, the critical tradition introduces a necessary focus on issues of power, agency, and social transformation, highlighting how participatory dialogue and critique can drive meaningful change (Deetz, 2017: 18–47; Mumby, 2022).

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

This study combined theories from two meta-theoretical traditions: the cybernetic tradition and the critical tradition. It applied theories from different theoretical fields within these traditions.

### **1.6.1 Cybernetic tradition**

The cybernetic tradition differentiates between systems and subsystems and the interrelation between them. In these relationships, the subsystems strive for balance, stability, and adaptability through communication (Drack & Pouvreau, 2015: 523–571). Communication within these subsystems is viewed as the variable that manages the overall system to achieve balance and control (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008: 39–40). For such outcomes, the systems and subsystems must function interrelated and have mutually beneficial relationships (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008: 39). This can be achieved through stakeholder feedback, where information is used to control the system that will lead to

stability and balance, which will ensure the continuation of the organisation's success (Craig & Muller, 2007:309). In this study, the cybernetic tradition was utilised to explain the relationship between the CH9s and CSOs, and how this relationship should be built through communication that could create stability, balance, and particularly benefit both organisations. Gregory (2000:266–277) argues that the open systems approach leans mostly towards the two-way symmetrical model, which embraces that organisations should be as open to change as their publics (stakeholders) are because of the communication dialogue that takes place. The systems emphasise interaction and feedback in relationships between the organisation and the stakeholder (Blumberg, 2008). In this study, the researcher included the two-way symmetrical model, stakeholder relationship management theory and communication management that falls under the cybernetic tradition in the communication framework to build mutually beneficial relationships with CSOs.

### **1.6.2 Two-way symmetrical communication**

The best way for CH9s to build and manage trust-based relationships with CSOs is by using two-way symmetrical communication towards a mutual benefit. According to Grunig and Grunig (2000:163-186), the primary role of two-way symmetrical communication is to help the communicators to better understand each other. This model is based on a free exchange of information that is used to alter attitudes in both the organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 2000:163-186).

The two-way symmetric model relies on honest and open two-way communication and mutual give-and-take rather than one-way persuasion. It also focusses on mutual respect and efforts to achieve mutual understanding; a willingness to adapt and make compromises; it requires organisations to be willing to adjust in how they operate to accommodate their stakeholders (Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Freeman, 1984:31–51; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Heath, 2013:43; Turney, 1998:321–334). This model explains how the communication between CH9s and CSOs should take place to encourage relationship building and maintenance.

### **1.6.3 Stakeholder relationship management theory**

Stakeholder management, in essence, holds that the forces of stakeholder groups are increasingly affecting business success and survival. Therefore, business leaders must understand this change and ensure that stakeholder interests, needs, and expectations are incorporated into, rather than ignored, in strategic decision-making (Letza *et al.*, 2004:251). These can be incorporated if organisations understand the needs, interests, and expectations of stakeholders in an open system. To reach the relationship outcomes of control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment, a mutually beneficial relationship should be created between CH9s and CSOs through appropriate and effective communication (see Hon & Grunig, 1999:18–25). The stakeholder relationship management theory identifies specific strategies that organisations can use to build and maintain positive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, including accessibility, positivity, openness, assurances, and sharing of tasks that the researcher will incorporate in the framework (see Hon & Grunig, 1999:18–25). The researcher integrated stakeholder relationship theory into this study, which considers how an organisation is managed so that it creates value for stakeholders (Freeman, 1984:24–31). Adhering to the guidelines of the stakeholder relationship management theory should allow CH9s and CSOs to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships (see Clarkson, 1995; Freeman *et al.*, 2004; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

It is argued that CH9s will have a better chance of succeeding in establishing long-term, positive, mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships with CSOs by applying these principles. The relationship management strategies of Hon and Grunig (1999) were particularly relevant for the study, as there is a lack of relationship building and partnership between CSOs and CH9s for mutually beneficial relationships.

### **1.6.4 Critical tradition**

In contrast to the cybernetic tradition, which conceptualises communication as a process managed to serve organisational interests, the critical tradition views communication as a means of interrogating power dynamics and promoting social transformation and equity.

This should entail true dialogue about differences that may lead to genuine mutual understanding and public change beyond strategic management (Craig, 1999:148;

Habermas, 1984). The premise of critical perspectives is that “conflict, distortion, injustice, and dominion” are an inherent part of human society (Garcia-Jimenez, 2014:91). Critical theorists thus openly question and criticise instances of oppression of the citizens, power abuse by authorities, and discrimination with the goal of exposing social injustices in society and creating awareness that can ultimately lead to change and accessibility (Garcia-Jimenez, 2014:91; Roy & Oludaja, 2009:255; West & Turner, 2010:31). It is important to note that in this tradition communication is both the object of criticism as well as the means of achieving critical thinking, change and accessibility (Cooren, 2012:11; Roy & Oludaja, 2009:269). Craig and Muller (2007:430) explain that communication can provide the necessary “techniques for resisting or overcoming” these social injustices. Within this study, the critical tradition was utilised to explore how communication can lead to genuine mutual understanding between the CH9s and the CSOs that could facilitate change and equality towards mutual empowerment.

#### **1.6.5 The participatory approach to development communication**

The participatory approach falls within the critical tradition in the field of development communication. The aim of development communication in this approach is to improve and to change the lives of the marginalised in a sustainable way (Nuridayati & Hasan, 2021; Servaes, 2003:42-45). Participatory development communication, as defined in this study, is, amongst others, informed by Paulo Freire's work on dialogical communication and empowerment (Freire, 1970:27). The term “participatory development communication” is often used to draw attention to an emphasis on two-way communication processes and to distance from one-way communication approaches that involve disseminating messages, transmitting information, or persuading citizens to access certain services (Nair & White, 1994). In the participatory approach, communication is centred on empowerment and the promotion of critical dialogue among stakeholders (Bessette, 2004:32; Freire, 1970). To achieve such empowerment, it is essential to establish genuine dialogue between CH9s and CSOs, ensuring both organisations are actively involved in decision making that shapes their relationship. Adapting the principles of the participatory approach enables both organisations to participate fully and work towards their shared empowerment (see Kheerajit & Flor, 2011; Servaes, 2000; Tufte & Mefalopulo, 2009).

The elements of communication, like feedback, participation, mutual sharing, empowerment, and more, need to be stressed in the study of development communication (Nuridayati & Hasan, 2021). The relationship between the CH9s and the CSOs should focus on the empowerment of both institutions.

### **1.7 The contribution and significance of the study**

CH9 institutions are dependent on their relations with other state institutions, including the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, in order to protect and uphold the Constitution and its provisions. However, the CH9s also relies heavily on relationships and communication with CSOs to ensure that other state institutions do not abuse their powers and that accountability and development are maintained. Although numerous studies have been conducted on efficiency, constitutionality, and other related aspects of the CH9s, there has been limited research on the role of these bodies in communicating with and engaging stakeholders to create value and mutually beneficial relationships that foster mutual empowerment. Research specifically linked the problems CH9s are experiencing in fulfilling their mandates to a lack of working relationships and collaboration with CSOs. This highlights the need for positive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between the two institutions, which this study argues should be built and maintained through communication. In this study, it is, however, argued that there is a need to move beyond these types of relationships, towards a relationship of mutual empowerment. There is currently no communication framework available that addresses these outcomes. This study, therefore, proposes a communication framework to reinforce the role of communication towards mutually beneficial relationships and mutual empowerment of both CH9s and CSOs.

On a theoretical level, such a framework can make a significant contribution to the current body of knowledge. Concepts and constructs from two different meta-theoretical traditions and relevant theoretical perspectives are critically integrated as a point of departure to conceptualise the communication framework for CH9s. It contributes to the disciplines of both corporate communication and development communication, since the principles from the participatory approach were integrated with those of two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management to create a framework that should facilitate mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual

empowerment. The current theory on relationship management also does not sufficiently focus on the empowerment of stakeholders, which is identified as a gap in the current body of knowledge. On the other hand, development communication theory does not pay sufficient attention to mutually beneficial relationships, since the focus is primarily on the empowerment of beneficiaries and communities. By utilising elements of both cybernetics and the critical tradition through the integration of constructs from corporate communication and development communications, this study is making a novel contribution to the current body of knowledge.

On a practical level, this study can contribute to both CH9s and CSOs enjoying mutually beneficial relationships and being empowered to be able to better fulfil their mandate towards society. At the moment, there is a lack of relationship and partnership between CH9s and CSOs that causes the CH9s to not fulfil their mandate optimally. Since CH9s are unique in their nature, focus, and mandate, they need a tailor-made communication framework to be able to fulfil their mandate optimally. An opportunity to consider best practice through a possible positioning framework, which CH9s institutions and CSOs can use as a point of reference for their practices, is also among the benefits. This framework may also assist other institutions and organisations in creating mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment.

## **1.8 Research approach**

The study seeks to develop a communication framework for CH9 institutions to contribute to mutually beneficial relationships with CSOs towards mutual empowerment. This study adopts a qualitative approach, which will focus on collecting and analysing qualitative data. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Creswell, 2013:44). Qualitative research can be characterised as being “textual, interactive, hermeneutic, subjective, constructive, and symbolic” (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:229). This methodological approach is ideal for descriptive data analysis and results that allow in-depth interpretations and understanding of the research topic (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:134; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014:48).

The above-mentioned characteristics of the qualitative approach assisted in expanding an in-depth understanding of participants’ perspectives on the proposed communication

framework, as well as their expectations and experiences regarding communication between CH9s and CSOs. The intention of qualitative research methods is to investigate subjective, personal, and socially constructed realities where the context of a phenomenon and the human experience are deemed central to the research topic (Mouton, 1996:169). Furthermore, the focus is thus on the participants' points of view, and how they think and feel about a certain issue (Bless *et al.*, 2013:16). The characteristics are relevant for this study as the researcher interviewed the people who are responsible for communication and stakeholder relations in each institution on a strategic level. In addition, they are responsible for giving strategic guidance and direction to the executives and board members of these organisations. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to investigate participants' views in greater depth, report detailed views of informants and enable interviewees to express their opinions (see Alshenqeeti, 2014:40). This approach is deemed appropriate as it allows for the selection of a group that is knowledgeable, experienced and able to contribute to the phenomenon that the researcher is concerned about in an expressive, articulate, and reflective manner (see Pilankas *et al.*, 2015:534). According to Queirós *et al.* (2017:279), such a small sample size will enable the researcher to solicit rich information from participants in response to research questions. For this study to produce a communication framework that can be applied in practice, an in-depth understanding of the participants' views and input was crucial.

## **1.9 Research methods**

The study consisted of both a literature study and an empirical component.

### **1.9.1 Literature study**

The following databases were used to find relevant literature, as the researcher found that there is enough literature available to make the study feasible: Business Source Complete, Communication Source, Directory of Open Access Journals, eBook Collections (EBSCOhost), Ebsco Discovery Services (EDS), Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, IEEE Xplore Digital Library, Library Catalogue, North-West University (NWU) library, and Scopus. A Nexus search indicated that the study has not been attempted previously, thereby demonstrating its novelty. The literature study focussed on cybernetic tradition, the two-way symmetrical model, and stakeholder relationship management

theory in Chapter 3 and discussed the critical meta-theoretical tradition, Habermas' approach, dialogue and cultural diversity within the public sphere, critical pedagogy, development communication, and the participatory approach to development communication to ascertain theoretical perspectives specifically focussed on facilitating empowerment in Chapter 4.

A review of existing literature on communication and stakeholder relationship management reveals distinct thematic emphases among the cited studies. Several works, such as Matsika (2017) and Meintjes (2012), primarily address the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships through strategic communication approaches, highlighting the role of investor relations and governance frameworks in fostering reciprocal value. Other research, notably by McLeod (2006), Oksiutycz (2006), and Cho (2012), centres on empowerment, exploring how communication can be leveraged to enable stakeholders, particularly within the context of organisational and societal development. Studies by Tam *et al.* (2020), Mmutle (2018), and Ranyane (2014) examine stakeholder relationships with a specific focus on empowerment, analysing participatory communication strategies and support frameworks that facilitate stakeholder agency and inclusion. Meyer (2017) and Selebi (2019) take the discourse further by exploring mutual empowerment, investigating how metamodern models and national frameworks foster environments in which stakeholders and organisations empower each other collaboratively. Collectively, these studies contribute to a nuanced understanding of communication's role in building stakeholder relationships, with particular attention to the dynamics of empowerment, reciprocity, and participatory engagement.

None of these studies explored mutual empowerment as a relationship outcome (see Cho, 2012; Matsika, 2018; McLeod, 2006; Meintjes, 2012; Meyer, 2017; Mmutle, 2018; Oksiutycz, 2006; Selebi, 2019; Tam *et al.*, 2020; Van der Walt, 2016; Wiggil, 2009). Also, there is no existing communication framework for mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment in the context of CH9s and CSOs. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a communication framework that is not only theoretically sound but can also be used in any context to achieve mutual empowerment.

### **1.9.2 Empirical study**

The empirical part of the study consisted of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a good data collection method for trying to understand the world of the participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:437). The empirical current research used data as an exploratory study, as the researcher wished to gain new insights into the research, draw conclusions, and make recommendations (see Saunders *et al.*, 2019:174).

### **1.9.3 Semi-structured interviews**

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that combines a pre-determined set of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore themes or responses further (Creswell & Clark, 2011:23). Semi-structured interviewing can be seen as a guided conversation or a conversation with a purpose in which the interviewer establishes the general agenda for the conversation but also pursues specific topics raised by the participants (Mason, 2002:45-46; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Babbie (2020) supports this argument by highlighting that semi-structured interviews in qualitative research should not be viewed as just a list of questions to be asked, but as a creation of dialogue.

Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for eliciting individual experiences, opinions, detailed responses, contradictions, connections, and relationships between phenomena or events (Mack *et al.*, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were therefore relevant to the study, as the researcher sought to collect qualitative, open-ended data to explore participants' thoughts and beliefs about the proposed communication framework. To ensure consistency while encouraging meaningful contributions, all participants were provided with the same conceptual framework and questions. At the same time, the structure remained flexible, allowing for follow-up questions and enabling participants to share additional relevant information that the researcher might not have anticipated.

The researcher compiled an interview schedule beforehand based on theoretical concepts and constructs identified in the literature review, which were to guide the interviews but not dictate them. The qualitative method gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their thoughts, interpretations, and understanding by describing and explaining the situation in their environment (see Alshenqeeti, 2014). The researcher

got feedback from participants from both CSOs and CH9s and implemented input in the proposed conceptual framework that the researcher adapted to reflect their input.

#### **1.9.4 Population and sampling**

The population for the study consisted of senior communication managers. This included all communication managers and all communication officers for the three identified CH9s and all the directors of the identified CSOs.

The researcher used purposive sampling in the study. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable one to answer the research questions (Pilankas *et al.*, 2015:534). This method is deemed appropriate, especially in qualitative studies, as it allows for the selection of a group that is knowledgeable, experienced, and able to contribute to the phenomenon that the researcher is concerned about in an expressive, articulate, and reflective manner (Pilankas *et al.*, 2015:534).

Through purposive sampling, the researcher selected one senior communication manager, one communication manager, and one communication officer from each of the three identified CH9 institutions (SAHRC, the PP, and the CGE). These are the only communicators within the organisation responsible for communications and stakeholder relations, and they have been with the organisation for more than 10 years.

In addition, one director was chosen from each of the nine CSOs. These participants were specifically chosen because they are responsible for communication and stakeholder relations within their respective organisations, and they have been working with the organisation for more than 10 years.

Senior communication managers focus more on strategy developments and policies, while communication managers focus on operations and implementation, and communication officers focus on coordination and administrative aspects of communication activities; hence, it is imperative to interview these participants on each level to get their input. These participants are based in the national head offices in Gauteng. In total, nine participants represented the CH9s in the study.

In addition, nine directors from the CSOs (mentioned below) based in the national offices in Gauteng were selected through purposive sampling as they are representative of this study, and they are responsible for communication and stakeholder management within the CSOs. The researcher selected the CSOs that deal with human rights, gender equality, and administrative justice, which are linked and work together with the three identified CH9s. These institutions are as follows:

- Foundation for Human Rights
- Institute for Democracy in South Africa
- Treatment Action Campaign
- Abahlali base Mjondolo
- South African Council of Churches
- Lawyers for Human Rights
- Sonke Gender Justice
- Albinism Society of South Africa
- Centre for the study of violence and reconciliation

Eighteen (18) individuals participated in the semi-structured interviews. According to Queirós *et al.* (2017:279), such a small sample size enables the researcher to solicit rich information from the participants in response to research questions.

#### **1.9.5 Data analysis**

To analyse the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, the researcher employed both inductive and deductive approaches, which enabled the use of key constructs from the framework (critical dialogue, transparency, collaboration, affirmed mutuality, participation, cultural diversity, solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change) as a foundation for developing a communication framework informed by participants' input. The researcher initially employed a deductive qualitative content analysis approach, utilising the various constructs of the framework as predefined categories to systematically identify data pertinent to each construct. Subsequently, an inductive thematic analysis was conducted.

This was subsequently followed by an inductive approach, which involved testing and refining the framework based on participants' lived experiences, allowing the analysis to be driven entirely by the data (see Azungah, 2018:389). The researcher did both deductive and inductive content analysis, where he used the theoretical concepts and constructs as categories for analysis in the deductive analysis, before moving to inductive analysis to determine any other relevant information. In line with this, the researcher adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006:87) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, an approach particularly suited for exploring experiences, thoughts, and behaviours across qualitative datasets (Kiger & Varpio, 2020:84). The empirical research process will be explained in detail in Chapter 6.

### **1.10 Ethical considerations**

The researcher ensured that he understood the NWU's policies and guidelines on research ethics, completed Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation (TRREE), and applied for ethical clearance from the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC). Ethical clearance was permitted, with ethics number NWU-01015-23-A7. Permission for the study was obtained from both the CH9s and the CSOs. Both sets of institutions were contacted in advance through an email to seek their cooperation for the study and acquire their permission for interviews. The communications practitioners and relevant directors from both institutions were also contacted through email to acquire their permission for interviews. The participants were informed that participation is voluntary, and they signed a consent form to obtain informed consent, and it was explained to them that should they wish to withdraw from the study at any time, they are able to do so. Participants were also advised that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions that they were not comfortable with. Audio recordings of interview proceedings were done with the permission of the participants. Due to the nature and scope of the study, the researcher did not foresee any harm to participants.

The researcher maintained the confidentiality of all data collected from participants and maintained security procedures for the protection of individual and organisational information. The researcher ensured that the information shared was not linked back to the participants by using pseudonyms. The researcher ensured the results of the interviews were credible by interpreting the data that was provided by the participants

accurately and by ensuring that the researcher spent a reasonable amount of time with them virtually to understand them better and gain insight into their inputs on the proposed framework (see Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

### **1.11 Chapter layout**

Chapter 1 provided the introduction, the problem statement and outlined the research questions, before providing an overview of the research design.

Chapter 2 focuses on, gives an overview, and explains the relationship between CH9s and CSOs and how each institution currently operates with the other. The chapter explains the current relationship between CH9s and CSOs and the reason why these organisations should have a closer relationship.

Chapter 3 focusses on the cybernetic tradition as a meta-theoretical tradition and the two-way symmetrical model, and stakeholder relationship management theory from a corporate communication perspective within this meta-theoretical tradition. From the discussion of these theoretical perspectives, theoretical statements were formulated, which were used to determine the theoretical concepts and constructs that were included in the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs.

The critical meta-theoretical tradition is covered in Chapter 4, along with Habermas' methodology, critical pedagogy, and the participatory approach from a development communication perspective. From the discussion of these theoretical perspectives, theoretical statements were formulated, which were used to determine the theoretical constructs that were included in the communication framework for facilitating mutual empowerment between CH9s and CSOs.

Chapter 5 seeks to answer the question: “*What theoretical constructs should be included in the conceptualisation of the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment?*” The chapter conceptualises the communication framework. The chapter aims to integrate perspectives from Chapters 3 and 4 into a tailored communication framework that both CH9s and CSOs can adopt to build positive, mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment.

Chapter 6 discusses the methodological choices that were made in this research. The chapter explains and motivates the research approach that has been chosen, explains how the research methods have been applied, and also indicates how the data have been analysed.

Chapter 7 was informed by the thematic analysis approach discussed in Chapter 6. The chapter sets out to answer specific research questions 2 and 3.

What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework? (see 1.4.1.2)

What are the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework? (see 1.4.1.3)

Both these research questions were answered by conducting semi-structured interviews with the directors of the identified CSOs and CH9 communication practitioners from the identified CH9s. Following the participants' inputs, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis based on interview feedback that will help to refine the proposed framework. The results of the semi-structured interviews are covered in this chapter through a thematic analysis. The chapter also reformulates the theoretical statements based on findings, leading to an overall evaluation of the communication framework proposed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 8 presents a summary, recommendations and study conclusion based on the interpretations derived from the analysis of the data. It provides a holistic view of the research objectives and how these are addressed throughout this study. Specific conclusions and recommendations relevant to this study are highlighted with an emphasis on the contribution of this study. The communication framework is proposed for CH9s, based on the conceptual framework, and adapted to reflect the input from communication practitioners of CH9s and CSO directors to answer the general research question. The researcher presents the framework as an answer to the general research question.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CH9s AND CSOs**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the introduction, and the problem statement and outlined the research questions. In this, the importance of effective communication between CH9s and CSOs has been highlighted. Given this focus, the current chapter provides background on both CH9s and CSOs in general, as well as on the specific CH9s and CSOs included in this study to indicate the potential mutual benefit both sectors can gain from an improved working relationship and mutual empowerment. This chapter aims to give an overview and explain the relationship between CH9s and CSOs and how each institution currently operates with the other.

This chapter outlines the mandate and limits of CH9 institutions, which provide the context for this research. Because this thesis focuses on the three CH9s whose mandates are similar and closely linked: the South African Human Rights Commission (the SAHRC), the Public Protector, (PP), and the Commission for Gender Equality (the CGE), the first section of the chapter focusses on these. This section further outlines how CH9s and CSOs currently communicate with each other in a bid to fulfil their respective mandates.

The second section of the chapter examines the function and challenges of various CSOs and provides background on the CSOs participating in this study.

This is based on the oversight role of South African CSOs in activism and advocacy discussed in section 2.4. Section 2.5 stresses the significance of a healthy relationship between the state, CH9 and CSO. It argues that CSOs constitute a valuable network for CH9s to access citizens and communities, particularly at a local level or in rural communities where the CH9s have a relatively poor presence.

It also examines whether existing CH9 communication with CSOs can move towards the establishment of mutual empowerment as a goal and an outcome.

## **2.2 The mandate of CH9 Institutions**

The mandate of current CH9s can be identified as being:

- to contribute to creating an accountable government through monitoring and investigation of government action.
- to support and strengthen South African constitutional democracy by holding the state accountable for its actions; and
- to contribute to the transformation of South Africa into a country in which freedom, dignity, and equality prevail (Murray, 2006; Konstant, 2016).

CH9s have been described as ‘watchdogs’ that protect the rights of citizens by demanding government accountability. They should be independent and impartial in their investigation of government affairs on behalf of citizens to protect and promote the rights of vulnerable citizens (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Murray, 2006). Murray 2006, cited by Keil (2010), indicates that CH9 institutions are designed to guarantee that the state remains open and responsive to the needs and rights of all citizens. CH9s have been established to assist in achieving all these goals (Keil, 2010). Their role is primarily communicative, investigatory, and administrative. Communicative means that they should facilitate the exchange of information between themselves and citizens. CH9s are also investigatory in the sense that they carry out an examination of the details of various cases brought to their attention. Their administrative function involves the various forms of filing, reporting, and communication their departments perform on a daily basis (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Murray, 2006).

### **2.2.1 The South African Human Rights Commission**

The current study focusses on three CH9s with a similar mandate. The South African Human Rights Commission’s (SAHRC) role is to promote respect and protect and fulfil the human rights set out in the Constitution. In addition, it is obligated to promote a culture of human rights; promote the protection, development, and attainment of human rights; investigate and report on the observance of human rights; and take steps and secure appropriate redress where human rights have been violated (SAHRC, 2019). The SAHRC is tasked with monitoring and resolving complaints brought to them by the

citizens on human rights violations and seeking redress for such violations. Since its establishment, the SAHRC has contributed to the awareness and attainment of human rights in South Africa by investigating complaints and conducting public inquiries into widespread human rights violations, participating and contributing to human rights discourse at the regional, national and international levels (SAHRC, 2019).

### **2.2.2 The Public Protector**

The Public Protector's (PP) mandate is to oversee administrative justice in government dealings and its institutions. The mission of the PP is to strengthen constitutional democracy in pursuit of its constitutional mandate by investigating, rectifying, and redressing any improper or prejudicial conduct in state affairs and resolving related disputes through mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and other measures to ensure fair, responsive and accountable public sector decision-making and service delivery (PP, 2018). In fulfilling its mandate, vision, and mission, the PP's strategic objectives are to be accessible and trusted by all citizens and communities; to promote good governance in the conduct of all state affairs and to be an efficient and effective organisation (PP, 2018). The PP, therefore, serves the interests of citizens by protecting them from the potential vanity of their political leaders.

### **2.2.3 The Commission of Gender Equality**

The Commission of Gender Equality's (CGE) mandate is the attainment of gender equality. It promotes, protects, monitors, and evaluates gender equality through research, public education, policy development, legislative initiatives, effective monitoring, and litigation (CGE, 2018). The CGE's functions include monitoring and evaluating the policies and practices of government, the private sector, and CSOs to ensure that they promote and protect gender equality; public education, and information; reviewing existing and upcoming legislation from a gender perspective; and investigating inequality lodged by the citizen (CGE, 2018). It seeks to ensure the right of every citizen not to be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, based on race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origins, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, or language (CGE, 2018). Like the other CH9s, their mandate is citizen-centred.

#### **2.2.4 The role of the CH9s**

CH9s must be well-positioned to advise at the macro-level concerning any needed legal reform for the citizens, and this can be done in partnership and collaboration with CSOs who have access to citizens on the grassroots level. In other words, CH9s can provide a complete review of whole areas of regulation; for instance, the SAHRC can assess and recommend amendments to the Promotion of Access to Information Act (Klug, 2010). A further example would be the CGE's ability to suggest how a case lodged by citizens was conducted. In this way, CH9s can identify and bridge the gaps between the public interests concerning essential aspects of representative democracy and the systems currently in place to provide those services (Konstant, 2016). CH9s play a role in providing the necessary information to citizens to form policy and informed political decisions. In other words, CH9s are equipped to bring information on government action to light and to publicise it. In this way, the hope is that with greater transparency will come greater compliance with the requirements of the Constitution. This conforms to the importance of access to information by the citizens in the bill of rights (Konstant, 2016).

Another critical role played by the CH9s is that of an intermediary between citizens and the state (Murray, 2006). Citizens may lodge grievances concerning the violation of their rights, and such complaints will be investigated, and some form of remedial action taken. The SAHRC and CGE fulfil this function. The PP also plays an essential corrective role when acting as a form of communication between citizens and government (Konstant, 2016). To play their roles effectively and efficiently, the SAHRC, PP and GCE all depend on their organisational make-up, operational procedures, and their functional relationship with CSOs (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Murray, 2006).

### **2.3 The function of various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)**

According to Graham *et al.* (2008), CSOs represent the total diversity of human voluntary endeavour and the mechanism through which citizens come together to pursue their wants and needs. In the South African context, "civil society" typically refers to a broad spectrum of actors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), trade unions, indigenous people's movements, foundations, and other non-profit entities, as outlined by Du Toit *et al.* (1998:264).

Governments interact with a range of CSOs who critically monitor the government's work and engage the government in policy discussions and how those policies can benefit the citizens. In addition, CSOs are located within local communities, making them easily accessible to most citizens (HSRC, 2007, 2016). CSOs have often been viewed as vital for democracy because of their strong support at a grassroots level and their capacity to develop and empower the poor. It can be argued that CSOs are a crucially important factor at every stage of the democratization process (Ajulu, 2005).

Some CSOs often have no field projects but form alliances with other CSOs to educate and lobby on citizens' specific issues. Since the advent of democracy, many CSOs have influenced government through their advocacy campaigns towards parliament, officials, and politicians. Many of these have been successful. Successful examples that spring to mind are the passage of the Basic Income Grant, the Children's Act, and the Anti-Retroviral Campaign (De Vos, 2012; Gumede, 2018; Magongo, 2016). Due to their roots within communities and the work they do with those most in need, CSOs are seen as partners through which service delivery can occur (Graham *et al.*, 2008). Using that logic, CSOs present an opportunity for CH9s to develop effective and efficient partnerships. This is because CSOs are often able to identify the needs of citizens more readily and they have further reach than CH9s. As a result, investing in CSOs becomes a valuable investment for CH9s (Swilling & Russel, 2002). NGOs and community-based organisations can facilitate information exchanges between CH9s and grassroots.

CSOs provide network information and education services to other CSOs, including newsletters and seminars. Before democracy in 1994, a few CSOs established networks to pursue their sectoral interests for the benefit of citizens. Forums were set to discuss and negotiate the needs of a non-racial society in pursuing common objectives in sectors such as education, health, water, local government, land, sanitation, and urban development (Camay & Gordon, 2000). These networks survived and negotiated agreements with government departments to provide a civil society function in specific sectors. CSOs play many essential roles in South Africa by providing humanitarian assistance to victims of gender-based violence. The below-mentioned CSOs institutions will form part of the study as their mandates are similar and closely linked to the three

CH9s under study. As a consequence, these organisations work closely with the identified CH9s.

These organisations include:

- Foundation for Human Rights (FHR)
- Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)
- Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)
- Abahlali Base Mjondo (ABM)
- South African Council of Churches (SACC)
- Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)
- Sonke Gender Justice (SGJ)
- Albinism Society of South Africa (ASSA)
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR)

The CSOs will be discussed below.

### **2.3.1 The Foundation for Human Rights (FHR)**

FHR is a human rights organisation in South Africa mandated to protect and promote human rights. It was established in 1996 through a cooperation agreement between the European Union (EU) and the South African government (Gumede, 2018). The FHR supports public and state-owned institutions to promote and facilitate increased awareness, respect, protection, and fulfilment of the rights protected in the South African Constitution. It advocates for citizens who are disadvantaged, poor, and marginalised. It creates a platform for government and other relevant stakeholders to dialogue pertinent to human rights issues, builds solidarity, and mobilises communities around critical human rights issues (Magongo, 2016). Through its national footprint and established relationships with a wide range of other CSOs, including community-based organisations, the FHR is uniquely positioned to act as a convener for CSO mobilisation (FHR, 2021). In the next section, the role of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa is discussed.

### **2.3.2 The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)**

IDASA is an independent public interest organisation committed to promoting sustainable democracy based on active citizenship, democratic institutions, and social justice. It is committed to representing and participating in inspiring citizens (IDASA, 2010). It aims to empower communities and citizens to shape the course and condition of their lives through practical engagement in social and political processes (IDASA, 2010). It focuses on building citizen and civil society capacity to promote and maintain democracy within South Africa and the region. It pursues this aim through capacity-building initiatives (IDASA, 2010). The next CSO to be discussed is the Treatment Action Campaign.

### **2.3.3 Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)**

The TAC was founded in December 1998 to campaign for access to AIDS treatment. It is widely acknowledged as one of the most important CSOs active on AIDS in the developing world. One of its most significant victories was the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling (Heywood, 2017). Following its lobbying, the South African government was ordered to provide anti-retroviral drugs to prevent the transmission of HIV from mothers to their babies during birth. TAC continues to represent citizens who are users of the public healthcare system in South Africa and campaign and litigate critical issues related to quality and access to healthcare (Heywood, 2017). The organisation currently has over 8,000 members and a network of 182 branches and provincial offices in seven of South Africa's nine provinces (TAC, 2021). Members receive basic training in the science of HIV, TB, and related conditions and their rights in the healthcare system (TAC, 2021). Another CSO to consider is Abahlali Base Mjondolo.

### **2.3.4 Abahlali Base Mjondolo (ABM)**

Abahlali Base Mjondolo is a shack dwellers' movement in South Africa that organises land occupations, builds collectives, and campaigns against evictions and xenophobia (Abahlali Base Mjondolo, 2021). The movement grew out of a road blockade organised from Durban's Kennedy Road shack settlement. As of June 2021, it has had more than 100 000 members who are citizens of the country in 86 branches across five provinces, including Gauteng. Abahlali Base Mjondolo has held demonstrations, engaged in direct action such as land occupations, self-organised water and electricity connections, and

used the courts tactically to ensure that these essential services are granted to the citizens (Abahlali Base Mjondo, 2021). A CSO operating on the religious front is the South African Council of Churches.

### **2.3.5 South African Council of Churches (SACC)**

The SACC was founded in May 1968 during one of South Africa's darkest periods (SACC, 2021). At the time, the National Party had been in government for 20 years. Its policy of apartheid severely restricted the rights, associations, and movements of the majority of South Africans. With its enviable track record of advocacy, care, and empowerment, the SACC aims to be the moral compass of South Africa, advocating for social and economic justice, national reconciliation, the integrity of the natural environment, the eradication of poverty, and contributing toward the empowerment of all those who are spiritually, socially, and economically marginalised (SACC, 2021). Next, the role of Lawyers for Human Rights is discussed.

### **2.3.6 Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)**

LHR is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental human rights organisation that was started by activist lawyers in 1979. LHR employs a holistic approach to social justice and human rights enforcement, including strategic litigation, advocacy, law reform, human rights education, and community mobilisation and support (Magongo, 2016). LHR provides legal services through law clinics and advice offices in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Musina, and Durban (Gumede, 2018). This allows them to identify trends and strategic issues arising across the country and vulnerable groups that may benefit from the litigation. This also ensures that LHR is responsive to the changing social justice issues of the day. LHR is staffed by specialist legal practitioners and activists dedicated to helping vulnerable, marginalised, and disadvantaged citizens and communities (LHR, 2020). An organisation operating on the gender front is Sonke Gender Justice.

### **2.3.7 Sonke Gender Justice (SGJ)**

Sonke Gender Justice is mandated to strengthen the capacity of governments, civil society, and citizens to advance gender justice and women's rights. It assists in preventing gender-based violence and reducing the spread of HIV and the impact of AIDS

(Sonke Gender Justice, 2020). In this way, it contributes to social justice and the elimination of poverty. SGJ works closely with various organisations and citizens, including women's rights organisations, social movements, trade unions, government departments, sports associations, faith-based organisations, media organisations, university research units, and human rights advocates (Sonke Gender Justice, 2020). In addition, SGJ is committed to ensuring that the perspectives and priorities inform programmes of those working to advance the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersexual communities, people living with HIV and AIDS, and refugees and migrants (Sonke Gender Justice, 2020). Another CSO to consider is the Albinism Society of South Africa.

### **2.3.8 Albinism Society of South Africa (ASSA)**

The Albinism Society of South Africa is mandated to enhance the self-esteem of persons with albinism. It enables and supports parents to properly care for children with albinism and create a socially acceptable environment (Albinism Society of South Africa, 2019). The rights of people living with albinism are often violated in South Africa. Therefore, this organisation must have a relationship with these CH9s so that they can educate the community about their rights and how to report violations and victimisation to these CH9s (Albinism Society of South Africa, 2019). The last CSO discussed in this chapter is the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

### **2.3.9 Centre for the study of violence and reconciliation (CSVR)**

The CSVR was founded in 1989 and registered as a Section 21 company in 1990. It is an independent NPO that engages in research, community interventions, policy formation, service delivery, education, and training (CSVR, 2020). For three decades, CSVR has worked to understand violence, heal its effects, reconcile communities, and build sustainable peace in South Africa. CSVR provides technical support and works with individuals and communities to focus on the wide range of violence and conflict forms, including collective and interpersonal, political and criminal, and state and social violence (CSVR, 2020). CSVR provides mental health and psychosocial support and other interventions to address and prevent violence and human rights violations. Its mission is to promote sustainable peace at the community, national, regional, and global levels by understanding, preventing, and addressing the effects of violence and inequality (CSVR,

2020). The three aforementioned CH9s are pertinent to this study and are expected to collaborate with the selected CSOs. As outlined in Chapter 1, the researcher has provided a comprehensive overview of all CH9s in South Africa and has justified the selection of these three particular institutions due to their established connections with the identified CSOs and their anticipated collaborative roles with CH9s. (see 1.2)

### **2.3.10 The relationship and challenges between CH9 and CSO**

CH9s are dependent on a functional relationship with CSOs who are in some instances the gatekeepers to vulnerable communities. An example is how Sonke Gender Justice can be seen as a gatekeeper to accessing sex-worker communities. For the relationship to work between CH9s and CSOs, CSOs expressed eagerness to collaborate and partner with the CH9s. CSOs believe that the CH9s must work with them to fulfil the CH9s' mandate for various reasons (Murray, 2006). CSOs have the skills and the necessary experience to deal with specific localities and have specific specialisations on which the CH9s can capitalise (HSRC, 2007, 2016). Working through CSOs would also create public awareness about CH9s. It is hoped that this relationship will be strengthened by developing a relevant communications framework. Despite the strengths in the roles performed by CSOs, there are challenges and shortcomings in their functioning relationship and collaborations with CH9s. These challenges are common in all the CSOs, and include management capacities and issues of essential visibility and legitimacy, sustainability, effectiveness, and forging a workable partnership and relationship with CH9s (Lewis, 2007:24). Another challenge among CSOs is a lack of networking and linkages with CH9s to achieve common objectives of mutual empowerment and to learn from each other's experiences as they share a common goal of mutual empowerment. The lack of forging alliances to achieve common objectives is also evident: CSOs, particularly those that operate in urban areas, tend to have greater capacity to generate funding than smaller community-based CSOs, which tend to rely more on government funding (Salamon *et al.*, 1998).

Despite their mandate, CH9s still face a lot of challenges that limit their communicative, investigative, and administrative functions and efficiency. The absence of a structured relationship framework between CH9s and CSOs (Gumede, 2018) is a challenge. Much of this challenge has already been discussed in Chapter 1.

More regarding the importance of a functioning relationship between CH9s and CSOs will be discussed in section 2.5.

The link between CH9s and CSOs is outlined below.

The next section discusses the oversight role of South African CSOs in activism and advocacy. This will foreground the importance of CSOs as a potential asset for CH9s that have been underutilised.

## **2.4 The link between CH9s and CSOs**

According to Murray (2006:7), CSOs have a role to play in the pursuit of democracy, and given the fact that CH9s are expected to enhance transparency, there must be a collaboration and partnership of some sort between the two in terms of how they intend to communicate and meet with each other regularly. There is a need for a relationship between CH9s and CSOs because collegial relations with CH9s carry immense benefits for CSOs (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; HSRC, 2007, 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006). This is because CH9s possess resources, knowledge, and information that CSOs need to enhance their performance. CSOs play a significant advocacy role in protecting and promoting the interests of citizens (De Vos, 2012). Thus, a good relationship between the CH9s and CSOs can enhance CSO efficiency by allowing them access to more information, resources, and knowledge. The aforementioned CSOs have established a strong presence throughout South African society, including local communities and rural areas. They have done so through working with some CH9s in activities such as research, public advocacy, and service delivery to material issues enabling their members to participate in delivering these services (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Murray, 2006).

According to Gumede (2018:14), having active CSOs in South Africa has played a critical role in creating a lively democratic culture and addressing the awareness gap between the citizens and the CH9s services (Gumede, 2018:18). South Africa's CSOs are the last line of defence for distressed and vulnerable citizens. South Africa's CSOs landscape is more diverse, dynamic, and assertive in holding CH9s accountable and supporting democracy than in many comparable developing countries (Gumede, 2018). CSOs have successfully used the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the judiciary to press for

democratic rights, freedoms and equality, and quality public services for the poor, vulnerable, and excluded (Murray, 2006). South Africa's model constitution gives a special place for CSOs to play an oversight role over democratic institutions such as CH9s, monitor human rights, and give citizens, especially the poor, vulnerable, and excluded, the tools to know and assert their rights (Gumede, 2018). In South Africa, CSOs groups have, in the post-1994 era, continued to hold CH9s to account. CSOs groups such as the TAC had spent decades successfully fighting for HIV treatment and access to medicines for the citizens (Heywood, 2017).

CH9s also stand to benefit from the diversity of knowledge that some CSOs provide. Some other CSOs, such as the SACC, are created by religious organisations, often emphasising providing welfare services, sometimes combined with religious preaching to the citizens. Historically, these organisations have provided education, welfare, and anti-apartheid discourse to the communities in which they have operated. In the past, these organisations have also played a formidable role in integrating political exiles into the fabric of South African society (Keil, 2010). FHR and LHR, as part of CSOs, are formed to monitor human rights abuses, lobby against such violations, and protect and assist abuse victims. The FHR and LHR also concentrate on public education and awareness regarding citizens' rights and responsibilities, especially in South Africa, which is newly democratised (Magongo, 2016). For CH9s to get the best out of CSOs and ensure that the state and citizenry are transparently engaged, they need to create a healthy relationship with CSOs. The next section examines the significance of a healthy relationship between the State, CH9s, and CSOs.

## **2.5 The significance of a healthy relationship between CH9s and CSOs in fulfilling their mandate.**

We have established that both the CH9s and CSOs must be willing to work with each other if they are to build a mutually beneficial relationship leading to mutual empowerment (see Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; HSRC, 2007; 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006). Magongo (2016) found that CSOs differed sharply on the current state of their relationship with the CH9s. Some CSOs labelled CH9s positive, while others called them difficult. Among those who felt positive are IDASA, LHR, and the SACC. At the same time, those who felt negative were the FHR, AB, and CSVr. The

FHR and CSV, for instance, believed that the CH9s view them as 'trouble' and 'as enemies of government' respectively (Konstant, 2016). The FHR believed that the CH9s are not sufficiently vocal and activist in this regard. Instead, they felt that the CH9s frowned upon advocacy methods such as protests and demonstrations. The FHR's favourite form of expression labelled CH9s 'as a problem' and said they tended to eschew organisations employing such techniques (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; HSRC, 2007, 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006).

Be that as it may, previous research suggests that the relationships between CH9s and CSOs need to be improved (Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006). A study conducted by the International Council on Human Rights Policy in 2007 summarised the CSOs' relationship with CH9s, stating that CH9s seldom meet monthly with relevant CSOs to discuss priorities and strategies affecting citizens. CH9s and CSOs can use a case study of Ghana and how the state has built a relationship with CSOs in their country. This is an example of how CH9s can utilise CSOs to build mutually beneficial relationships for educational purposes and create public awareness to reach out to citizens (HSRC, 2007, 2016).

Malta's experiences are evidence that shows the value of CH9s partnering and using CSOs as an educational tool to reach out to citizens for mutually beneficial relationships. Malta has a very similar structure to South Africa, wherein through their outreach and awareness activities, the CH9s promote their work among the citizens by organising meetings in various communities where the CSOs are used as a conduit for educating the citizens about the work of the CH9s and to access its services (HSRC, 2007, 2016). Given the levels of illiteracy and the poor communication infrastructure in South Africa (particularly in the rural areas), CSOs serve to inform and advise citizens regarding their rights and possible recourse from utilising the services of the CH9s (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; HSRC, 2007, 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006). This role would be more effective if a healthy relationship between the CH9s and CSOs could be utilised to create greater state transparency.

According to HSRC (2016), the mandate of the CH9s, SAHRC, and the PP is too massive to implement alone, and they ought to be keen to work with CSOs. Likewise, CSOs share a similar sentiment that the CH9s mandate is too huge to implement alone, as CH9s lack

the social networks and reach to access the citizens at the grassroots level (Murray, 2006). This kind of collaboration and partnership between the CH9s and CSOs will serve to enhance the capacity of the CH9s. CH9s can benefit by having direct access to the citizens to fulfil their mandate. CSOs can benefit from this relationship as they will have direct access to CH9s to refer citizens to lodge complaints with these institutions. The process could be quicker if the citizens lodge direct complaints with the CH9s. In those cases, the CSOs know the process, procedures, and the relevant practitioners in these organisations concerning different matters (HSRC, 2007, 2016) and can therefore act as intermediaries between the CH9s and the citizens (Murray, 2006).

CSOs can therefore assist CH9s through their part in research, communications, advocacy and empowerment. For instance, CSOs like IDASA or LHR provide expertise to the CH9s, by conducting public inquiries or making expert submissions on a topic that affects the citizens. For the SACC, an activist organisation with widespread community networks that are directly involved in addressing the plight of their constituencies, its role can be to mediate between informing its members and how to access the services available within certain CH9s (Konstant, 2016). After all, CSOs themselves concede that CH9s are valuable to their activities, as demonstrated in the case studies of Malta and Ghana. Collegial relations with CH9s thus carry immense mutual benefits for CH9s and CSOs (De Vos, 2012; HSRC, 2007, 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006). Both CSOs and CH9s need to formulate strategies to communicate with each other. The responsibility for forging good relations between the two sectors falls not only on the CH9s but also on the CSOs (Murray, 2006).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the state of the relationship between the CGE, SAHRC, and the OPP and relevant CSOs. It first discussed the mandate and limits of CH9s. This section showed the importance of CH9s for both citizens and CSOs. The chapter proceeded to discuss the challenges that limit the communicative, investigative, and administrative efficiency and impact of CH9s.

The discussion proceeded to examine the function of various CSOs. An outline of 9 CSOs showed that they play an important function that should be embraced by CH9s. Having outlined the mandate and function of CH9s and CSOs, the chapter emphasised the

significance of a healthy relationship between the CH9 and CSO in fulfilling their mandates. The next chapter asserts that the two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management theory, grounded in corporate communication research, offers a solid framework for directing interactions between CH9s and CSOs. Utilising these concepts allow both organisations to foster constructive, enduring partnerships and attain the intended results.

Chapter 3 integrates the cybernetic tradition, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theory to indicate how communication can be used to facilitate long-term, positive, mutually beneficial relationships between CH9s and CSOs.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE CYBERNETIC TRADITION, THE TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL MODEL, AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THEORY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter 1 provided the introduction and the problem statement and outlined the research questions to guide this study. The chapter highlighted the need for a communication framework for CH9s to guide their communication with CSOs to facilitate communication that can contribute to mutually beneficial relationships and mutual empowerment as relationship outcomes. In Chapter 1, it was argued that no conceptual framework currently exists that enables mutually beneficial relationships with the mutual empowerment of the role players as relationship outcomes, thereby indicating the theoretical gap this study addresses. Chapter 2 showed the links between CH9s and CSOs and also highlighted some existing challenges and limitations prevalent in the communication between CGE, SAHRC, the PP, and selected CSOs. Both chapters have shown numerous constraints to the partnership and relationship between the CH9s and CSOs (see GCE, 2018; HSRC, 2007, 2016; PP, 2018; SAHRC, 2019; Makwambeni & Matsika, 2022:9 -11; Nyagweta, 2024:1-3; Valentinov & Roth, 2024:301-315), hence the need for a framework that enhances mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment.

Communication between CH9s and the CSOs should be about the two institutions' needs and expectations regarding the relationship to allow them to build mutually beneficial, long-term relationships. Based on this argument, this chapter argues that communication between the CH9s and CSOs should rely on the principles of two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management theory from a corporate communication perspective. Two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management should assist CH9s and CSOs in facilitating mutually beneficial, positive, and long-term relationships, as well as achieving the other relationship outcomes mentioned above.

From the discussion of these theoretical perspectives, theoretical statements will be formulated, which will be used to determine the theoretical concepts and constructs that

will be included in the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs. The first section discusses cybernetics as a meta-theoretical tradition.

### **3.2 Cybernetics as a meta-theoretical tradition**

In this study, the cybernetic tradition provides the meta-theoretical context for the two corporate communication theoretical perspectives, namely the two-way symmetrical model and the stakeholder relationship management theory.

Cybernetics involves the function of self-regulating systems (Ashby, 1966; Wiener, 1978) whose principles have been applied to theories of general human behaviour (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1982; Miller, 1965; Powers, 1978), mental and physical health (Hyland, 1987; Schwartz, 1983) and organisational behaviour theories (Campion & Lord, 1982; Kelin, 1989; Manz, 1986). In cybernetics, elements are assembled like a system and a network. Cybernetics and systems theory are interconnected, as cybernetics oversees how systems function. At its heart, Von Bertalanffy's (1933) general systems theory is based on the idea that the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. A system is "a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment" and is in constant flux (Von Bertalanffy, 1972:417). Systems thrive on interconnectedness between different parties (Arnold & Wade, 2015: 669–678; Trilling, 2024:1-24; Rutherford, 2026:60). In this study, it is argued that CH9s and CSOs are interconnected parts of the same system.

The cybernetic tradition views communication as processing information, feedback, and control. It refers to the control of the communication process, in which the initiator of communication must ensure that the receiver understands the message in the manner the sender intends (Ashby, 1995). According to Ashby (1995), cybernetics highlights the idea of complex systems where many interacting elements influence each other. Cybernetics comes from a universal principle of systems that prioritises self-regulation, namely feedback (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Bezuidenhout, 2017; Cummings & Cooper, 1979; Krippendorff, 1977:21-67; Littlejohn, 1983; McGrath, 1976; Rogers, 1994; Schuler, 1980). Cybernetics replaced linear models with the complexity and circularity of interdependent feedback loops (August, 2022). Bale (1995:34) summarises the systemic self-regulatory functions of cybernetics in the following manner:

Feedback is a recursive process whereby a system's behaviour is scanned and fed back through its sensory receptors. Data about the system's previous actions, as a part of the input it receives, is monitored, allowing the system to 'watch' itself, and thus signal the degree of attainment or non-attainment of a given operation relative to pre-established goals. This process allows a system to alter its output and thereby regulate or steer its behaviour in relation to its pre-encoded goals.

Cybernetic systems thus depend on feedback, wherein if a particular action or communication achieves an unexpected outcome, the sender should reevaluate the communication. In this study, it would mean that if CH9s receive feedback indicating that their communication with CSOs did not render the outcomes they intended, the CH9 organisation should step back and act differently to achieve a different result. In this regard, cybernetics is used to understand how communication can be leveraged to foster positive and mutually beneficial relationships between CH9s and CSOs, by utilising feedback mechanisms to enhance cooperation and value creation. However, while cybernetics effectively facilitates these constructive interactions, its focus on systems and feedback processes may not fully address the deeper power dynamics or achieve genuine mutual empowerment. Therefore, there is a need to draw on the critical tradition, which specifically interrogates power structures and does not accept them as they are, but rather promotes transformative change to complement cybernetic approaches to achieve mutual empowerment.

In the cybernetic tradition, the system uses both negative and positive feedback when attempting to achieve stability (homeostasis) based on the information it receives from its inputs about the attainment of its predefined goals with those inputs (Miles, 2007:314; Dekkers, 2025:13). (The critical theory, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, on the other hand, seeks to disrupt the status quo, which may disrupt the entire system). The homeostat represents a system interacting with its environment to gain equilibrium (Tilak *et al.*, 2022). Negative feedback is deviation-reducing feedback, such as that which can be found in a thermostat (Montuori, 2011). A decrease in temperature below a certain threshold kicks in the heating, so that a relatively stable temperature is maintained (Montuori, 2011). In a system known as a 'self-exciting' or 'runaway' system, positive feedback occurs when, for example, rude behaviour by one person leads to more rude

responses by another person, escalating with the arrival of the police (Montuori, 2011). This creates negative feedback. Positive feedback can be found both in vicious and virtuous cycles. With its focus on deviation amplification, positive feedback is also associated with creativity and innovation. If negative feedback maintains a system on course and in equilibrium, positive feedback's deviation amplification takes it toward disequilibrium and change (Montuori, 2011; Bechtel & Bich, 2025:13). As opposed to negative feedback, positive feedback is only supposed to occur when the opposite is happening – where the system is trying to create a more significant difference between its goals and its inputs (and, as a result seeking instability or, from another angle, reinforcing change) (Miles, 2007:314). Instability is seen as productive because it leads to review and change. Cybernetics, therefore, follows the following logic: “Without knowledge of results, practice does not lead to better performance” (Baker & Buckley, 1996:22). This makes both positive and negative feedback critical constructs for the communication framework.

The use of both positive and negative feedback to come up with a conceptual communication framework for CH9s is at the core of this research. From a cybernetic perspective, information is returned to the system to correct deviations and maintain the status quo, while a critical perspective treats feedback as a communicative act influenced by power dynamics among stakeholders, with some voices more powerful than others, that can influence the status quo.

The systems model suggests that when an organisation does not function properly, it must examine whether its subsystems meet its needs, and it must assess its environment to determine whether it is well-adapted (Flood & Jackson, 1988). In an open system, the CH9 must balance individual autonomy with collective strength to achieve its goals. An organisation that wants to meet its information processing requirements must give its subordinates autonomy in turbulent environments (Flood & Jackson, 1988:17). Feedback works best in an open system. An open systems theory encourages “organisations to take a holistic approach to problem-solving by understanding how the internal structure and external environment interact” (Sullivan, 2009:359). Approaching cybernetics from an open systems perspective allows this research to adopt a practical communications approach.

The function of the communications department also relies on whether the organisation is a closed or open system. A closed system has no interaction with the surroundings, so it moves to entropy (internal chaos), disintegration, and eventually death (Ströh & Leonard, 1999; Ursula & Miia, 2002; Vrabcová *et al.*, 2024). The open system, on the other hand, possesses both the capability of receiving matter and energy from its environment as well as the ability to transmit those same elements back to it (Ströh & Leonard, 1999). From an organisational efficiency perspective, an open system is more desirable. It can be argued that both the open systems theory and the two-way symmetrical communication model are closely connected (Ströh & Leonard, 1999; Lee, 2022:108-123). The systems theory provides the basis for understanding how organisational systems affect communication activities in organisations like the CH9s and CSOs. Similarly, the two-way symmetrical communication provides a structured communication process on how coordinated communication activities within the system help to receive feedback and improve the system as a whole.

The Cybernetic Traditions provides the theoretical grounding for the study to understand how CH9s and CSOs, as self-regulatory systems, are prone to change due to external forces, may use feedback to foster new relationships or even strengthen mutually beneficial relationships. However, there should be systems in place to manage this process, hence the integration of systems theory. Consequently, systems do not operate in a vacuum; they require communication and the study benefits from a two-way symmetrical communication approach that provides a coordinated communication framework to assist in not only managing communication but also facilitating feedback to improve the system as a whole. Because systems theory is concerned with the environment, including an organisation's stakeholders, it is essential to consider a theoretical perspective on stakeholders that operates both internally and externally within this environment, regulated by cybernetics.

### **3.3 A theoretical perspective of stakeholders**

Freeman is widely considered the “father of stakeholder theory”. He defined stakeholders as anyone who is affected by the success of the organisation's objectives, those groups who are important to the survival and success of the organisation (Freeman, 1999), and those to whom the organisation has a responsibility (Freeman, 1984). According to

Freeman (1999), organisations must focus on all relationships that could affect or be affected by their goals if they want to become effective (Freeman, 1999). Other authors support Freeman's definition and open it up more by identifying stakeholders as entities with any form of interest in the operations of an organisation (Hung, 2001:13, 2005:396; Friedman & Miles, 2006).

Given the nature and context of CH9s and CSOs, it is appropriate to apply both stakeholder definitions. CSOs are significant stakeholders for CH9s, as their involvement is crucial to the survival and success of CH9s. CSOs can influence CH9s in achieving their objectives and, reciprocally, impact the broader system and its operations.

Under the banner of the stakeholder, Clarkson (1995) categorised stakeholders as primary and secondary. There is a strong relationship between the organisation and the primary stakeholder group, defined as "one without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive" (Clarkson, 1995:105) and includes shareholders, investors, employees, customers, and suppliers. Furthermore, Clarkson (1995) defines secondary stakeholder groups as "those who are affected by the organisation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the organisation and are not essential for its survival" (Clarkson, 1995:106). Clarkson's definition allows for an understanding of CSOs as CH9s' primary stakeholders, as cooperation with CSOs can have a direct positive or negative impact on CH9s achieving their respective mandates.

According to the HSRC (2007, 2016), a functional relationship between CH9s and CSOs is crucial in fulfilling their role (see section 2.6). The HSRC (2016) report recommends that CH9s with limited institutional reach or insufficient capacity can compensate for this by using CSOs to reach out to as wide an audience as possible. The report further suggests that the disconnection between CH9s and citizens may be bridged by means of a more structured, continuous relationship with CSOs, which are spread out all over South Africa, and which possess a wealth of knowledge that the CH9s can tap into (Ad Hoc Committee, 2007; De Vos, 2012; Govender, 2007; HSRC, 2007, 2016; Konstant, 2016; Murray, 2006; Van Zyl *et al.*, 2025:95-118; Cwaile, 2023).

Positive relationships between CH9s and CSOs are therefore critical for their survival and success. Therefore, the research proposes a communication framework that connects

CH9s and CSOs as stakeholders on a relationship basis. The proposed CH9-CSO communication framework will be mutually beneficial, acknowledging the importance of CSOs for the survival of CH9s and of CH9s for the survival of CSOs, grounded in their interdependence. This is in keeping with Freeman's (1999) definition of a stakeholder as those groups essential to the organisation's survival and success.

The next section will focus on excellence theory, which identifies two-way symmetrical communication as appropriate to build and maintain positive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (in this case, between CH9s and CSOs). Two-way symmetrical communication will be further discussed in detail to indicate its relevance to the study and how the principles of this type of communication can be applied in communication between CH9s and CSOs.

### **3.4 Excellence theory**

In order to understand value creation through communication, the study adopts the excellence theory to theorise value creation for CH9s and CSOs. James Grunig and colleagues proposed the excellence theory in a study on best practices in public relations (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). The excellence theory identifies the characteristics of communication that increase the value creation to an organisation and explains how they achieve this value (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The significance of effective communication in maintaining a positive reputation for an organisation both inside its networks and beyond, is also underscored in this theory.

Grunig and Hunt developed four models of public relations in 1984: the press agency (or publicity), public information, two-way asymmetrical and the two-way symmetrical models. Press agency and public information are one-way models. Practitioners of press agency seek attention for their organisation in almost any possible way, whereas public information practitioners are journalists who disseminate accurate, but usually only favourable, information about their organisation. However, one-way communication models are often criticised because they do not allow for feedback or dialogue with stakeholders, which can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of trust, highlighting the need for two-way models that foster genuine engagement and mutual understanding while maintaining control over the coordination of communication activities (Cornelissen,

2023; Grunig & Grunig, 2020b; Zerfass *et al.*, 2022; Andersson, 2024:91-112; Cornelissen, 2023; Limani *et al.*, 2024).

In the excellence study, it was found that two-way communication could be practised asymmetrically or symmetrically. Asymmetrical or persuasive communication is associated with being internally orientated, closed, and centred on efficiency, elitism, conservatism, traditionalism, and central authoritarianism (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Grunig *et al.*, 1995). Asymmetric communication leads to manipulation, which happens when an organisation communicates with the public merely to serve its interests. With the two-way asymmetrical model, practitioners conduct scientific research to determine how to persuade the public to behave in the ways their client organisation wish (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Grunig *et al.*, 1995).

According to Grunig and Grunig (2013), in the asymmetrical model, organisations seek to dominate the environment, while in the two-way symmetrical model, organisations seek cooperation.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig *et al.* (1992) introduced two-way symmetrical communication as an approach that aims to address the interests of both organisations and their stakeholders. Symmetrical communication is associated with equity, autonomy, innovation, decentralised management, responsibility conflict resolution and interest-group liberalism (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:883). In two-way symmetrical communication, the organisation and publics/stakeholders are assumed to be in a balanced relationship. With the two-way symmetrical model, practitioners use research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes and behaviour of both organisations and the public (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Grunig *et al.*, 1995).

The excellence study advanced the two-way symmetrical model to a normative one because it found that implementing it should contribute to achieving organisational goals, whilst benefiting both the organisation and its stakeholders. The two-way symmetrical model was endorsed as the norm for how effective and socially responsible public relations should be practised (Kelly *et al.*, 2010:190; Al Hadeed *et al.*, 2024). The excellence study, which led to the excellence theory, illustrated that public relations adds value to the achievement of organisational goals when it supports two-way symmetrical communication to build and nurture stakeholder relationships (Grunig, 2006:158).

Furthermore, the original public relations models of asymmetrical and symmetrical two-way communication went through adaptations, confirming the evolution of the excellence theory. The first models of public relations, namely the asymmetrical two-way communication model and the symmetrical two-way communication model, have undergone modifications, hence validating the progression of the excellence theory. Grunig *et al.* (1995) also maintain that an organisation should attain its goals if the communication management function adheres to the excellence theory criteria, since it would lead to the alignment between an organisation's goals and the expectations of its strategic stakeholders. Considering the argument as illustrated above, the excellence theory principles become relevant to this study and imperative for CH9-CSO stakeholder relationship management. Excellence recognises that the two-way symmetrical model is normative, and the model will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.5 Two-way symmetrical communication**

The foundation of two-way symmetrical communication is transactional communication which, according to Dozier *et al.* (1995), is a communication process that uses feedback mechanisms to determine feedback to stakeholders. It further seeks to achieve mutual understanding among the organisation and its stakeholders through two-way communication and managing conflict, with the ultimate goal of a win-win situation for the organisation and its stakeholders (Dozier *et al.*, 1995).

While Dozier *et al.* (1995) focussed on transactional communication to achieve mutual understanding, Jahansoozi (2007) asserts that two-way symmetrical communication is characterised by the inclusion of dialogue to facilitate mutually beneficial transformational ideas, attitudes, and behaviours for the organisation and its stakeholders. The concept of two-way symmetrical communication is characterised by a cooperative approach, wherein one party consistently endeavours to accommodate the interests of the other party (Grunig *et al.*, 1995). According to the proposition put forth by Grunig and Grunig (1992), the two-way symmetrical model is posited as a normative framework for public relations across a wide range of circumstances.

Furthermore, the concept of two-way symmetrical communication is expanded beyond transactional, dialogical, cooperative, and accommodating measures to include other characteristics such as interdependency, openness, truthfulness, mutual understanding,

and a shared vision (Bishop, 2006:217-221; Burchell & Cook, 2006:212; Gregory, 2000:269). The study rests on the notion that two-way symmetrical communication is not limited to being a public relations function but an overall organisational, communication, and management function aimed at coordinating important organisational functions.

Despite some postmodernists' stance that the model of two-way symmetrical communication should be "relegated to the archives" (Holtzhausen, 2022), theorists such as Spicer *et al.*, (2009:27, 38) declare that we can think of "few instances whereby a concept has had such a profound and lasting effect in a communication discipline as has the two-way symmetrical model". Therefore, any communication action would be intellectually and pragmatically poorer without this model. While two-way symmetrical communication provides the basis for understanding why feedback, dialogue, and engagement are important in an organisation, it may be criticised for its maintenance of control over communication activities (Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Holtzhausen, 2022; Servaes, 2003). This kind of criticism is addressed through the critical tradition inclusion in this study by analysing and understanding the power dynamics, marginalisation of some stakeholders, and how these have an impact on communication. While communication proposed by the two-way asymmetrical communication model is appropriate to ensure system controls to measure achievements of organisational goals, it may offend some of the emancipatory requirements of development communication and participatory communication, hence the application of these theories and the integration of their concepts and constructs in the study (Grunig & Grunig, 2020a; Holtzhausen, 2022; Servaes, 2021). Two-way symmetrical communication is essential because it can create dialogue and conflict resolution between CH9 and CSOs that may lead to mutual understanding and mutually beneficial, positive relationships. In the cybernetic tradition, relationships are conceptualised as integrated systems composed of interdependent elements that exchange information to sustain equilibrium and minimise ambiguity (Bateson, 1972; Wiener, 1948). Conversely, the critical tradition views relationships as fundamentally influenced by power structures, where communicative processes can either perpetuate or confront social inequalities and dominance (Deetz, 1992; Habermas, 1984). Within the cybernetic perspective, conflict is interpreted as a disruption in systemic information exchange, necessitating adaptive feedback mechanisms to re-establish system stability (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967; Wiener, 1948). From a critical standpoint, conflict emerges as an inherent consequence of imbalanced

power relations and operates as a mechanism for revealing, contesting, and transforming forms of oppression (Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Freire, 1970). This aligns with recent scholarship, such as Coombs and Holladay (2012), which contends that activism often arises when organisational engagement is insufficient, prompting stakeholders to mobilise for change (see also Edwards, 2022).

Therefore, to mitigate the risk of stakeholder activism and ensure organisational resilience, it is crucial for organisations to foster strong and positive relationships with their various stakeholders.

Bowen (2005:838) states that organisations need the goodwill of stakeholders for survival and that effective two-way symmetrical communication contributes to solid stakeholder relationships. Communication management will enhance the function of an organisation if it sustains two-way symmetrical communication with its stakeholders (Bowen, 2005:840). This places communication at the centre of stakeholder relationship management and engagement to achieve mutual understanding, create value for the organisation, and establish relationships with different stakeholders.

Moreover, communication for stakeholder relationships needs to be coordinated to achieve the desired organisational outcomes, and the two-way symmetrical communication model is one of the most effective in achieving this goal. Giles (2002:42) argues that two-way symmetrical communication is often prescribed as the most influential external communication model because both the stakeholders and the organisation benefit from it (Giles, 2002; Grunig *et al.*, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The implementation of a two-way symmetrical approach enhances the extent to which communication contributes to the overall effectiveness of an organisation.

Two-way symmetrical communication is ideal for the CH9-CSO relationship because it is possible to balance the interests of organisations and their stakeholders towards mutual benefits (see Heath, 2010). Among these mutual benefits is mutual understanding.

The process of achieving mutual understanding involves a bilateral exchange of information, news, ideas, and emotions, while also encompassing the generation and dissemination of shared meanings among stakeholders. Mutual understanding serves as

a mechanism for establishing connections among individuals in a broad sense (see Cornelius & Boos, 2003; Hantho *et al.*, 2002; Mohr & Bitner, 1991).

Mutual understanding has been conceptualised and defined in the context of communication and how it shapes and creates value in the organisational setting. The fundamental principle of mutual understanding is empathy between individuals. This phenomenon is commonly known as mutual affection (Kapur, 2022). Drawing on the work of George Herbert Mead, Schwalbe (1988) describes mutual understanding as entering the perspective of the other. The study uses Schwalbe's work to define the mutual understanding of the other's imagery of the external world. This cognitive process of mutual understanding is clear if one understands how another person sees an event; one is more likely to understand that person's communications about the event (Carey & Tanewski, 2016; Gooderham *et al.*, 2004).

In this way, two-way symmetrical communication can contribute to mutual understanding, while mutual understanding can contribute to positive relationships. Subsequently, mutual understanding and a positive relationship create value for the organisation and its stakeholders. Within the cybernetic tradition, mutual understanding is achieved through information sharing between the organisations and their stakeholders within the system. When there is mutual understanding, both parties can communicate information thoroughly and accurately as the basis for decision-making (Churchman & Schainblatt, 1965). In the context of CH9s and CSOs, mutual understanding is critical because it helps both parties to make sense of each other's goals, interests, and mandates. A high level of mutual understanding between CH9s and CSOs means that they must understand each other and know what to expect from each other in terms of their partnership and collaboration (see Halabi *et al.*, 2010). Fostering a collaborative relationship between these organisations is crucial for promoting shared empowerment and reinforcing constitutional democracy. When these parties cultivate a mutual comprehension of their supportive functions - CSOs as community mobilisers and advocates, and CH9s as constitutionally designated overseers - they can synchronise their endeavours towards social accountability and the safeguarding of rights.

Furthermore, mutual understanding is imperative for the CH9-CSO relationship in order for parties to realise their mutual goals, and both parties should be able to comprehend

what the other party is trying to do and the reasons behind it (see Cornelius & Boos, 2003; Hantho *et al.*, 2002; Mohr & Bitner, 1991; Rommetveit, 2014). There is not much research on mutual understanding in the literature (Umansky & Fuhrberg, 2017). Consequently, little is known about the mechanisms behind creating mutual understanding (Tan, 1994). However, it is acknowledged that misconceptions and differences in views can lead to disputes if they are not effectively managed (Umansky & Fuhrberg, 2017). Accordingly, establishing mutual understanding makes coordination and cooperation easier (Tan, 1994). Conflicts occur when people protest against corporate organisations' projects because they believe they are not concerned with public health, even when these organisations actively promote health safety, as Umansky and Furhberg (2017) illustrate. "In such a case, the conflict would not be caused by conflicting interests but by conflicting perceptions," the scholars conclude. To this end, the focus should be on mutual achievement while recognising its subjectivity to avoid unnecessary disputes (Leong *et al.*, 2007). This situation demonstrates that mutual understanding is a result of efficient communication channels, which facilitate the passage of information more successfully while reducing errors and misunderstandings.

Moreover, Schwalbe (1988) asserts that mutual understanding is essential for establishing stable patterns of interaction. Therefore, one can conclude that mutual understanding is necessary for realigning the behaviour of both CH9s and CSOs. Some of the research on mutual understanding shows that this factor leads to more successful negotiation of arbitration disputes (Neale & Bazerman, 1983), the building of positive long-lasting relationships (Gladstein, 1983; Mitchell *et al.*, 2023), and both parties becoming satisfied with the end goal (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Swartz and Brown (1989) conducted research that supports the idea that the accuracy of mutual understanding influences stakeholder satisfaction.

In the CH9-CSO context, mutual understanding should favourably influence the development of a shared vision by both parties, thus contributing to the success of both organisations. It is essential for both CH9 and the CSO to avoid miscommunication, as it hinders the ability of both organisations to achieve their objectives (Bryckero *et al.*, 2020). "To the extent that people in different cultures understand the world differently, they must expend deliberate effort in trying to come to terms with each other's meanings, over and beyond their translated vocabularies, if they are to collaborate successfully", as

Jankowicz and Dobosz-Bourne (2003:123) explain. When the project's success depends on the team members' consensus on essential components, negotiations are required for numerous terms (Tan, 1994). In the service context, Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) propose that management's misunderstanding of stakeholder expectations diminishes the stakeholder's evaluation of the service quality offered by the organisation. Given that mutual understanding is a desirable goal for the CH9-CSO relationship, literature suggests that constructive dialogue can help both CH9s and CSOs to explain mutual understanding better. To this end, mutual understanding and dialogue are strongly interrelated and connected (Mohr & Bitner, 1991).

According to Tan (1994), in a service environment, the partners (CH9s and CSOs) must be able to understand what the other side is attempting to accomplish and why in order to realise their common goals. Since they must understand one another's job, behaviour, and expectations, cognitive similarity is required (see Cornelius & Boos, 2003; Hantho *et al.*, 2002; Mohr & Bitner, 1991; Rommetveit, 1974; Tan, 1994). To effectively decode each other's signals and prevent misinterpretation and false information, role players must have cognitively comparable rules in their communication (Runkel, 1956; Tan, 1994). If we apply this to the context of services (i.e., good communication between CH9s, CSOs, and external stakeholders), mutual understanding then becomes a process of knowing and being aware of what to expect from another party and the level of engagement required to satisfy these requirements. Both parties must share information with each other to pursue the same goal (Bennett & Robson, 2003; Reynolds *et al.*, 2006; Murphy, 2026:23-32).

It is the responsibility of senior management in each department of both CH9s and CSOs to apply the principle of two-way symmetrical communication in their communication plan and engagement with each other. Based on the discussion of two-way symmetrical communication, the following theoretical statement has been formulated:

***Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication***

*CH9s and CSOs should apply the principles of two-way communication in their communication with each other by engaging in dialogue, cooperating with each other, and committing to conflict resolution to facilitate mutual understanding and building and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term positive relationships.*

Dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution will be discussed below as means to reach mutual understanding and building and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term positive relationships between CH9s and CSOs.

### **3.5.1 Dialogue**

Dialogue from a cybernetic perspective is a structured exchange of information that improves system coordination and efficiency, as opposed to being an emancipatory practice where participants co-create meaning, challenge power inequalities, and foster transformative understanding from a critical tradition (see Freire, 1970).

Dialogue has been referred to as consultation, engagement, participation, collaboration, partnership, and bargaining (Laasonen, 2010:528). Dialogue is characterised by interactive as opposed to one-way communication, where information is merely disseminated to stakeholders without any form of feedback or discussion (Burchell & Cook, 2006:155; Gronstedt, 1996a:296-297; Kitchen & Schulz, 2009:200). In line with the idea that dialogue is interactive, Andriof (2001:228) describes dialogue as a conversation where information is exchanged and knowledge is acquired. Similarly, Grunig and Hunt (1984:48), as early as the 1980s, noted that dialogue should involve two-way communication. Beckett and Jonker (2006:96) define dialogue as a process in which participants can express their views, attitudes and needs free from professional intrusion and control. Dialogue provides an effective way to exchange information, clarify issues and find solutions, especially when there are matters of mutual interest between CH9s and CSOs (see Mason & Simmons, 2013; Mena & Campos, 2010:167-168; Peach, 1987:195). However, dialogue alone is not enough without active listening as a crucial part of the dialogue which plays an important role in achieving mutual understanding. According to Carolo (2011), active listening enhances communication and relationships and develops understanding among stakeholders. Active listening does not only improve dialogue, but also demonstrates respect and focussed attention (Jonsodottir & Fridriksdottir, 2019). Active listening is an important aspect of dialogue because it allows for a conducive environment for intellectual exchange (Janz, 2018).

From a two-way symmetrical communication model perspective, communication is the exchange of information between the organisation and its stakeholders and adaptation to each other's needs to achieve mutual understanding (Kent & Lane, 2021). However,

Kent and Lane (2021) argue that dialogue is not necessarily symmetrical and does not solve all communication problems, and that there should be an understanding of negative spaces. When situated within the two-way symmetrical communication model, dialogue is defined as a process rooted in mutual understanding and responsiveness, as opposed to mere persuasion (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Kent & Lane, 2021). Dialogue facilitates stakeholder engagement, allowing for the joint development of collaborative understanding (Johnson-Cramer *et al.*, 2003:149).

Crane and Livesey (2003:47) distinguish between dialogue designed for persuasive purposes and genuine dialogue, premised on two-way communication. Persuasive dialogue is centred on the dissemination of rhetoric, aimed at convincing the other party of the value of a particular point, as opposed to genuine dialogue, which is geared towards collaboration, based on information sharing, joint learning, and problem-solving. It is evident that communication between CH9s and CSOs should reflect genuine dialogue, to reap the benefits of collaboration, joint learning, and problem solving. Noland and Phillips (2010:40) note that dialogue is a type of communication that involves, at the very least, respect and an appreciation of another person's dignity throughout the interaction. The Environmental Council, an independent convenor for dialogue, which was responsible for resolving the Brent Spar case in the mid-1990s, defines dialogue as a "search for win-wins based on sharing and understanding each party's interests and values towards building and strengthening relationships" (Harrison & John, 1999:8). This is in line with the outcomes of dialogue as identified in the two-way symmetrical model and the aims of communication in this study.

The definitions examined above are relevant to this study, as organisations interact with numerous and diverse stakeholders, who often have differing and competing interests (Arvidson, 2010:340; Collins *et al.*, 2006:1). The above definitions note that communication is a transactional process where people go through a process of sense-making and sense-giving to interpret what is being said. Dialogue is a social process used to make sense of social events and is socially constructed (Basu & Palazzo, 2009:125; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010:12; Sarturi *et al.*, 2023). Heath (2013:324) argues that dialogue based on the symmetrical model encourages long-term relationships to be built and maintained. Kent *et al.* (2008) identify five characteristics of dialogue: reciprocity (e.g., recognition of organisation-stakeholders relationships); propinquity (temporality

and spontaneous interactions with the public); empathy (supportiveness and confirmation of stakeholder goals and interests); risk (willingness to interact with individuals and stakeholders on their terms); and commitment (the extent to which an organisation gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics). This is in keeping with two-way symmetrical communication, which moves from persuasion towards decentralised communication that allows both the organisation and the stakeholder to benefit (Grunig, 2006; Limani *et al.*, 2024). Effective dialogue involves continuous interaction, mutual respect, honesty, and transparency.

#### **Theoretical statement 2: Dialogue**

For communication between CH9s and CSOs to be considered dialogical, it should be a two-way, continuous, interactive process of consultation, engagement, participation, and bargaining that reflects reciprocity, empathy, active listening, and mutual respect

By fostering such dialogical communication, CH9s and CSOs lay the foundation for genuine cooperation. The section demonstrates how active dialogue not only strengthens relationships but also facilitates meaningful cooperation towards common goals.

### **3.5.2 Cooperation**

Although cooperation is a main construct in two-way symmetrical communication, there is little agreement on how to define the concept. Smith *et al.* (1995:10), in their editorial for a special issue on cooperation within and between organisations for the *Academy of Management Journal*, characterised the state of affairs in theory and research on cooperation as chaotic, because of “the numerous definitions of cooperation scholars have offered without making many attempts to reference other usages of the term”. According to this conception, cooperation exists when individuals hold mutual goals and goal attainment is positively influenced by each other’s actions (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). There are various forms of cooperation within and between organisations (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Schruijer, 2006). Clashes between the interests of stakeholders inside and outside organisations are not uncommon. In certain contexts, cooperation seems to be rooted in informal agreements between the parties involved in such a way that it leads to mutual benefits for all.

The concept of cooperation is interpreted distinctly across various paradigms. Within the cybernetic tradition, cooperation is understood as the coordination among system components with the aim of optimising overall functioning and maintaining system stability. Here, the focus lies on the technical and functional integration of parts to achieve equilibrium without critical evaluation of the constitution of these systems, which may lead to abuse of power and marginalisation (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2003; Wiener, 2019). In contrast, the critical tradition conceptualises cooperation as a negotiated process that is inherently shaped by power dynamics. This perspective emphasises that genuine collaboration requires confronting and addressing existing inequalities, particularly those that influence who is able to participate and whose interests are prioritised (Freire, 2020). Thus, while the cybernetic paradigm centres on systemic optimisation and stability, the critical paradigm foregrounds issues of power, participation, and justice in the cooperative process (Habermas, 1984; Luhmann, 1995).

Cooperation increases the mutual benefit of the parties involved (Georgé *et al.*, 2011). From a two-way symmetrical model perspective, cooperation will require a process that is dialogical, continuous, consultative, participatory, and aimed at achieving mutual understanding. Cooperation is one of the most important themes for modern organisations. Cooperation as a synergistic force is a core organisational process driving organisational effectiveness (Chen *et al.*, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 1995). According to recent scholarly investigations, it has been shown that organisations achieve the highest level of performance when they actively participate in open dialogue and cooperative efforts with their stakeholders (Heino & Anttiroiko, 2014). Merkhofer *et al.* (1997) advocate for the advantages of cooperative techniques, asserting that such approaches enable stakeholders to collectively assume responsibility for decision-making. A variety of authors agree that cooperation is a process in which individuals, groups, and/or organisations interact and form relationships for mutual gain or benefit (Smith *et al.*, 1995). Lee (2024) suggests that engaging in two-way symmetrical communication by any involved party will contribute to cooperation by building trust and confidence among all parties. To this effect, cooperation can lead to achieving mutual understanding and creating value for the organisation and its stakeholders.

Cooperation is important for CH9s and CSOs for its ability to achieve common goals, the creation of synergies and innovations, the division of labour and the specialisation of

tasks, the sharing of resources, the support and building of relationships, the resolution of conflicts, the promotion of learning and growth, and the strengthening of social cohesion (see Borzaga & Bodini, 2020). If CH9s and CSOs cooperate with each other in their communication campaigns and collective decision-making processes, they should be able to achieve a common goal and build long-lasting relationships that will lead to mutual benefits (see Tuomela, 1993). Cooperation is a fundamental principle for collective progress, development, and harmonious coexistence.

The communication framework adopts intentional cooperation. Cooperation implies that both CH9s and CSOs can work together and form a relationship for mutual benefits, at least in the long run (see Georgé *et al.*, 2011). This feeds into the overall mutual benefits of both CH9s and CSOs. Agents can act cooperatively yet adopt different social strategies. A simple strategy, which can be called benevolent cooperation, is to assume that all agents are cooperative, and so they automatically cooperate if they are asked (Georgé *et al.*, 2011). Benevolent cooperation is mutually beneficial for both CH9s and CSOs. CH9s and CSOs need to root their cooperation through a formal agreement that will lead to mutual benefits and understanding. The level of cooperation between CH9s and CSOs should be high so that the goals of both organisations will be better served for mutual outcomes.

Based on the discussion of cooperation as a principle of the two-way symmetrical model, the following operational definition has been formulated.

#### **Theoretical statement 3: Cooperation**

Cooperation between CH9s and CSOs should entail collective efforts, including collective decision-making, to reach mutual goals that will contribute to mutual benefit.

Cooperation comes with differences in opinion, meaning there will be a potential conflict of interest. This is why conflict resolution is important.

#### **3.5.2.1 Conflict resolutions**

Conflict resolution is an important construct of two-way symmetrical communication. The symmetrical paradigm addresses conflict by mutual adjustment instead of persuasion or

control (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Heath (2006) associates symmetrical discussion with the resolving of rhetorical conflicts. He perceives organisations and the public as participants in a "marketplace of ideas", where conflicting assertions are reconciled through conversation. Effective conflict resolution entails acknowledging and legitimising divergent perspectives, a process he refers to as "rhetorical dialogue". The purpose of communication is not to eradicate differences but to achieve ethical and mutually advantageous results.

Kent and Taylor (2002) discuss dialogue as a mechanism for conflict transformation. They augment the Grunig's paradigm by demonstrating that authentic discourse necessitates empathy, risk, and transparency. In a conflict, this signifies that all parties recognise their vulnerabilities and must be prepared to adapt. Such a communicative process can alter relationships, rather than merely resolving conflicts.

When there is an inability to communicate clearly and respectfully what a party means, conflicts often develop out of confusion, hurt, and anger (Fisher, 2000). The two-way symmetrical paradigm calls for organisations to act as mediators to promote consensus and conflict resolution (Guth *et al.*, 2005:7). This is important because incompatibility, miscommunication, and misunderstanding can create conflict if it is not addressed by the parties involved (Fisher, 2000). Additionally, parties may perceive a situation differently, leading to a breakdown of communication until they share information and a common understanding toward mutual goals and clarify their perceptions (Fisher, 2000). Depending on how conflict is handled, it can either lead to destruction or to positive social change (Kriesberg, 1999).

Conflict resolution takes place through the following means: win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win approaches. In the win-lose approach, the plan is to coerce the other side to capitulate. A majority vote, the authority of the leader, or judicial determination are some mechanisms that can be used for this purpose (Fisher, 2000; Hidalgo, 2022; Wani, 2011). In the end, all lose when there is a victor who is superior and a vanquished who withdraws in shame but prepares to face the next round and in the long run, they are all losers (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2018).

In the lose-lose strategy for conflict resolution, the simplest compromise is reached, and conflict is soothed over (Fisher, 2000). The strategy views disagreement as inevitable;

therefore, it is important to take a painless route to resolve conflict. Using this approach means that each party gets what it wants to some extent and receives partial satisfaction (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2018). A more satisfactory outcome might have been achieved if both sides had confronted the conflict fully and cooperatively. It may also be useful for the parties to use this approach in real life to divide limited resources or to avoid escalating to a win-lose situation (see Fisher, 2000; Hidalgo, 2022; Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2018; Wani, 2011).

A win-win approach involves solving problems collaboratively to maximise the interests of both parties (Fisher, 2000), as argued in the two-way symmetrical model on a win-win strategy for achieving mutual understanding. In this context, the conflict is seen as a problem to be solved rather than a war to be won. As opposed to us (one party) versus they (the other party), the important distinction is we (both parties) versus the problem (Wani, 2011). This method focusses on the needs and constraints of both parties rather than emphasising strategies designed to conquer. Full problem definition and analysis, and development of alternatives precede consensus decisions on mutually agreeable solutions. The parties work toward common and superordinate goals, i.e., ones that can only be attained by both parties pulling together. In this approach, long-term relationships are prioritised over short-term accommodations, and the quality of those relationships is emphasised (Hidalgo, 2022; Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2018; Wani, 2011). The win-win approach to conflict resolution will be adopted in the communication framework. This is because a win-win will bring the most benefit to both CH9s and CSOs and their long-term relationship. The win-win situation assumes that integrative agreements are possible, given the full range of resources existing in the relationship. Attitudes and behaviours are oriented toward trust and acceptance, not an escalation of suspicion and hostility. The win-win approach requires a very high degree of patience and skill in human relations and problem-solving (see Fisher, 2000; Hidalgo, 2022; Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2018; Wani, 2011). Therefore, it is a key construct in the communication framework.

**Theoretical statement 4: Conflict resolution**

In instances of conflict, CH9s and CSOs should employ a win-win approach to conflict resolution by solving problems collaboratively, taking the needs and constraints of both parties into consideration.

### **3.6 Conclusion on two-way**

As indicated in the discussion on the two-way symmetrical communication model, the application of this model can enhance and strengthen the initiation and maintenance of positive relationships between CH9s and CSOs through dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution (Grunig, 1992:552). Ultimately, organisations that engage in dialogue with stakeholders are likely to succeed because of the open system of communication and engagement leading to a better understanding of stakeholder needs (Heino & Anttiroiko, 2014). In this study, the focus is on building and maintaining mutually beneficial, positive, long-term relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment, and it is argued that incorporating elements of the stakeholder relationship management theory can complement the two-way symmetrical model in facilitating such relationships.

### **3.7 Stakeholder relationship management theory**

Stakeholder relationship management theory focusses on the relationship between organisations and their stakeholders, and this theory provides communication strategies to manage relationships. Stakeholder relationship management theory is connected to the two-way symmetrical model, and both perspectives are working towards the same goal of building and maintaining mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships. According to Dozier *et al.* (1995), relationships were the starting point of relationship management. Ledingham *et al.* (1997) define relationships as the state that exists between an organisation and its key stakeholders. According to Huang (1998), an organisation-stakeholder relationship is defined by the degree of trust and agreement among the organisation and its public, satisfaction with each other, and commitment to the organisation. The success of the organisations depends on the relationship they have with their stakeholders and, therefore, it is important to manage these relationships effectively as part of the organisational management function (Hon & Gruning, 1999; Kee & Barsi, nd). Storbacka and Lehtinen (2001) go so far as to indicate that the development of relationships should be seen as one of the most critical assets in a company. Within this context, the stakeholder relationship management theory considers how an organisation's stakeholder relationships are managed to create value for stakeholders.

Stakeholder relationship management is widely accepted today and has become self-evident, yet as a theory, it has been criticised by numerous scholars (Antonacopoulou & Méric, 2005; Broom *et al.*, 1997; Friedman & Miles, 2006; Jones & Wicks, 1999; Key, 1999; Koschmann, 2009; Laskin, 2009; Mainardes *et al.*, 2011). Stakeholder relationship management, despite being extensively advocated as a framework for ethical and strategic communication, has faced criticism for its excessively administrative and instrumental characteristics. One of the criticisms is that organisations frequently employ stakeholder relationship management to further organisational goals instead of fostering authentic, reciprocal connections. The central argument is that this approach regards stakeholders mainly as instruments for attaining legitimacy or mitigating risk, rather than as equal collaborators in discourse (Fassin, 2012; Greenwood, 2007). However, in the context of CH9s and CSOs, the interdependence of the stakeholders shifts from treating stakeholders for compliance towards a collaborative approach, which is essential for mutual empowerment (Ebrahim, 2019; Mena & Palazzo, 2020). Regardless of this criticism, stakeholder relationship management helps organisations find shared interests, avoid conflict, and adjust to changing social standards by encouraging two-way communication with a wide range of audiences (Crane *et al.*, 2022; Freeman *et al.*, 2023; Knox *et al.*, 2025:153).

Relationship management involves the process of initiating relationships with stakeholders and aligning them to the interests of the organisation through communication and engagement (Ledingham, 2003). Two types of relationships exist between an organisation and its stakeholders, namely exchange and communal relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20). In an exchange relationship, the parties in the relationship benefit from one another because they received specific benefits in the past or expect benefits in the future (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2001:13, 2005:396, 2007:456; Fu *et al.*, 2024:841). In contrast, the parties in a communal relationship benefit one another out of concern for the other's welfare even though there is no financial incentive to do so (Hon & Grunig, 1999:21; Hung, 2001:13, 2007:456). Hence, Hon and Grunig's communal relationships view of stakeholder relationship management theory will be adopted as the ideal in this research's CH9 communication framework. Communal relationships allow for the exchange of information and ideas.

Relationship management is most effective when it is based on shared aims and common interests, and when they produce understanding and benefits for both the organisation and stakeholder (Ledingham, 2018). In addition, the relational paradigm encourages determining true behavioural change rather than accepting outcomes as proof of the value of the relationship. Developing relationships and ratings of those relationships can further operate as a predictor of stakeholder behaviour; the effectiveness of relationship management can be measured in terms of relationship building (Ledingham, 2018). Communication with stakeholders and maintaining long-term relationships are part of developing relationships (see Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2001, 2005, 2007; Ledingham, 2003). Therefore, both CH9s and CSOs need to be invested in pursuing productive communication towards mutually beneficial relationships.

Stakeholder relationship management theory focusses on relationship outcomes to facilitate relationship building and partnership between organisations (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3). In 1999, Hon and Grunig developed a six-item scale for measuring these outcomes in relationships. These outcomes are identified as control mutuality (Burgoon & Hale, 1984, 1987; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Ferguson, 1984; Ambrose & Siddiki, 2024:498), trust (Grunig *et al.*, 1992), satisfaction (Ferguson, 1984; Grunig *et al.*, 1992), and commitment (Aldrich, 1975, 1979; Burgoon & Hale, 1984, 1987; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Canary & Stafford, 1992). To achieve these outcomes, relationship-building strategies should be employed for a mutually beneficial relationship to be created between the organisation and its stakeholders (in this study, between CH9s and CSOs).

Based on the introduction to stakeholder relationship management theory, the following theoretical statement has been formulated:

**Theoretical statement 5: Stakeholder relationship management**

CH9s and CSOs must actively pursue stakeholder relationship management theory in a two-way symmetrical manner towards achieving the same goal of building and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term, positive stakeholder relationships.

In the following section, the relationship management outcomes and strategies will be discussed, as relevant to relationship building between CH9s and CSOs.

### **3.7.1 Relationship outcomes**

Recent scholarship highlights two contrasting paradigms in understanding relationship management outcomes. From a cybernetic perspective, relationship management is often framed as a process that leverages information flows, feedback loops, and control systems to sustain organisational equilibrium and predictability (Heath, 2022; Gregory & Willis, 2023). This tradition emphasises the optimisation of system stability and harmonious interactions through continuous adjustment and monitoring. In contrast, critical theorists argue that the primary objective from a critical standpoint is to uncover and confront systemic inequities, thereby fostering more equitable participation, amplifying marginalised voices, and driving transformative social change, rather than simply preserving the status quo (Edwards & Hodges, 2024; Motion *et al.*, 2023).

The following section discusses the outcomes of the stakeholder relationship management theory. These outcomes are trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. It will further detail the relevance of these outcomes for the study.

#### **3.7.1.1 Trust**

Trust is not universal and has been defined by many scholars from different perspectives. Trust speaks to each party's level of confidence and openness with the other. Grunig and Huang (2000), as well as Boon and Holmes (1991), define trust as “one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party”. In line with the idea of willingness to open oneself to the other party, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) alluded that trust is a state in which people reveal their vulnerabilities, believing that their openness would not be taken advantage of and are aware of possible gains or even losses but are willing to give in to the other person with the hope that they will behave acceptably. Individuals reveal their vulnerabilities to build trust, believing they will not be exploited. Dimmick *et al.* (2000) therefore defined trust as a willingness to self-disclose.

Anderson and Weitz's (1992:20) definition of trust focusses on the confidence aspect, by stating that trust is "one party believing that its needs will be fulfilled in the future by actions taken by the other party".

Using the conceptualisation of trust by Hon and Grunig (1999), this study defines trust as "the willingness to rely on the other party in whom one has confidence". In the context of this study, trust is the process by which CH9s and CSOs disclose their vulnerabilities and are open to criticism, rather than exploitation. To this end, trust can be used as a process of learning about each other, their vulnerabilities, and the impact on their organisation, and subsequently how this can be used to build a mutually beneficial relationship towards mutual empowerment.

Furthermore, Church *et al.* (2003) mention that trust itself is promoted overall through relationships that reflect accountability, openness, and transparency. Accountability means both CH9s and CSOs need to assume responsibility for the impacts of their practices, policies, and processes and the decisions that are behind those practices (see Waddock, 2003). Transparency implies openness, communication, and accountability. According to Waddock (2002), transparency means allowing action plans and decisive decisions to be visible to interested stakeholders and needs to indicate why the information matters. Transparency is important because it is seen to be an important counter to stakeholder distrust and lack of confidence among role players. In the context of this study, both CH9s and CSOs must be transparent and accountable in their actions for the benefit of the citizens. This would imply that even though CH9s know that there may be gains or losses, they are willing to give in to the CSOs in hopes that they will behave in such a way as to benefit the relationship between them (see Coleman & Deutsch, 2000).

The variable of trust includes integrity, dependability, and competence (Carnevale, 1995). Integrity refers to the belief that an organisation is fair and just (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Hon and Grunig (2019) describe dependability as the belief that an organisation will do what it says it will do and competence as a belief that the organisation can accomplish what it promises to accomplish.

Trust is a critical attribute determined by how each party can rely on the integrity of the promise made by the other party (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Similarly, an organisation's track record depends on how much it keeps its word (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

According to Church *et al.* (2003), trust is essential for building successful networks, creating thriving "communities of practice", and influencing partnerships positively (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). Where there is no trust, communications campaigns and messages can fail, especially if this lack of trust has not been identified and addressed with the relevant stakeholders involved. Stakeholders that are in relationships characterised by prominent levels of trust are more likely to openly exchange information and to act with caring generosity toward one another than those in relationships lacking trust (Senge, 1990; Waddock, 2002). Trust between CH9s and CSOs is important in building long-lasting relationships. Furthermore, Church *et al.* (2003) and Mchunu and Van der Merwe (2011) highlight that trust develops gradually through transparent, accountable, and open relationships fostered by ongoing communication and dialogue.

Ki and Hon (2007) found that trust, as an essential element, is inter-correlated with commitment and satisfaction.

For CH9s and CSOs to build trust, a wide scope of information is needed, as different types of information affect the experienced trust. For CH9s and CSOs to communicate needs and expectations precisely and efficiently, both rational and emotional information are needed for both parties (Dimmick *et al.*, 2000). To develop trust, CH9s and CSOs need to specify their roles clearly and communicate openly, as these are critical. If CH9s and CSOs can state their needs and expectations openly, they may be able to discover the possibilities and potential of the relationship early. If parties are aware of the basics and if they are able and willing to communicate, the trust-building process should fasten. Trust, like any other social process, undergoes different stages and phases (Luhman, 1979). According to Luhmann (1979), interacting parties may "overdraw on the information base" in the early phase of the relationship. Lewis and Weigert (1985) describe that "sentiments of trust" re-enforce the trust-building process. Especially in the partnership initiation, when there is little information available, parties may rely on soft issues and personal impressions. As the relationship evolves, parties gain insight through experience and are thus able to form a more rational and cognitive estimation of the other

party. The research contends that trust improves the levels of commitment between parties. Applying the relationship strategies should, according to theory, add to trust.

Consequently, trust plays an important role in relationship building and engagement and must be protected at all costs. Organisations which place trust at the heart of relationship management are likely to succeed compared to those suffering from a trust deficit. In this study, trust is placed at the centre of relationship management to guide how mutually beneficial relationships must be formed to facilitate mutual empowerment.

Based on the discussion of trust, the following theoretical statement has been formulated:

**Theoretical statement 6: Trust**

Both CH9s and CSOs should have confidence in each other and believe that their needs will be fulfilled by the other party to such an extent that they are willing to rely on each other and feel safe enough to be open and vulnerable in the relationship without fear of being exploited.

Trust is an essential element of commitment, as true commitment involves not only trusting one another but also continuously investing in the relationship and honouring each other's needs and expectations. The next section will examine commitment as a relationship outcome.

### **3.7.1.2 Commitment**

Hon and Grunig (1999:3) define commitment as “the extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote”. Additionally, they identified two dimensions of commitment: *Continuance commitment* is “a certain line of action”, and *affective commitment* is “an emotional orientation”. Affective commitment is about positive emotional attachment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). When applied to membership organisations, it can be defined as members' emotional attachment to an organisation, depending on how they feel about it (Ki & Hon, 2011). Continuance commitment is a “commitment to continue a certain line of action” (Meyer & Allen, 1984:373). Both these dimensions of commitment are critical for the communication framework. Moorman *et al.*'s (1993) definition of commitment links strongly to that of Hon

and Grunig, as they define commitment as the desire to maintain the relationship in the future.

Commitment is extended beyond the ability to continue and emotional orientation to include a duty or a pledge that organisations make for a certain purpose (Walter *et al.*, 2006). In addition to the definition, Goulet and Frank (2002) add that such a duty or pledge includes patterns of behaviours, motivating forces, or an attitude towards the relationship role players have. In the context of this study, commitment is conceptualised as the desire by one party to maintain the relationship and the pledge to continue based on the motivation. This means that the CH9 and CSO will evaluate the relationship and, if it is beneficial, commit to achieve mutually beneficial relationships and ultimately mutual empowerment. An indicator of commitment includes affectivity, continuance, and normative components (Allen & Meyer, 1990). It has been found that commitment affects behaviour across disciplines due to this underlying dimension (e.g., Ki & Hon, 2007a; MacKenzie *et al.*, 1998). Commitment is used to reflect positive emotional attachment and feelings of obligation that stakeholders have towards such a purpose (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The loyalty, duty, and pledge that people refer to are different forms of commitment. Committed persons may at times go as far as doing something that is not within their expected roles (Goulet & Frank, 2002). This indicates the important benefits of commitment in a relationship.

This study adopts Ki and Hon's (2007b) conceptualisation of commitment, which is the belief that a relationship with the other party is valuable enough to warrant maximum effort in maintaining the relationship. The research also adopts active commitment, which refers to a process of deepening knowledge of an organisation and shows "a genuine passion for the future of the organisation and the work it is trying to achieve" (Ki & Hon, 2007b:8).

Commitment is important because it improves the relationship, leading to successful organisational outcomes. Bruning *et al.* (2004:445) found that "organisation-public relationships, when managed effectively, positively affect the attitudes, evaluations, and behaviours of key stakeholders". To this end, organisations with strong stakeholder relationships are likely to enjoy long-term commitment and positive attitude and behaviour. Commitment is also linked to transparency because stakeholders are likely to

respond positively to a transparent organisation compared to organisations that do not (Galbreath, 2006).

Moreover, organisations must communicate effectively and transparently to initiate and maintain commitment as part of a communication framework which guides the rules of engagement (Ohammed & Sharipudin, 2017). This means that the committed party believes the relationship with the organisation is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely. Hon and Grunig (1999) have said that a degree of believing and feeling in the relationship between the organisation and the stakeholder is based on commitment. Bruning and Galloway (2003), as well as Ledingham and Bruning (1998), emphasise that the practices influencing how the public perceives and interacts with an organisation are crucial for fostering a productive, committed relationship (Jahansoozi, 2007). Such commitment between parties often cultivates a sense and state of mutual satisfaction.

Consequently, CH9s and CSOs should strive to be transparent, communicate effectively, and engage their stakeholders with respect to gain commitment. They should also engage in open two-way communication to build mutually beneficial relations which can lead to commitment from all stakeholders.

#### **Theoretical statement 7: Commitment**

Both CH9s and CSOs should experience that their relationship is sufficiently beneficial and because of this, spend time and energy on maintaining and promoting the relationship.

Commitment fostered through transparent and effective communication between organisations and stakeholders often leads to mutual satisfaction. The next section focusses on satisfaction.

### 3.7.1.3 Satisfaction

Hon and Grunig (1999:20) describe satisfaction as the “extent to which one party feels favourably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced”. It results from comparing expectations with an evaluation of the organisation's actual work. Research on relationships acknowledges how complex satisfaction measurement can be, but it is still the most used indicator for capturing the quality of relationships (Ki & Shin, 2006). Joby (2020) describes stakeholder satisfaction as a measurement of how services supplied by an organisation meet or surpass stakeholder expectations. This study defines satisfaction as the extent to which each party feels favourably toward the other.

The mutual satisfaction phase of public relations encourages organisations and their stakeholders to compromise and make complementary adjustments to one another so both can benefit from their relationship (Mohammed & Sharipudin, 2017). Overall, mutual satisfaction is important because it promotes trust, fosters cooperation, reduces conflict, and increases loyalty. It is possible for individuals and organisations to develop positive relationships that are based on fairness, respect, and understanding by prioritising mutual satisfaction when interacting with each other (Heiss & Gordon, 1994).

According to Ferguson (1984), understanding what contributes to a critical stakeholder's satisfaction could influence a communication strategy. When a relationship yields more benefits than costs, it is considered satisfying (Arvey & Murphy, 1998; Hon & Grunig, 1999). Investing the time and resources needed to strengthen a relationship between an organisation and the stakeholder will likely increase public satisfaction (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Communication can play an important role in facilitating relationships between the organisation and stakeholders and may be worth investing time and resources to strengthen satisfaction. This resonates with Kelly's (1998) stewardship process, which suggests non-profits use two-way symmetrical communication with existing donors to make them feel confident about keeping the relationship and collaborating in the future. CH9s and CSOs can achieve satisfaction by ensuring that time and resources are invested in stakeholder relationships, engagement, and communication to achieve mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual

empowerment. This calls for a stakeholder relationship strategy based on transparency, openness, and mutual respect.

#### **Theoretical statement 8: Satisfaction**

CH9s and CSOs should feel favourable towards the other due to positive expectations about the relationship being reinforced, and experience that the benefits of being in the relationship outweigh the costs.

Satisfaction relies on how parties can meet the agreed-upon elements that each can control; a phenomenon known as control mutuality, the concept discussed in the next section.

#### **3.7.1.4 Control mutuality**

Control mutuality determines who has the right to influence which party (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Seltzer, 2006) and reflects stakeholders' satisfaction with the control they have over their relationship (Arvey & Murphy, 1998). There is a natural imbalance in relationships, but for them to be stable, organisations and their stakeholders should have some control over each other (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Often, organisations have a larger pool of resources than their stakeholder counterparts in many organisation-public relationships, allowing them to exert greater control. A positive and healthy organisation-stakeholder relationship will not be purely controlled by one party or another. Each party should have the opportunity to exercise some influence in the relationship (Seltzer, 2006). The concept of control mutuality involves decision-making processes and how each party's opinion is incorporated into final decisions (Ki & Hon, 2012).

Grunig, *et al.*, (2002) explain that parties feel satisfied if they have some degree of control over one another and the relationship, despite the power imbalances which may exist. Bruning and Ledingham (1999) applied this idea from interpersonal communication (Duck, 1984) to organisation-stakeholder relationships: that awareness of each other's existence and the recognition that the organisation and its key stakeholders can affect each other are the cornerstones of a relationship. Only if both parties have a consensus that one has some control over the other can two-way communication be achieved and relationships be built.

Furthermore, Grunig and Huang (2000) advocate control mutuality as a cognitive aspect of the extent of the reciprocity by which public opinions are shared with the management of an organisation. Control mutuality, as a norm of reciprocity and the empowerment of stakeholders, is important to the interdependence among relational partners and the stability of a relationship (Huang, 2001; Grunig & Huang, 2000). This reciprocity augments stakeholder empowerment, trust, and collective accountability (Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2012). Ultimately, control mutuality between CSOs and CH9s signifies a sophisticated collaboration in which power is decentralised and negotiated through discussion, mutual respect, and acknowledgement of each other's interdependence in achieving their joint mandates. To this end, control mutuality becomes the reciprocity process where the organisation and its stakeholders rethink how mutually beneficial relationships can be achieved. Incorporating CSOs in agenda-setting, policy discussions, and monitoring processes can enable them to exert significant impact while upholding the constitutional duties of CH9 institutions.

#### **Theoretical statement 9: Control mutuality**

Both CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge their interdependence in achieving their joint mandates and should feel satisfied with the control they have over their relationship, including decision-making processes.

To reach the intended positive relationship outcomes discussed above, there are relationship strategies that both CSOs and CH9s could employ. The next section fleshes out relationship strategies relevant to the CH9-CSO context.

### **3.7.2 Relationship strategies**

There are several different relationship strategies in communication, for example, a competitive strategy, a collaborative strategy, a compromising strategy, an avoiding strategy, and an accommodating strategy (Ki & Hon, 2008). The communication framework of this study adopts the collaborative strategy, which is focussed on achieving mutual goals that benefit both parties (see Sanfey *et al.*, 2013). This approach is

characterised by a win-win mentality, where both parties work together to find a solution that satisfies both of their needs. As long as both parties are interested in achieving a desirable goal and are cooperative, this strategy may be effective (Ling & Yen, 2001). Collaborative strategy includes openness and disclosure, assurances, access, networking, sharing of tasks, positivity, reciprocity, relationship nurturing, reporting, and responsibility (Ling & Yen, 2001). These constructs will be discussed in detail below.

### **3.7.2.1 Openness and disclosure**

Grunig and Huang (2000), as well as Huang (2001), defined openness as an organisation's efforts to provide information about the nature of the organisation and what it is doing. The concept of openness in corporate communication involves disclosing "thoughts and feelings among parties" in a relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999:14). The above authors did not find a specific link between openness/disclosure and a particular relationship outcome, which led them to consider if openness/disclosure "is not a mutually inclusive strategy but rather a dimension of all cultivation strategies" (Hon & Grunig, 2009:259).

Moreover, Grunig and Huang (2000) articulate that monitoring disclosure provides an effective gauge of relationship quality. In a detailed example based on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) study, AT&T community leader teams, under evaluation in the 1970s, tended to be more open with their concerns during interaction with effective teams than with less effective teams. Openness is a desirable trait that CH9s must adopt to keep CSOs satisfied with the information and initiative they provide. According to Bok (1989), openness can make the distribution of power in a relationship more symmetrical. In the context of the relationships of interest to this study, CH9s and CSOs should be open and transparent with one another, which should lead to mutual benefit and relationship-building. Both CH9s and CSOs should feel comfortable with the manner of openly sharing information without fear of victimisation. CH9's and CSO's openness or disclosure should allow both parties to control a problem, whereas a lack of openness will not give either party control over a problem, which undermines trust and mutuality in control. Overall, openness and disclosure are important in communication because they promote trust, understanding, problem-solving, emotional well-being, and personal growth. By being

open and honest with each other, individuals can build more meaningful and fulfilling relationships (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Openness is a vital construct in the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs. Openness is the opposite of secrecy; that is, if transparency occurs, it conveys honesty and integrity (Ball, 2009). Transparency, or the degree of openness in conveying information, is seen as a device signalling the trustworthiness of the actor in negotiations (Clark & Reed, 2005; Cowhey 1993; Finel & Lord, 1999). Openness works hand in glove with other constructs toward mutually beneficial long-term relationships. However, the allowance of engagement considers openness or disclosure as an important value for CH9s and CSOs.

Overall, an organisation can apply truthfulness by being transparent, honest, and ethical, fostering a culture of truthfulness, and taking responsibility (Martinson, 1996). These organisations must share information that affects both parties, including values, goals, measurable outcomes, and accountability, which in return will demonstrate openness (Ki & Hon, 2009). CH9s and CSOs can demonstrate openness when they keep each other informed or up to date about the collaboration's activities and the progress of the projects or campaigns. Information sharing, especially for public institutions, is important because it increases the level of transparency, collaboration, openness, and participation culture among stakeholders (Casalino *et al.*, 2015). However, Aprianto and Idowu (2025) argue that despite all the processes in place to facilitate information sharing, organisations still struggle to implement transparent strategies and propose that organisations develop a culture of sharing to increase public trust.

#### **Theoretical statement 10: Openness and disclosure**

CH9s and CSOs need to be open to each other by providing transparent information on the nature of the organisation, what they are doing, and allowing engagement from the other with this information.

Openness and disclosure can provide CSOs with the assurance that they are regarded as important partners by CH9s.

### 3.7.2.2 Assurances

Ki and Hon (2009) define assurances as “any efforts by an organisation to assure its strategic stakeholders that their concerns are attended to”. It also refers to attempts by parties in the relationship to assure the other parties that they and their concerns are legitimate (Hon & Grunig, 1999). This strategy might also involve attempts by the parties in the relationship to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining the relationship.

A lack of assurances can lead to issues of control mutuality, as assurance behaviours are crucial for addressing time-sensitive concerns that arise from insufficient communication and are instrumental in fostering trust and positive control mutuality (Bordeaux, 2016; Conody *et al.*, 2016; Ki & Hon, 2009; Shen, 2011).

The above authors demonstrate that assurances can be a “primary predictor of all relationship outcome indicators”. Assurance strategies allow stakeholders opportunities to demonstrate commitment, and “to raise issues and propose solutions” (Ki & Hon, 2009).

Assurance means actively creating a space where everyone feels accepted and empowered to participate fully. It requires a conscious effort to identify and address any barriers that may prevent individuals from feeling excluded, such as discrimination, prejudice, or unequal treatment (Schwartz, 2007). In the context of this study, representatives of CH9s and CSOs should address each other’s concerns and assure each other that their concerns will be addressed within the agreed timeframe. For example, CH9 should pay particularly close attention to CSOs, and they must address each other’s concerns throughout until their concerns are resolved.

#### **Theoretical statement 11: Assurance**

CH9s and CSOs should assure each other that their concerns are legitimate and will be addressed in the agreed timeframe.

CH9s can utilise access as a strategy to contribute to CSO assurance.

### 3.7.2.3 Access

Hon and Grunig (1999:14) define access as how parties avail themselves to the other. Hon and Grunig (1999) further define access as “the degree of effort that an organisation puts into providing communication channels or media outlets that assist its strategic publics in reaching it”.

Access is an important variable for this study because both institutions need to be available to the other and provide access to its organisational leaders. There are multiple ways for organisations to be accessible, and in the digitally connected world, the internet is one source of accessibility. If a website provides contact information such as telephone numbers and staff electronic mail addresses, it can make it easy for both parties to be accessible (Conody *et al.*, 2016; Shen, 2011). Websites can encourage feedback through bulletin board discussions and online surveys and provide other mechanisms for the stakeholder to gain access and communicate with the organisation (Bordeaux, 2016; Conody *et al.*, 2016; Shen, 2011; Bolleyer, 2024:2; Madekwe, 2025:60-71). For CH9s and CSOs, fostering accessibility between one another is essential to building a strong, collaborative relationship. This accessibility can be achieved through various forms of public participation, such as joint community visits and engagement activities, which provide opportunities for both parties to exchange information and insights. Additionally, hotlines serve as valuable tools that allow CH9s and CSOs to communicate directly and efficiently, especially for reporting instances of abuse of power or mismanagement of state resources. These mechanisms help deepen mutual understanding and strengthen their partnership. Subsequently, Bordeaux (2016), Conody *et al.* (2016) and Shen (2011) found that access can have “a positive impact on control mutuality” and they explained that “having accessibility to express one’s opinion is crucial” (Shen, 2011).

In the context of CH9s and CSOs, it is imperative for both organisations to make sure that they are accessible to each other and to ensure that the website is easy to navigate for any enquiries that they may have for each other. Both parties should answer telephone calls or read letters or e-mail messages from the other. Both parties should also be willing to go to the other when they have complaints or queries. Access can allow both CH9s and CSOs to join in the decision-making process. CH9s and CSOs should

outline when and how often they communicate with each other and how accessible they are to each other for mutual benefit as the end goal.

**Theoretical statement 12: Access**

CH9s and CSOs should be accessible to one another by using communication channels that are accessible to both parties and by availing themselves to participate in communication with the other when the need arises.

Access should enhance networking opportunities among the parties.

### **3.7.2.4 Networking**

The term networking refers to behaviours that facilitate work-related activities by enabling individuals to access resources and maximise mutual advantages through the voluntary granting of access to resources and the building, maintenance, and use of informal relationships (Wolff & Moser, 2009). Research on networking in management traces its roots back to Mintzberg (1973), who stressed managers' role as establishing contacts and interacting with people outside the formal organisation's hierarchy. As a goal-directed behaviour, networking involves establishing, cultivating, and utilising interpersonal relationships (Gibson *et al.*, 2014; Michael & Yukl, 1993). It is believed that networking promotes the development of personal and professional opportunities (Baker, 1994; Wolfe & Moser, 2009) and contributes to organisational functioning by enhancing organisational communication and access to resources (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Some in the popular press have asserted that the quality of an individual's network has as much or more impact on a person's career success than his or her skills, knowledge, and experience (Torres, 2005). When applying this principle to organisations, Hon and Grunig (1999) posit that organisations should build networks with the same groups as their existing stakeholders.

In the context of this study, networking between CH9s and CSOs can take the form of conferences, seminars, and community outreach programmes, and this can create some level of visibility for both organisations through stakeholder engagement and collaboration. To this end, CSOs should extend the network to other COSs who may require the services of CH9s for mutual benefits.

In general, networking involves the exchange of effective information, benefits, and influence (Michael & Yukl, 1993:328). However, interpersonal relationships play a critical role in networking, through spending time with stakeholders for mutual empowerment to gain support and make the relationship enjoyable (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Networking can also be realised through shared explanations, control mutuality, and liking (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Furthermore, Guerrero *et al.* (1993) state that networking should be proactive and nurture beneficial maintenance behaviours. Thus, this relationship maintenance strategy is manifested through the number and quality of contacts with networks of these groups (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Based on the arguments above, networking is a process of facilitating resource sharing through interpersonal relationships and extending access to other organisations and stakeholders with similar interests.

#### **Theoretical statement 13: Networking**

CH9s and CSOs should widen their circle by sharing their networks with each other to access more resources and maximise common advantages.

One of the main benefits of improved networks is the ability to share tasks, making it easier to reach organisational goals.

#### **3.7.2.5 Sharing of tasks**

Sharing tasks refers to the process of dividing up responsibilities and duties among individuals or groups within an organisation or team. Sharing of tasks means that parties share whatever responsibilities have been created by the mutual decisions made in the relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ki & Hon, 2009). Hon and Grunig (1999) applied this strategy to organisation-stakeholder relationships and defined sharing of tasks as “organizations and stakeholders’ sharing in solving joint or separate problems”.

Overall, sharing tasks is an important practice for organisations and teams that want to improve efficiency, productivity, collaboration, workload management, and job satisfaction (Zlotkin & Rosenschein, 1989). By dividing tasks and responsibilities among team members, organisations can ensure that work is completed effectively and efficiently. Canary and Stafford (1992) found that sharing of tasks is a consistent and

strong predictor of control mutuality, commitment, liking, and satisfaction and that it contributes to parties' liking one another in interpersonal relationships. Other researchers also have commented on the importance of sharing tasks for relational satisfaction (Huston *et al.*, 1986; Ki & Hon, 2009; Wilmot & Sillars, 1989). Hon and Grunig (1999) determined that sharing of tasks could be measured by integrating social responsibility reports that would demonstrate the extent to which management had worked on problems of interest.

Zlotkin and Rosenschein (1989) argue that sharing tasks ensures a fair distribution of work and that each person or group is responsible for a specific set of tasks. In the context of the relationship of interest to this study, any collaborative efforts and shared problem-solving efforts are considered shared tasks for both CH9s and CSOs. Sharing tasks is a fundamental aspect of respectful and healthy relationships, and it is important to ensure that both CH9s and CSOs involved are fully aware of and agree to the activity. Task sharing must be freely given, enthusiastic, informed, and ongoing; it should not be coerced or obtained through threats, intimidation, or manipulation (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Sharing can be withdrawn at any time, and it is the responsibility of both CG9s and CSOs involved to ensure that communication is clear and ongoing throughout any activity.

#### **Theoretical statement 14: Sharing of tasks**

CH9s and CSOs should share tasks when addressing mutual problems and goals, dividing responsibilities during project planning and implementation.

Sharing of tasks involves cooperation between team members. This can foster positivity between individuals and organisations.

#### **3.7.2.6 Positivity**

In Canary and Stafford's (1994:15) study, positivity is conceptualised as "attempts to make interactions pleasant". Hon and Grunig (1999:14) applied this strategy to public relations and defined it as "anything the organisation or stakeholders do to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved". Positivity corresponds to the principle of being unconditionally constructive, espoused by Fisher and Brown (1998) in

building relationships, which Grunig and Grunig (1992) and Plowman (1995) adopted for the symmetrical model.

Positive, long-term relationships are valuable to organisations because these relationships are more likely to encourage supportive behaviours while also preventing unsupportive behaviours (among the stakeholders) (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). Although some scholars and practitioners have indicated that maintaining positive and long-term relationships is the litmus test for successful public relations, studies have empirically determined how positive relationships drive the stakeholders' attitudes and behaviour (Bordeaux, 2016; Conody *et al.*, 2016). Positivity has consistently emerged as an important predictor of control mutuality and liking, and as a primary maintenance strategy predicting trust (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1994). Ki and Hon's (2009) work found similar results, indicating that positivity can lead to the relationship outcomes of control mutuality, satisfaction, and trust.

In the context of this study, positivity is demonstrated in behaviours that make the relationship enjoyable for CH9s and CSOs. For both CH9s and CSOs to enjoy their relationship for mutual benefit, they need to integrate positivity that should lead to control mutuality, trust, commitment and satisfaction. The next section discusses reciprocity to account for the return benefits of mutually beneficial relationships.

#### **Theoretical statement 15: Positivity**

CH9s and CSOs should deliberately try to make the relationship more enjoyable for each other by initiating positive interactions.

In addition to the relationship strategies found in the stakeholder relationship management theory as discussed above, two strategies from stewardship theory have been identified as relevant to positive relationships between CH9s and CSOs.

#### **3.7.2.7 Stewardship theory**

Although the stewardship theory does not form a main part of the theories for this study, its reciprocity strategies are used to account for the proper contextualisation of this study. The theory rests on the notion that the organisations need to be concerned with the

interests of stakeholders as opposed to just the selected few (Keay, 2017). Stewardship strategies within the context of stakeholder relationships help to understand how organisations maintain relationships with different stakeholders (Kelly, 2001; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Waters, 2011). While stewardship strategies focus on the organisation's responsibility and commitment to act in the best interests of stakeholders – emphasising ethical behaviour, trust, and long-term value – relationship strategies concentrate more broadly on managing the quality and nature of the interactions between the organisation and its stakeholders. Relationship strategies typically involve methods for building, sustaining, and improving connections, such as communication, engagement, and conflict resolution. In contrast, stewardship strategies are distinct in their emphasis on leadership, accountability, and fostering mutual benefit over time. Both the relationship and stewardship strategies are aimed at achieving similar outcomes, including trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Van Zyl *et al.*, 2025) and therefore some strategies of stewardship are relevant to the relationship between CH9s and CSOs.

Kelly (2001) identifies four stewardship strategies:

- Responsibility: refers to the social responsibility of organisational leaders towards the community and the supporters of the organisation.
- Reporting: the obligation of the organisation to be transparent using both verbal and written communication.
- Reciprocity: this speaks to the moral obligation by the organisation towards stakeholders and creating a win-win situation for all stakeholders.
- Relationship nurturing: ensuring that relationships with existing stakeholders are nurtured and creating positive experiences.

The strategy of reporting has been sufficiently addressed by the relationship strategies of openness and disclosure, as well as access. Relationship nurturing links closely to the relationship strategy of positivity as discussed above, but due to this study's strong focus on the relationship between CH9s and CSOs, it has been decided to include it as a strategy on its own. The same argument applies to reciprocity; although it is underscored in most of the strategies already discussed, it is considered too important not to be specified and discussed on its own. Ultimately, responsibility guides moral obligation for reporting, nurturing of relationships, and acts as the overarching strategy for stewardship.

### 3.7.2.8 Reciprocity

The concept of reciprocity is conceptualised using strategies from both the stakeholder relationship management theory and the stewardship theory. Reciprocity is the act of giving benefits to another in return for benefits received. Reciprocity may be either direct or indirect (Molm & Cook; 1995). Hobhouse (1996:12) refers to reciprocity as “the vital principle of society”, and Simmel (1950:387) notes that social equilibrium and cohesion could not exist without “the reciprocity of service and return service” (Molm, 2010). Becker (1956:1) refers to the human species as “homo reciprocal”, while Gouldner (1960) suggested that a “norm of reciprocity” helps assure that people help others who have helped them in the past. More recently, evolutionary biologists and experimental economists have proposed that we are hard-wired for reciprocity and have described reciprocity as the evolutionary basis for cooperation in society (Molm, 2010; Nowak & Sigmund, 2000).

Social relationships are profoundly affected by the structure of reciprocity, not only in terms of exchange and power but also in terms of the development of trust and solidarity (Nowak & Sigmund, 2000). Depending on the circumstances, actors may allocate reciprocal giving, trust, and affective regard to various partners, exchanging most often with partners with more valuable resources, but forming stronger integrative bonds with partners with more consistent reciprocity (Molm *et al.*, 2007). Developing bonds of trust and solidarity contributes to building assets of social capital, such as social capital that may influence future behaviour (Molm *et al.*, 2007). Indirect reciprocity further reduces the prevalence of conflict by eliminating any direct reciprocal relationship between the benefactor and recipient (Molm, 2010). In the context of this study, social relationships are founded on the interdependent nature of CH9s and CSOs, which provides the basis for a balanced relationship as opposed to a benefactor and recipient relationship.

When reciprocity is direct, the recipient of a benefit returns a benefit directly to the giver. When reciprocity is indirect, as in generalised forms of exchange, the recipient does not return a benefit directly to the giver, but to another actor in the social circle (Molm *et al.*, 2007). Krueger (2016) further explains that reciprocity is giving and receiving with the intent of mutual benefits. However, best practices among genuinely reciprocal partnerships may yield a new definition of reciprocity. This study posited reciprocity as

the process of intentionally engaging in collaborative practices with the intention of achieving mutual benefits.

Reciprocity is an important construct in the research communication framework. The communication framework adopts indirect reciprocity: a reciprocal act that benefits another without owing them a direct debt, while contributing to the network's collective enterprise, conveys even greater expressive value (see Molm, 2010). Even in the absence of a close personal relationship between actors, a reciprocal exchange can create strong bonds of trust and solidarity between them, making indirect reciprocity more valuable. In contrast, repeated exchanges between the same actors, even those that show strong behavioural commitment, are less likely to create bonds of trust and affective attachment when they are negotiated, especially if the actors are unequal in power (Molm *et al.*, 2007). Reciprocity is thus not an independent variable but one that depends on the balancing out of power relations. Reciprocity is both a defining feature of social exchange and a source of societal cooperation and solidarity (Molm *et al.*, 2007). It is therefore an important construct for the research's communication framework that will contribute to mutual empowerment.

In reciprocal exchange, actors perform individual acts that benefit one another, like giving help or advice, without negotiation and without knowing whether or when the other will reciprocate (Molm, 2010). In the context of this study, the two strategies of relationship and stewardship strategies are integrated to establish relationship strategies that are specifically customised for CH9s and CSOs.

**Theoretical statement 16: Reciprocity**

CH9s and CSOs should exchange resources, knowledge and skills to benefit both organisations.

Through reciprocity, organisations can contribute to relationship nurturing, which will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.7.2.9 Relationship nurturing

Relationship nurturing is defined as the maintenance of a long-lasting bond between two parties (Reis, 2001). Relationship nurturing is the element that humanises the organisation and helps it make friends with stakeholders by expressing care for them (Kelly, 2011; Li, 2018). It is also based on the organisation acknowledging the centrality of stakeholders in all its communication (Kelly, 2001). This means that CH9s should nurture relationships with CSOs, as they are primary stakeholders who derive value from CH9s and add value to them. CSOs are important for the survival of CSOs.

Lord (1983) describe how relationships can be nurtured: “Build ongoing relationships with your contributors. Invite them, recognise them, involve them, ask them, send them information before others receive it”. To do this, the organisation should provide information and be accessible to stakeholders (Sission, 2017) (see 3.6.2.1). Relationship nurturing can also be described through positivity, which advocates for all stakeholders to engage in communication characterised by respect, openness, empathy, understanding, and patience (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ihm, 2024:410) (see 3.6.2.6). Positivity rests on the notion of making relationships with stakeholders more acceptable for all the stakeholders involved (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Both access and positivity should be used in relationship nurturing to conceptualise long-term relationships between CH9s and CSOs.

The relationship can be nurtured functionally through newsletters, extraordinary events, and open house invitations, and improved personally by sending birthday cards (Waters, 2011). CH9s and CSOs need to nurture their relationship through continuous engagement and sharing of information. CH9s should maintain and nurture their relationship with CSOs by nurturing the short-term relationship into long-lasting relationships for mutual benefits.

#### ***Theoretical statement 17: Relationship nurturing***

CH9s and CSOs should express care for one another by inviting each other to important events, giving recognition, and communicating important information to each other before it goes to the public.

### 3.8 Theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs

Building on this understanding, the following section translates these theoretical insights into practical constructs that inform the proposed communication framework between CH9s and CSOs. The table below outlines the key theoretical statements and corresponding constructs that underpin this framework. It demonstrates how concepts such as two-way symmetrical communication, dialogue, cooperation, conflict resolutions, and stakeholder relationship management are operationalised to promote sustainable, trust-based, and participatory relationships between CH9s and CSOs. These constructs and concepts collectively highlight that sustainable and transformative relationships are built on reciprocity, trust, and shared purpose. Ultimately, the two-way symmetrical model and the stakeholder relationship management theory were used as the theoretical basis to determine concepts and constructs relevant to the theoretical and communication frameworks proposed in this study.

**Table 3.1: Summary of theoretical statements and concepts**

| Theoretical statement and concept                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Constructs                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 1: Two-way symmetrical communication</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should apply the principles of two-way communication in their communication with each other by engaging in dialogue, cooperating with each other, committing to conflict resolution to facilitate mutual understanding, and building and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term positive relationships (3.5).</i></p> | <p>Dialogue</p> <p>Cooperation</p> <p>Conflict resolution</p> <p>Mutually beneficial, long-term positive relationships</p> |
| <b>Theoretical statement 2: Dialogue</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Two-way communication                                                                                                      |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>For communication between CH9s and CSOs to be considered dialogical, it should be a two-way, continuous, interactive process of consultation, engagement, participation, and bargaining that reflects reciprocity, empathy, active listening and mutual respect towards mutual understanding (3.5.1).</i></p> | <p>Continuous communication</p> <p>Interaction</p> <p>Engagement</p> <p>Participation</p> <p>Reciprocity</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Active listening</p> <p>Mutual respect</p> <p>Mutual understanding</p> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 3: Cooperation</b></p> <p><i>Cooperation between CH9s and CSOs should entail collective efforts, including collective decision-making, to reach mutual goals, that will contribute to mutual benefit (3.5.2).</i></p>                                                                   | <p>Collectivity</p> <p>Decision making</p> <p>Mutual goals</p> <p>Mutual benefits</p>                                                                                                                 |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 4: Conflict resolution</b></p> <p><i>In instances of conflict, CH9s and CSOs should employ a win-win approach to conflict resolution by solving problems collaboratively, taking the needs and constraints of both parties into consideration (3.5.1.1).</i></p>                        | <p>Win-win</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Consideration</p>                                                                                                                                              |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>maintaining and promoting the relationship (3.6.1.2).</i></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 8: Satisfaction</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should feel favourable towards the other due to positive expectations about the relationship being reinforced, and experience that the benefits of being in the relationship outweigh the costs (3.6.1.3).</i></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 9: Control mutuality</b></p> <p><i>Both CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge their interdependence in achieving their joint mandates and feel satisfied with the control they have over their relationship, including decision-making processes (3.6.1.3).</i></p> | <p>Favourable</p> <p>Benefits outweigh cost</p> <p>Interdependence</p> <p>Satisfied with control</p> |
| <p><b>Relationship strategies (3.6.2)</b></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 10: Openness and disclosure</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should be open to each other by providing transparent information on the nature of the organisation and what they are doing, and allowing engagement from the other with this information (3.6.2.1).</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>Transparency</p> <p>Engagement</p>                                                                |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 11: Assurance</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should assure each other that their concerns are legitimate and will be addressed in the agreed timeframe (3.6.2.2).</i></p>                                                                                                | <p>Legitimise concerns addressed in agreed timeframes</p>         |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 12: Access</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should be accessible to one another by using communication channels that are accessible to both parties and by availing themselves to participate in communication with the other when the need arises (3.6.2.3).</i></p>      | <p>Accessible communication channels</p> <p>Availability</p>      |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 13: Networking</b></p> <p><i>CH9 and CSOs should widen their circle by sharing their networks with each other to access more resources and maximise common advantages (3.6.2.4).</i></p>                                                                              | <p>Sharing networks</p>                                           |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 14: Sharing of tasks</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should share tasks when addressing mutual problems and goals by dividing responsibilities between them when planning and implementing projects (3.6.2.5).</i></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 15: Positivity</b></p> | <p>Division of responsibilities</p> <p>Enjoyable relationship</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should deliberately try to make the relationship more enjoyable for each other by initiating positive interactions (3.6.2.6).</i></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 16: Reciprocity</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should exchange resources, knowledge and skills to benefit both organisations (3.6.2.7).</i></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 17: Relationship nurturing</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should express care for one another by inviting each other to important events, giving recognition, and communicating important information to each other before it goes to the public (3.6.2.8).</i></p> | <p>Exchange resources, knowledge and skills</p> <p>Mutual benefit</p> <p>Care</p> <p>Recognition</p> <p>Communicating important information</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 3.9 Conclusion

This chapter adopted the cybernetic tradition as a meta-theoretical framework to inform the corporate communication theories, i.e., systems theory, the two-way symmetrical model and the stakeholder relationship management theory, to theorise communication in the CH9s and CSOs. The systems theory was used to understand organisational structures and systems in both CH9s and CSOs and how this affects communication, engagement and the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders. These systems do not operate in a vacuum but are coordinated through communication, hence the integration of two-way symmetrical communication to understand how feedback received from stakeholders can be used to improve the organisation as a system. Stakeholder theory, on the other hand, was integrated to theorise stakeholders and how

stakeholder relationships are initiated, managed, and maintained. To strengthen the theoretical framework, concepts such as dialogue, cooperation, conflict management, and the building and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships were included to give more context and rationality. The two-way symmetrical model and stakeholder relationship management theory are two theoretical approaches designed to foster long-term, positive, and mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. These perspectives provide the concepts and constructs necessary for the CH9-CSO communication framework, which aims to build and maintain strong relationships between the two organisations, while the cybernetic tradition combined with theories and the two-way symmetrical model adds value in understanding how communication through systems and procedures happens in an organisation, and more particularly the CH9s and CSOs. Besides evaluating the constitution of organisational systems, hidden power dynamics, and marginalisation of other stakeholders, there is a need to complement this tradition with the critical tradition for the study to achieve its emancipatory and developmental communicative goals. The next chapter will discuss in detail the critical tradition, critical theory, the Habermas theory of the public sphere, participation, and development communication to provide a detailed theorisation of a participatory approach to communication, relationship management and mutual empowerment. The chapter will also use the Afrocentric communication approach and ubuntu philosophy to provide an African context of the concepts of mutual relationship towards an afro-centric mutual empowerment in CH9s and CSOs.

## **CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter synthesised the cybernetic tradition that informs corporate communication theories used in the study to promote long-term mutually beneficial relationships between CH9s and CSOs. The discussions of these theoretical perspectives led to the formulation of theoretical statements that will be used in the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs. The cybernetic tradition serves as a meta-theoretical framework that underpins the understanding of organisations as self-regulatory systems using systems. Within this framework, communication is coordinated using a two-way symmetrical communication model to build, manage, and maintain relationships between CH9s and CSOs, drawing on the stakeholder relationship management theory. These perspectives collectively inform the identification of constructs and concepts relevant to the development of a framework aimed at establishing long-term positive and mutually beneficial relationships.

However, it is not sufficient to contribute to mutual empowerment. To this end, development communication is integrated into the framework to bring about mutual empowerment between the CH9s and CSOs. Empowerment is not addressed in the theory of relationship management, but is a concept of development communication and, therefore, there is a need to integrate development communication theory with relationship management theory to establish mutually beneficial long-term relationships to facilitate mutual empowerment. This is just one aspect of the study. This chapter seeks to establish a more robust theoretical foundation for mutual empowerment by drawing upon a critical tradition that both contrasts with and critically interrogates key tenets of the cybernetics tradition. The intention is to synthesise diverse concepts and constructs that are pertinent to the overarching framework. In this context, communication – particularly as it is conceptualised within the field of development communication – will be critically examined to determine the applicability and significance of development communication theories and constructs to the communication processes embedded within the proposed framework.

Development communication as a metatheoretical tradition was used to guide the emancipatory orientation of communication to guide mutual empowerment. This approach draws on Habermas' public sphere, critical pedagogy, and the participatory approach to determine theoretical perspectives specifically focussed on facilitating empowerment. It aims to reveal the essential elements necessary for the CH9-CSO communication framework that this research will present to empower the two entities mutually. It shows why mutual empowerment requires a deeper and more critical understanding of various communication principles for its attainment. The theoretical and practical perspectives discussed in this chapter are interconnected and not detached. If applied wholly in a defined communication framework, these theories and practices should contribute to the mutual empowerment of CH9s and CSOs. This chapter also integrates the African perspective of communication using the ubuntu philosophy as a communicative approach to contribute to a more African communicative framework.

## **4.2 Critical Metatheoretical Tradition**

The critical tradition refers to a broad approach to knowledge and inquiry characterised by a sceptical attitude towards existing knowledge and social norms and a commitment to examining the underlying assumptions, biases, and power structures (Giroux, 1980). While there is no single set of constructs that defines the critical tradition, there are some common themes and assumptions that underlie it. The critical tradition is concerned with analysing and critiquing the structures of power and domination that underlie social, political, and economic systems (Deetz & Mumby, 1990; August, 2022: 271-291). It seeks to understand power distribution and how it is held, maintained, and used to create social inequality, aiming to change the status quo, as opposed to the cybernetic tradition, which focusses primarily on equilibrium and maintaining the status quo without looking deep into power dynamics. Adopting the critical tradition in communication means being aware of how communication may protect one group's interests over another's (Calhoun, 1995; Morrow, 1994). Unlike the cybernetic tradition, where information is returned to the system to correct deviations and maintain the status quo, a critical perspective treats feedback as a communicative act influenced by power dynamics among stakeholders, with some voices more powerful than others, which can influence the status quo (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Clegg *et al.*, 2006; Deetz, 2001; Foucault, 1980) (see 3.2). The critical tradition warrants understanding that while reality exists, those who make essentialist

claims about it do so from a situated and subjective position, making their understanding of reality a representation of the views held by the powerful (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 1994). According to the critical tradition, those framing discursive and nondiscursive practices that align with their interests can effectively exercise power (Brown, 1978; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 1994; Cairney, 2023:18-38). This position is sustained in classic Marxism, one of the subjects of the critical tradition. In classic Marxism, Marx (1867) examined how the working class is oppressed by those who own the means of production and consequently hold the dominant ideas in society. With this understanding, this research realises that CH9s yield great power in determining social justice discourse within the landscape in which CSOs are significant players. Therefore, CH9s' communication with CSOs must be furnished with a critical approach to communication towards knowledge co-production. Deetz and Mumby (1990) maintain that relationships between parties are fundamentally more constitutive of power than is traditionally suggested in the organisational literature (see Pfeffer, 1981). However, the cybernetic tradition sees an organisation as comprising of close interrelationships which are regarded as wholes and that must adapt to organisational changes to maintain a steady state (Beer, 1985; Espejo & Reyes, 2011; Jackson, 2023) (see 3.2).

The critical tradition recognises that ideas and beliefs are crucial in shaping social reality (Althusser, 2020). An emphasis is placed on examining how ideologies are developed and disseminated and how power structures are justified and maintained (Althusser, 2020).

It is important to note that critical theory is part of the critical tradition. However, the term 'critical tradition' refers to a broader range of approaches with a critical perspective on knowledge and society (Sarland, 2006).

Both the critical and cybernetic traditions strive to address systemic imbalances, albeit through different approaches. The critical tradition emphasises the need to recognise and empower marginalised groups, advocating for social justice and equity in challenging the status quo (Lynch, 2000) (see 4.2). Meanwhile, the cybernetic tradition focusses on achieving equilibrium within systems, upholding the status quo by transmitting information to reduce noise and enhance coordination (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2003; Wiener, 2019) (see 3.2). It emphasises the importance of reflexivity, or self-awareness, in inquiry (D'cruz *et*

*al.*, 2007). It also recognises that people are not neutral observers but are shaped by their social and historical contexts, biases, and assumptions (D’cruz *et al.*, 2007). The critical tradition encourages both individuals and organisations to reflect on their perspectives and assumptions, fostering openness to alternative viewpoints (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001) (see 4.2).

The critical tradition is characterised by a commitment to *questioning* established beliefs and power structures and a dedication to pursuing social justice and equity (Sarland, 2006). Its constructs provide a framework for understanding and critiquing social reality, and for working towards transformative change. Since the end of the 1990s, the critical tradition has significantly contributed to communication studies in organisations, challenging the dominant functionalist model (Held, 1980; Deetz & Mumby, 1990). The critical tradition, like the cybernetic tradition, places a high value on feedback as it recognises the importance of ongoing reflection and revision in pursuing knowledge and social change (Brookfield, 2011). Unlike in cybernetics (see Ashby, 1966; Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1982; Miller, 1965; Powers, 1978; Wiener, 1948), feedback in the critical tradition is explicitly oriented towards the realisation of social justice. In the critical tradition, feedback enables individuals to engage in an ongoing process of reflection and revision, challenging prevailing assumptions and power structures in pursuit of social justice and transformative change. Some specific parts of the critical tradition prioritise feedback more explicitly. One such part is the critical pedagogy movement, which emphasises the importance of dialogue and critical reflection in any context where knowledge is shared (See Buber, 1970; Freire, 1996). Freire’s critical pedagogy is discussed in section 4.4.

Without CSOs’ inclusion, CH9s, potent institutions, can unwittingly sustain the status quo (see Tilak *et al.*, 2022; Izak *et al.*, 2024) of various forms of inequality. Therefore, without critical reflection on the communication between CH9s and CSOs, the relationship will probably remain unchanged without mutual empowerment. Unlike the cybernetic approach, which applies structured theories of human behaviour to analyse organisational dynamics and often treats organisations as mechanical systems, the critical tradition focusses on how social contexts and individual actions shape organisations. This perspective recognises that organisational realities are not fixed, but

are constantly influenced and constructed by people within their social environments (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Roslyng & Dindler, 2023:11-20)

Only through a communication approach that facilitates an exchange of ideas between CH9s and CSOs as knowers can mutual empowerment be realised. Therefore, the CH9s' communication must decentralise power and domination, promote social justice and reflexivity, and question established beliefs and power structures.

The critical tradition has been shaped by diverse thinkers and movements throughout history, all committed to questioning established beliefs and values and challenging power structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Theories within the critical tradition should assist with defining mutual empowerment of CH9s and CSOs, given this tradition's focus on power, domination, reflexivity, questioning, challenging the status quo, critique, feedback, interpretation, co-production of meaning, and mutuality. The first specific theory in this tradition which is deemed relevant for this study is the critical theory.

### **4.3 Critical theory**

Critical theory encompasses a broad range of philosophical and social theories that seek to analyse and critique the social, economic, and political structures that underlie modern society (Bohman, 2005; Freud, 2012; Katznelson, 1993; Warnock, 1970; Buchanan & Levinson, 2025:13 ). While there is no single set of constructs that defines critical theory, there are several key ideas that are central to this theory. The critical theory emphasises the importance of ideology in shaping social reality (Thompson, 1988). According to critical theorists, dominant ideologies, such as capitalism or patriarchy, serve to naturalise and justify social inequalities and injustices (Thompson, 1988; Von Werlhof, 2013). The critical theory emphasises the importance of social change in pursuing social justice and equality. Critical theorists argue that social change requires a deep understanding of the social and political structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice and a commitment to challenging and transforming these structures (Brookfield, 2012; Ray, 1993; Lamsal, 2024:77)

In line with the critical tradition, critical theory seeks to understand the nature of power and domination in modern society. Critical theorists argue that power is not just a matter of overt coercion but also manifests in more subtle forms of influence and control, such

as cultural norms and institutional structures Critical theory concerns how knowledge is produced, interpreted, and legitimised as social truth or fact. It is also interested in how the various ways of knowing are implicated in relationships of power that serve the interests of the elite few (see Steyn, 2015). Critical theory places a high value on *dialogue and critique* as a means of challenging dominant ideologies and structures of power (Dussell, 2011). In contrast to other approaches, the cybernetic tradition is founded upon universal principles that emphasise self-regulation through the utilisation of feedback mechanisms. (Bezuidenhout, 2017; Beehr & Newman, 1978; Cummings & Cooper, 1979; Krippendorff, 1977; Littlejohn, 1983; Rogers, 1994; Schuler, 1980). Both traditions are essential lenses for promoting mutual understanding and challenging the assumptions and power structures underlying modern society. Critical theorists also argue that social and political structures cannot be understood in isolation from their historical context and that understanding historical processes is essential for understanding and challenging contemporary systems of power and domination (Steyn, 2015). Understanding the historical context within issues and communities, as well as the current power-relationships between CH9s and CSOs, should contribute to improving communication between CH9s and CSOs and addressing power imbalances.

In recent years, critical theory has been critiqued by some as being overly abstract and divorced from practical concerns. In contrast, others have argued that it remains a vital and necessary tool for understanding and challenging the structures of power and domination that shape modern society (see Hutchings, 2001; Kompridis, 2011). However, it remains a valuable approach to communications research and will be applied in the communication framework in Chapter 5.

From a critical theoretical standpoint, CH9s may feel like they have a good sense of reality. Still, they can never fully realise the challenges and ideas of non-state entities without clear interaction with CSOs, who bring knowledge obtained through practical experiences from interactions with communities. This is why an acknowledgement of personal and collective agency is essential. Using critical theory, this research seeks to resolve the dialectics or paradox that exists between organisational power/self-interest and communication. The use of critical theory is to understand how the power dynamics of stakeholders affect priority and interest and subsequently communication rather than merely study systems and organisational structures. This is the tension/dialectic that

CH9s must grapple with. Against this backdrop, this research shows that corporate empowerment, development, and 'enlightenment' projects can be self-contradictory because they often seek to include the populations they dictate their agendas to, unlike the cybernetic tradition, where cooperation and coordination are forged to achieve mutual empowerment (Banerjee, 2023:1-23)

CH9s should not have a predetermined agenda that they enforce on CSOs and other stakeholders. Instead, they must pursue dialogue to ensure that their agenda relates to the CSOs' needs. This should contribute to mutual empowerment.

In summation, this research follows Horkheimer's (1972) position that for a capitalist society to become more democratic, all the conditions of social life that are controllable by people must be determined by consensus by the people living there. This can be done through a communication framework that deconstructs ideology, power, and domination and gears towards social change through dialogue and critique (for more on dialogue, see sections 3.4.2 and 4.6.2). This is also captured in Habermas' concept of the public sphere, which this chapter turns to next.

#### **4.4 Habermas' public sphere**

Public sphere theory originates in the work of German philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas. In his influential book, "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", which was first published in German in 1962, Habermas analysed the historical development of the public sphere as a site of democratic deliberation and political action. The public sphere is a space where individuals come together to freely identify and discuss societal problems and, through the discussion, influence action. Whenever private individuals assemble to form a public body, a portion of the public sphere is created (Habermas, 1990:231). Habermas (1962) argues that the public sphere emerged in Europe during the 18th century due to the growing influence of the bourgeoisie, who sought to challenge the authority of the traditional ruling elites. The public sphere was characterised by a set of communicative practices and norms, including free speech, open debate, and the exchange of ideas, that allowed individuals to participate in the formation of public opinion and challenge prevailing power structures (Habermas, 1962; Thompson, 1993).

According to Habermas (1962), the public sphere played a crucial role in the development of modern democratic institutions and practices. Habermas (1991) defines the public sphere as a network for communicating information and points of view in which streams of communication are filtered and synthesised in such a way that they convert to bundles of topically specified public opinions. It is a platform where the public can openly engage in political, economic, and social discourse without any constraints. According to Habermas (1962:49-52), creating such an ideal situation is equivalent to creating an ideal speech community, which gives rise to civil society. For civil society to be successful, it must develop within a liberal political culture that promotes equality and distinguishes large institutions from everyday life (Habermas, 1962:54-56).

CH9s can embrace these public sphere ideals as targets of successful communication with CSOs. As part of the state architect, the CH9s can use the public sphere to generate public opinion about issues affecting the public and integrate this into their plans and strategies to ensure they serve the interests of the public, not just the selected powerful individuals. "To be sure, state authority is usually considered 'public' authority, but it derives its task of caring for the well-being of all citizens primarily from this aspect of the public sphere" (Habermas, 1962:115). The public sphere is ideally a space of structured deliberations, freedom of communication, and universal access (Mpofu, 2014; Tanner, 2001), making conversation and language a crucial element to forming the public (Seiler, 2008).

Unlike Craig (1999), a Chicago School of Thought affiliate, Habermas did not believe modern communication can result in "a great public of human understanding" (Habermas, 1962:115). Instead, "public opinion can only come into existence when a reasoning public is presupposed" (Habermas, 1962:115). To facilitate this, Habermas (1962) posits that the ideal speech situation should have adequate opportunity for people to speak, an adequate opportunity to challenge the rules or the topic of discussion, adequate opportunity to acquire the skills of discourse (including those of the media), and adequate opportunity to be free of violence and other forms of coercion. The "ideal speech situation" is therefore defined as:

symmetrical distribution of opportunities to contribute to the discussion.  
Participants must be free to call into question any proposal, introduce any

proposal, and express any attitudes, wishes, and needs (Jacobson & Storey, 2004:103).

In the 'ideal speech situation', CH9s and CSOs should be able to raise any topic, question all practices, and express all attitudes, needs, and pitfalls they deem relevant. According to Habermas, "as participants in discourse, we 'know' that we are not arguing 'seriously' if, in such an exchange of reasons, coercion or manipulation is at work, some of those involved are excluded, or relevant opinions and positions are suppressed" (Sheedy, 2018). This is important towards communication that creates mutual empowerment.

By analysing the ideal speech situation, we can critique all forms of systematically distorted communication (Deetz & Mumbly, 1990:34). Habermas (2018) argues that apart from the ideal nature of the speech situation itself, it is important that participants make certain idealising assumptions. For example:

citizens will participate in political elections only as long as they can assume implicitly that they can make their voice heard and that their vote "counts" – it should even have the same weight as every other vote (Habermas, 2018:2).

Habermas (1990) and Wiener (1978) assert that rightness, truthfulness, and comprehension are universal conditions for assessing all speech acts. These three form the basis on which the validity of any communication can be evaluated. Rightness speaks to how moral and just any communication act is. This means, using Habermas' rightness, the CH9 communication can be judged based on how democratic or liberal it is. Truthfulness speaks to the sincerity of the communication. Truthfulness also entails the ability to honestly examine acts that are supposedly meant to benefit the other. The cybernetic tradition sees truthfulness as a cognitive process of two parties understanding each other, which contributes to understanding the communication of the other (Carey & Tanewski, 2016; Gooderham *et al.*, 2004). It does not matter how one deforms the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding; the design of a perfect situation is implicit in the structure of potential speech since all talk, even deception, is oriented toward truth (Habermas, 1970:372). Mutual understanding is conceptualised differently within cybernetics (see 3.5) and critical traditions (see 4.2). In both approaches, mutual understanding involves recognising the other's perspective and assisting both parties in

making sense of each other's goals and interests, but the underlying definitions and emphases vary between the traditions. Cybernetics typically frames mutual understanding as an outcome of system feedback, communication loops, and self-regulation, placing emphasis on the mechanisms by which information is exchanged and coherence is maintained within a system. In contrast, critical traditions focus more on the role of power dynamics, social structures, and the potential for emancipation, arguing that mutual understanding is not merely a technical exchange but is shaped by context, ideology, and the need to challenge dominant narratives.

Lastly, comprehension involves the ability to understand one another. Forester's (1982) four elements of understanding – consent, trust, and attention – are directly related to those of Habermas (rightness, truthfulness, and comprehension) in his theory of universal pragmatics. Within the cybernetic tradition, comprehension refers to the mutual understanding between CH9s and CSOs regarding their respective goals, what the other party is trying to achieve, and the reasoning behind their actions (see Beck, 2020; Cornelius & Boos 2003; Craig, 2021; Hantho *et al.*, 2002). In contrast, the critical tradition focusses less on mutual understanding for achieving shared objectives and more on revealing underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and inequalities within communication processes. While the cybernetic tradition emphasises clear information exchange and feedback mechanisms to facilitate cooperation without evaluating underlying power dynamics, the critical tradition interrogates how communication can reinforce or challenge structures of domination. Despite this difference, both traditions value the role of communication in shaping relationships and outcomes – cybernetics through efficient understanding and feedback, and critical theory through questioning and transforming social realities (see Craig & Tracy, 2021; Mumby, 2022).

However, Habermas (1962) also argues that the public sphere had become increasingly commodified and fragmented in the modern era, leading to a decline in its ability to serve as a site of democratic deliberation and political action. Despite these critiques, public sphere theory remains an essential and influential framework for understanding the role of communication and discourse in democratic societies and for analysing how media and communication technologies shape public opinion and political action.

According to Seiler (2008), Habermas's work, which is also dubbed the "New Left", focusses on the belief that society is a mix of three primary interests: work, interaction, and power. By work, Habermas refers to the efforts to create material resources. By interaction, he refers to how language and symbols are used for communication. By power, he refers to dominance and influence over resources and ideas (Habermas, 1962, 1984, 1990). Habermas is optimistic that groups can transform society for the better through an awareness of dominant ideologies. Habermas dismisses strategic speech in favour of a society where *people speak and reach a consensus* to experience enlightenment and modernity. Habermas' dismissal of strategic speech is important for this research because it dismisses the two-way asymmetrical communication model, which can be used for manipulation, in favour of two-way symmetrical communication, which allows feedback towards mutual benefit (Macnamara, 2014; Raihan *et al.*, 2025: 111-127). CH9s must embrace speech for consensus and mutual benefit in their communication with CSOs.

A critical theoretical heuristic towards Habermas' concepts shows that there do not exist single or multiple public spheres that look out for different interests. This is important in the formation of the ideal speech situation. Habermas (1962) presents a "Bourgeois public sphere", dominated mainly by elites. This sphere does not cater to multiple group interests. An example is social media, which has been celebrated as the ideal communication technology for most organisations. However, considerations should also be taken of how the marginalised are further marginalised from the public sphere by these technologies due to their inaccessibility to all. According to Eijaz (2011:10), in developing countries, new technologies are "facilitating dialogue for particular segments of the population who are literate, financially sound and familiar with communication and information technology". Subaltern public spheres constitute dialogues and debates on issues, identities, positions, amongst others, which have been excluded from, and thus stand in opposition to, dominant public spheres (Dahlberg, 2007:837; Mpofu, 2014). In their diversity, different spheres can facilitate *dialogue* on different interests. However, the cybernetic tradition sees dialogue as a process of exchanging information to clarify issues and find solutions; subsequently, mutual interest and the centrality of dialogue from this tradition is not to foster persuasion but mutual understanding (see Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Mason & Simmons, 2013; Mena & Campos, 2010:167-168; Peach, 1987:195). This thesis argues that an ideal CH9-CSO communication space can be

achieved through the establishment of not one public sphere but multiple public spheres for different cultural and interest groups. This will give more people within the CH9s and CSOs the opportunity to speak, challenge the roles and the topic of discussion, and acquire the skills of discourse (see 4.7.3).

This research is inclined toward multipronged approaches that acknowledge diversity and put into consideration the different demographics they serve across language, ethnic, cultural, class, gender, disability, sexuality, and racial backgrounds. No longer can a single public sphere service the needs of all CSOs.

The potential that Habermas sees in the public sphere is in tandem with Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power. Foucault (1997:72) defines discourse as a group of statements that provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a specific historical moment. By investigating the reasons behind the legitimisation of discourse, participants of a public sphere can expose power. This is because, in keeping with Foucault, power is not allocated to an individual like wealth is. Rather, it operates in a net-like format as individuals are consistently in a position of undergoing or exercising it (Foucault, 1976). Power does not only refer to the control of the tangible aspects but also that of the ideological facets through public opinion. This thesis argues that CH9s can facilitate the circulation of public opinion through CSO engagement for mutual empowerment. Individuals working in the CH9 sector can individually and collectively become agents who consciously bring CSOs to the table through open communication.

The public sphere is not without its critics. The 'liberal' model of the public sphere can become an object of profit-maximising processes and manipulations by privileged groups, which leads Habermas to believe that only class struggle can redeem the public sphere's aims (Habermas, 1970). This allows for a critical introspection into the interests of the public sphere wherever it exists. Like Habermas, this research will show that the involvement of CSOs in the CH9-curated dialogical spaces is critical to its success. This entails leveraging the weaknesses of the public sphere to create a flexible communication framework that benefits both parties. Such a framework incorporates the Habermasian social welfare state mass democracy approach. Social welfare state mass democracy is Habermas' concept of self-regulation through the public sphere (Wiener, 1978; Vrabcová

*et al.*, 2024). Wiener (1978) posits that all classes are equally entitled to use the state services and to benefit from its regulatory interventions under the late capitalist welfare state. Therefore, the harmonisation of CH9s and CSOs through a rational public sphere should lead to mutual empowerment. In this regard, the public sphere should be a platform that allows for communication between the two institutions in terms of planning (see 4.7.1.1. for an explanation on planning)(Yacobi, 2007), implementation (see 4.7.1.2 for an explanation on implementation) (Bernardes, 2011), evaluation (see 4.7.1.3 for an explanation on evaluation) (Dahlberg, 2007), and decision making (see 7.2.3.3.2 for an explanation on decision making) (Nanz & Steffek, 2004).

The concept of the public sphere, as an open space free from state control, can offer an opportunity for CH9s and CSOs to understand each other's plans, ideas, mandates, and how public opinion is shaping their work. The purpose of interacting within the public sphere as a communicative space for persuasion, challenging power, and promoting freedom of speech is at the heart of mutual empowerment. It provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how power and control influence communication stemming from public opinion. However, the integration of the theory of the public sphere within the critical tradition also offers a critical understanding of power dynamics, which may affect what is reflected as public opinion, as opposed to systematic classification of stakeholders from the cybernetic tradition through the stakeholder theory without a proper critical analysis of power dynamics among stakeholders.

**Theoretical statement 18: Public sphere**

Communication between CH9s and CSOs should consist of free speech, open debate, and the exchange of ideas, where power structures can be challenged with the aim of identifying and addressing social issues.

**Theoretical statement 19: Ideal speech situation**

Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be truthful, understandable, and appropriate for the context.

The ideal speech situation, which focusses on the nature of communication between different parties, is linked to the work of Freire, who also explored the nature of communication within the context of social change.

#### **4.5 Freire's critical pedagogy approach**

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy approach originates from his experiences working with illiterate peasants in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s. Brazil was undergoing significant social and economic changes at that time, and many rural communities were experiencing extreme poverty and social marginalisation. Freire (1968) was deeply committed to social justice and believed education could be crucial in empowering marginalised communities and challenging dominant power structures. He developed his critical pedagogy approach in the context of adult education to enable learners to critically analyse their social and political contexts and become active agents of social change (Freire, 1968). Freire's critical pedagogy approach has dramatically influenced education, social justice, community organising, and the participatory approach to development communication. His work has inspired numerous educators and activists worldwide to develop critical teaching and learning approaches and work towards social change and empowerment.

Freire's critical pedagogy approach is based on several fundamental principles, including dialogue (Freire, 1968). Freire (1986) believed that education should be a dialogical process, in which learners and teachers engage in a mutual exchange of ideas and perspectives (see 4.7.2). This approach emphasises the importance of listening to the experiences and perspectives of learners and encouraging them to engage critically with their own experiences and the experiences of others (Freire, 1968). This approach involves helping learners to understand the power structures that shape their lives and to develop a critical perspective on those structures. Freire believed that learning should be a practical, action-oriented process in which learners apply their knowledge and critical perspectives to real-world problems and contexts. This approach emphasises the importance of taking action to challenge dominant power structures and to work toward social justice and equality (Freire, 1968:73). This research uses Freire's critical pedagogy thesis to show the importance of undoing a hierarchical relationship in how CH9s and CSOs communicate.

Critical pedagogy seeks to empower individuals by encouraging them to question and challenge prevailing assumptions and power structures and engage in ongoing reflection and critique. Feedback (see section 3.2) is essential to this process, as it allows students to assess their learning and identify areas where they need further development. In contrast, the cybernetic tradition centres on the dynamic exchange of feedback between sender and receiver, where the sender actively interprets and acts on feedback to refine communication and minimise unexpected outcomes. While critical pedagogy seeks to foster independent, critical thinking and social change, cybernetics prioritises iterative adjustment and system optimisation based on feedback loops. The key difference is that critical pedagogy is about challenging and transforming societal norms, whereas cybernetics is about improving communication and control within systems.

In his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1968) critiques the hierarchised relationship between the teacher and the student. In his critical pedagogy, Freire critiques narrative education or communication. According to Freire (1968), in the context of narrative instruction, the person in a leadership or teaching position talks about reality with the assumption that it is stationary, compartmentalised, and predictable. Instead of communicating, the narrative instructor issues a communique and makes deposits which the student is expected to patiently receive, memorise, and repeat (Freire, 1968:72). Such a relationship is flawed because it involves a narrating subject (the teacher or in this case the CH9s) and patient, listening objects (the students or in this case the CSOs) (Freire, 1968).

A liberating pedagogical communication framework can lead to mutual empowerment. CSOs, their constituencies, and CH9s can find value in the practice that has been borne out of the experiences of those whose lived realities should inform the agendas of the CH9s in the first place. Therefore, the conceptual communication framework produced in this research (see Chapter 5) is cyclical in that it acknowledges the various stages involved in the eventual empowerment of all parties involved.

Freire's liberating pedagogy is an approach to education that emphasises the importance of critical thinking, dialogue, and praxis (or action-oriented learning) in empowering learners and promoting social justice (see 4.7.2 and 4.7.4). Although Freire's work was initially developed within a pedagogical framework, it is essential to recognise that the

foundational principles he espouses, such as dialogue, critical consciousness, and the pursuit of empowerment, are not limited to educational settings. These concepts can be effectively transferred to a variety of contexts where the central aim is to empower individuals or communities, including social activism, organisational development, and community engagement. By focussing on the transformative potential of critical reflection and participatory action, Freire's approach offers valuable tools for fostering empowerment wherever power dynamics and marginalisation are present.

The emphasis on critical thinking and reflection within the cybernetic tradition aligns closely with Freire's pedagogical philosophy, which advocates for a dialogical approach to education that empowers individuals to question and transform their realities. Freire's work centres on the cultivation of critical consciousness – an awareness developed through reflective engagement with one's environment and social conditions. By encouraging learners to scrutinise the underlying assumptions of their actions and the consequences thereof, as described by Dewey (1934), Birch and Miller (2000), and Mezirow (1981), the cybernetic tradition echoes Freire's insistence on education as a transformative process. Both perspectives value the role of internal and external feedback in achieving equilibrium, not only within systems but also in fostering agency and empowerment, supporting the notion that critical thinking is fundamental to social change and personal growth.

The critical tradition sees critical thinking as the means to challenge the pre-conceived ideas which may dominate the stakeholders' environment, while the cybernetic tradition uses feedback to achieve stability and attain predetermined goals. Consequently, in the critical tradition, preconceived goals are somewhat fixed but can be changed through persuasion, while in the cybernetic tradition, the goal is to achieve equilibrium, which must be maintained by the system. Critical thinking is also held as a way of examining our subjective thoughts about who we are, our identities, beliefs, and so on (Wilson, 2002; Yücel, 2025:137–163).

Praxis lies at the core of Freire's work. Praxis, as conceptualised by Paulo Freire, refers to the dynamic process of reflection and action directed at transforming the world. Freire emphasises that true education involves not only critical understanding of one's social reality but also active engagement in efforts to change oppressive structures. This

iterative cycle of reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it is central to his pedagogy, highlighting the inseparability of thought and practice in the pursuit of social justice and liberation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2020; Torres, 2023).

The dialogical praxis can be used to aid development agency and raise awareness about social justice (Nondo, 2023). According to Dixon *et al.* (2021), praxis can be used as a transformative tool for action. The praxis of critical theory helps with self-reflection, self-correction, and reflection to prevent the whole idea of criticality from becoming an issue in the process of liberation (Rageliski, 2020). Praxis can be used as a means of critical thinking and reflection through spaces of persuasion and dialogue (Foster & Flenoor, 2019).

#### **Theoretical statement 20: Critical learning**

CH9s and CSOs should actively participate in a process of critical engagement, ongoing reflection, and critical thinking towards a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change.

Habermas's public sphere and Freire's critical pedagogy can enhance the development of communication approaches which seek to bring about mutual empowerment. The following section expands on the development of communications and its constructs, which will be included in the theoretical communication framework for CH9-CSO mutual empowerment.

#### **4.2. Development communication**

Development communication is a field of study and practice that emerged in the mid-20th century, particularly in post-colonial countries seeking to promote economic and social development (Basset, 1996). The history of development communication is closely tied to the history of development itself, as the field emerged as a response to the challenges and opportunities presented by the development process (Agboeze & Nwankwo, 2016). The concept of development communication can be traced back to the 1950s when Western countries began to provide aid and technical assistance to developing countries to promote economic and social progress (Alakwe & Okpara, 2022). This aid often included communication technologies and strategies, such as radio broadcasts, film

screenings, and public campaigns intended to promote modernisation and social change (Agboeze & Nwankwo, 2016). After Lerner's influential 1958 study of Middle East communication and development, communication researchers assumed that media and certain forms of information could transform societies and individuals from traditional to modern by bringing them into society (Servaes, 2003).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the field of development communication began to emerge as a distinct area of study and practice. In this period, the diffusion of innovation, media, and development communication was responsible for informing and educating the masses as the missing link in the development chain (Yagnik & Melkote, 2020). Here, agencies tended to communicate in linear, one-way, top-down, and prescriptive ways, as opposed to the dialogical two-way communication to facilitate mutual empowerment (see Jahansoozi, 2007). However, while development communication (in its diffusion of innovations and modernisation phases) was pitched as innocuous, it did not always lead to development. Instead, it was fashioned like what Freire critiqued as the subject-object relationship, where agendas are set for communities without establishing their ideas and needs first. According to Melkote (2018:77):

The theoretical model of modernisation in which devcom [development communication] was situated was influenced by the quantitative and empirical social sciences philosophy, theory and methodology; in particular, it had a strong economics and post-colonial orientation. Devcom operations, in general, were tasked with the responsibility of preparing individuals in developing countries for a rapid social change toward modernisation by changing their attitudes and behaviours toward modernising innovations and related social change.

Due to its inability to bring about sustainable social change and development, scholars and practitioners began to question the effectiveness of traditional communication strategies used in the modernisation paradigm in promoting development (Bakhtin, 1981; Manyozo, 2012; McAnany, 2012; Servaes, 1999, 2012, 2016; Servaes & Malikhao, 2016; Waisbord, 2008).

They called for a more participatory and empowering approach to communication that would involve local communities and prioritise their needs and perspectives. In the 1980s

and 1990s, the focus of development communication shifted towards democratisation and participatory development, emphasising the empowerment of marginalised groups and promoting social justice (Servaes & Malikhao, 2016). Scholars and practitioners began exploring new communication technologies and strategies, such as participatory video, community radio, and mobile phones, that could encourage social change and empower local communities. Development communication continues to be a dynamic and evolving field, emphasising participatory approaches, social justice, and new and emerging communication technologies (Wilkins *et al.*, 2014). It remains a vital area of study and practice for those seeking to promote development and social change worldwide.

According to Fair and Shah (1997), communication research published between 1987 and 1996 is significantly more theoretically diverse than that published between 1958 and 1986. Fair and Shah (1997) posit that because of the 1987-1996 period, Lerner's modernisation model was discredited, and participatory development became the most widely used theoretical framework, an optimist postmodern approach almost opposite to Lerner's idea that mass communication plays a top-down role (Fair & Shah, 1997:10). The Lerner's modernisation is based on the principles namely: 1) modernisation is a social process linked to economic development and 2) the process is characterised by universal pattern (Bernstein, 2007). The move from modernisation to a participatory approach was necessitated by the acknowledgement that development was a political activity linked to power interests (Wilkins & Mody, 2001; Sulaiman *et al.*, 2024:144-160). During the 1980s, the participatory approach to development communication emerged as a critique of the modernisation paradigm. Since then, it has become the normative approach to development communication (Huesca, 2003:500).

In participatory development communication, information is shared to reach a consensus for action based on the interests, needs, and capacities of all parties (Servaes, 2003; Wilkins & Mody, 2001). Hence, there was a significant shift from modernisation, when the participatory approach was introduced to development communication. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2006), (participatory) development communication facilitates an increase in public access to information, empowers communities at the grassroots level to be involved in participatory communication processes, and engenders communicative acts grounded in research (Servaes,

2016:201–218.). To encourage changes, development communicators must support local communities in their efforts to resist the obstacles set by those in formal power who want to maintain the status quo (Petersone, 2007:10). In this new way of thinking, studies of interpretive and critical nature were considered important, and changes included a variety of non-quantitative dimensions, including independence, cultural and personal growth, involvement, and emancipation (Yagnik & Melkote, 2020). The overarching objective of development communication from a participatory approach is to position communication towards the achievement of social change, development, and empowerment.

To facilitate social change between CH9s and CSOs, development communication is crucial towards mutual empowerment. CH9 and CSO can achieve positive change that will benefit both parties by applying the principles in their communication with each other. A more inclusive and sustainable development process is driven by more effective and inclusive development communication (Nair & White, 1994; Dikeocha, 2024:112138).

By promoting development communication principles, both CH9s and CSOs become expressive spaces for the achievement of common goals. CH9s and CSOs should promote development communication because it is collectively viable. This feeds into the participatory approach to communication.

The following section expands on the participatory approach to development communication, which will be included in the communication framework for CH9-CSO mutual empowerment.

#### **4.6 The participatory approach to development communication**

Agunga (1997) identifies different participatory approaches to development communication, empowerment, participatory communication, and emancipatory communication. Others (see Melkote, 2000; Wilkins & Mody, 2001) have used the terms development support and communication for development to describe participatory communication, respectively. Based on the interpretive and critical theory and methodology of social change communication, participatory approaches like rural communication, participatory action research, and liberation theology were influenced by

participatory approaches such as rural communication, action research, and liberation theology (Yagnik & Melkote, 2020).

Petersone (2007), asserts that there is no single theory behind participatory communication; it is an umbrella concept encompassing different perspectives that view communication as a people-oriented process. The participatory approach as a normative approach is based on the principles that citizens have an inherent right to participation in decisions that affect their lives (Awobiyi & Klawole, 2022). Furthermore, the participatory approach as a governance strategy is aimed at increasing public involvement in decisions through collaboration and diversification of decisions (Umoh, 2022). In modern democracy, a participatory approach is used to strengthen the quality of decisions and increase public involvement in public policy (Licursi & Pascuzzi, 2023). The participatory model of communication incorporates the concepts of the proposed communication framework of CH9s and CSOs. It emphasises the importance of the cultural identity of local communities and promotes democratisation and participation on international, national, local, and individual levels (Servaes 2004:45; Servaes & Malikhaio, 2005:95, 2008:169).

The participatory approach emphasises the importance of involving individuals and communities in the development process. It recognises their right to participate in decision-making and communication, as development aims to empower people. The approach values cultural identity, democracy, and participation, and respects local culture and context (Cornwall, 2016; Chambers, 2020; Hickey & Mohan, 2023). Jacobson and Kolluri (1999:268) defined participatory communication as “the permanent dialogue, the spontaneous and relevant participation, never arbitrary or conditional, generating collective decisions and the socialisation of production and its fruits”. Among its characteristics, participatory communication is defined as the opening of dialogue between participants over time, the continuous interaction between them, their constructive thinking about the situation, and their identification of developmental problems. Communication is no longer one-way, but instead, it is a two-way, horizontal process. For CH9-CSO communication to facilitate mutual empowerment, it should be participatory, dialogic, and reciprocal (see Servaes, 1994; Thomas, 1994; White, 1994).

The participatory approach emphasises the use of local media within a community due to its accessibility, familiarity, and ability to reinforce cultural traditions (Boeren, 1994; Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999). This approach emphasises collective self-reliance, allowing communities to set their own communication agenda and act rather than rely on outside experts to guide them. These ideas align with UNESCO's debates on access, participation, and self-management, ultimately promoting empowerment (Boeren, 1994; Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999). According to Melkote (2018), in the context of the participatory approach, development communication aims to empower people, build local capacities, and optimise equity. Participatory development communication activities include activating and sustaining social support systems and networks, empowering local people and facilitating awareness about the development agenda (Melkote, 2018). The participatory approach is the most successful in facilitating long-term social change and development.

In the 2000s and 2010s, the participatory approach continued to evolve and adapt to new communication technologies and social contexts. With the rise of digital media, new forms of participatory communication, such as social media and online platforms, emerged as powerful tools for communication (Bruns, 2018; Carpentier, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008). CSOs and CH9s can take advantage of these technologies for their communication. For CH9s to acquire value from their relationship with CSOs, they must move from dissemination towards dialogue and mutual empowerment. There are principles of the participatory approach that are relevant for communication between CH9s and CSOs. These principles are participation, dialogue, cultural identity, and empowerment. This justifies the importance of this research's participatory approach to development communication. For CH9s to acquire value from their relationship with CSOs they must move from dissemination towards dialogue for mutual empowerment.

#### **4.6.1 Participation**

According to Croft and Beresford (1992:20), "participation" is one of those contentious words like "community" and "care," which can seem to mean everything and nothing. For Kloppers and Fourie (2018), the participatory approach centres on participation, but it is unclear what participation is since it is conceptualised differently in different contexts. Participation forms the basis of any authentic democracy, and historically, participation

has been part of a broader discussion of democracy that dates to 3,000 years (Blacksher, 2013). Participation in decision making is crucial to development as it increases greater local ownership of development (Kyamusugulwa, 2013). Dwivedi and Dwivedi (2021) argue that for any participatory project to be deemed successful, there must be involvement of all stakeholders in all phases of the project, not just in the planning phase. The centrality of participatory development is a process characterised by engaging citizens as beneficiaries in the decision-making process to avoid exclusion (Dipholo & Molosi-France, 2017). Participation in decision making is important to emancipate the marginalised and avoid decisions taken on behalf of the selected few. As noted in the critical tradition, communication in development should facilitate a collective process of dialogue to ensure the marginalised are heard as opposed to the voices of the dominant.

While there is little consensus on its definition (Croft & Beresford, 1992), it is a revered notion that almost everyone enthusiastically applauds that the governed participate in their government (Arnstein, 2007). Despite the lack of consensus, Kasongo (1997) insists that unless citizens are involved, appropriate media are used, and the messages reflect the proper variety of realities, development through communication will remain a pipe dream. As a result of people's desire for involvement, the following features are associated with participation: influencing decisions, changing power distribution, making sure marginalised and oppressed groups and constituencies have equal access, providing broad participation, and going beyond establishing new leadership (Croft & Beresford, 1992). According to Croft and Beresford:

participatory initiatives can be a route to redistributing power, changing relationships and creating opportunities for influence. Equally, they can double as a means of keeping power from people and giving a false impression of its transfer. They can be put to two conflicting purposes, according to whether their initiators want to hold on to or share power (Croft & Beresford, 1992:38).

Furthermore, Yudarwati and Gregory (2022) argue that participation involves bringing together participatory development communication and deliberative decision making, which encourages a change in the public's perception of the government (the organisation). Deliberative decision-making involves the collective deliberation among

various stakeholders towards a decision. To empower themselves and their communities, their ultimate goal should be high-level participation and collective decision making throughout all stages of the communication campaign. This includes the formulation and planning of a communication campaign, as well as the implementation, evaluation, and sharing of benefits resulting from the campaign. Deliberative decision making supports a move from one oriented towards dissemination to one oriented toward dialogue and from one that controls to one that empowers (see Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Participation ensures that all stakeholders have a voice and are included in the communication process. Participation allows for diverse perspectives, experiences, and needs to be considered and represented. It ensures mutual contribution of ideas, concerns, and solutions. Participation helps build confidence, mobilise resources, and promote sustainable actions and change (Arnstein, 2007).

Participation unsettles the assumption that CH9s can independently select and frame social conditions and problems and legitimise specific approaches to their resolution (and not others), without engaging with CSO framing (see Wilkins & Mody, 2001). This research views the role of CSOs as collaborative with CH9s. The success of this collaboration depends on the degree to which they are integrated for participation in CSO initiatives.

Participation has no universal meaning and sometimes has been used interchangeably with involvement (Croft & Beresford, 1992; Kasongo, 1997; Melkote, 2018; Yagnik & Melkote, 2020). In the South African context, participation is embedded in the public participation framework, which categorises involvement as an element of participation (Public Participation Framework, 2013). According to some development communication theorists, participation should be considered as an end in itself in terms of empowerment (see Huesca, 2008), while others see participation as a means to successful development initiatives (see Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999). This means participation has a dual role, first as a consequence of empowerment and second as a cause of empowerment. Where there is no participation, the communities' perceptions of their problems and solutions are often overlooked, while their storehouse of information, experience, and analysis is often neglected (Anyaegbunam *et al.*, 2004). The above factors can result in passive participation by merely telling communities about what is happening and counting their participation by, for example, attending a meeting where they are informed (Arnstein,

1969). To gain agreed, collective decisions, people must have the opportunity to speak, and diverse viewpoints must be represented in deliberative and participatory communication (Blacksher, 2013). This is in congruence with Habermas' ideal speech situation in the public sphere (see section 4.3).

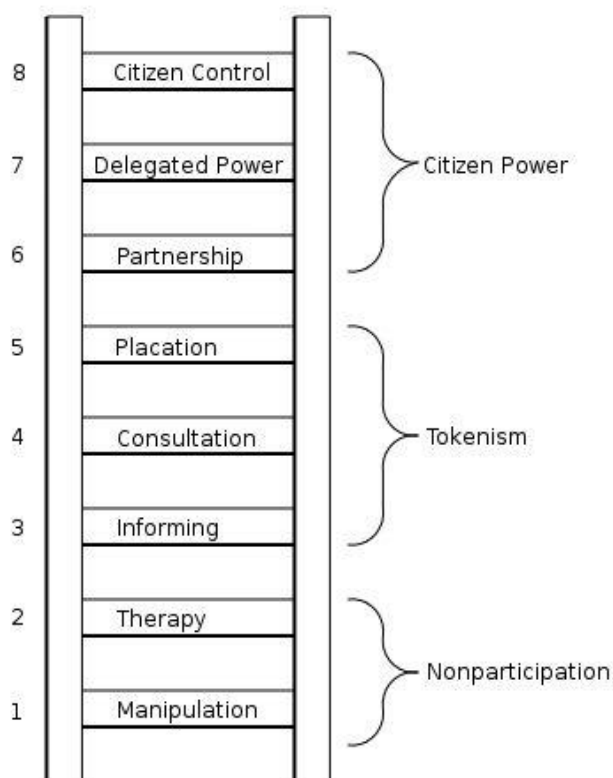
This research considers any form of inclusion with no implications for CSO empowerment as involvement, not participation. Lukes (1974) reveals the hidden dimensions of power where we assume participation exists. Hidden power is exercised when a conflict of interest is excluded from public discourse and decision making. Consequently, others appear to accept what happens, but their views are not being heard (Lukes, 1974).

Arnstein (2007:216-224) developed a ladder to determine who holds power in important decision-making processes. Despite its age, the ladder remains relevant as many processes still ignore input from those on the lower rungs. The ladder highlights the need to increase citizen participation and climb the ladder to ensure everyone's voices are heard and needs are met. It demonstrates the varying levels of citizen participation in decision making, with the lower rungs representing less involvement, such as informing or placating citizens, while the higher rungs represent greater citizen power, such as partnerships or citizen control (Arnstein, 2007:216-224).

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, first introduced by Sherry R. Arnstein in 1969, is a conceptual framework that illustrates the varying degrees of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. The ladder comprises eight rungs, ranging from non-participation (manipulation and therapy) through degrees of tokenism (informing, consultation, placation), to levels of citizen power (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control). Arnstein (1969) argues that true participation only occurs when citizens possess actual decision-making power, as opposed to being merely informed or consulted without real influence. This model remains highly influential in fields such as urban planning, public administration, and community development, as it highlights the importance of empowering communities and ensuring meaningful engagement in governance (Arnstein, 1969:216-224). However, other scholars like Hurlbert and Gupta (2015:100-113.) argue that participation should not be limited to the levels but also recognise the conditions and circumstances which necessitate participation, including the nature of the problem participation seeks to address. Similarly, the Public Participation

Framework (2013) argues that for participation to be effective, it must be based on the sharing of information, consultation, involvement of the citizens in all stages of participation and collaboration.

Arnstein (2007) shows through the participation ladder that participation is more than just about physical presence. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation ranges from one to eight. The diagram below demonstrates the eight rungs of participation.



**Figure 4.1: Eight rungs of participation (Source: Arnstein, 1969:217)**

Levels one to three are non-participatory, consisting of manipulation and therapy. This level is characterised by non-participation by citizens being observers with no active role to play. In the context of this study, this level can refer to an information stage where the CH9s provide educational information to the CSOs without expecting them to make contributions. In this level, the CH9s may be seen as being in control of the process.

Levels four to six are degrees of tokenism (Arnstein, 2007). Here one finds informing, consultation, and placation. While a degree provides information and consultation as a

basic requirement of participation, it is not enough for CH9s to provide information and consultation when the CSOs cannot contribute to the policy or public action if the information is unclear or consultation is reduced to one-way communication.

Levels six to eight are degrees of citizen power where one finds partnership, delegated power, and citizen control (Arnstein, 2007). Here, there is more engagement, the decision-making process is diversified, participation is open to all stakeholders, and there is a distribution of power. However, the equal analysis of power dynamics of representative structures must be acknowledged.

This research proposes a CSO-CH9 communication framework focussing on establishing partnerships, delegated power, and mutual control through the empowered participation of both CH9s and CSOs within their relationship to fulfil their shared mandates.

To enable empowered participation, the participatory approach, which advocates for participation in all phases of the development processes (conceptualising, planning, implementing, and evaluating) (see Cohen & Uphoff, 2011; Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999; Servaes, 2008; Thomas, 1994; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009), should be followed. Participatory decision making in development communication requires knowledge sharing between the experts and the beneficiaries of development projects (Melkote, 2000). In the context of this study, it is argued that both CH9s and CSOs should participate equally in collective decision making. This would involve decision making across the various aspects of initiatives they address together, in accordance with their shared mandate. Therefore, it is argued in this study that the different phases of participation within initiatives, although theorised in a community development context as occurring between champions and beneficiaries (Kloppers & Fourie, 2018), are also relevant to the relationship between CH9s and CSOs in their mutual empowerment, as it defines empowered participation.

#### **4.6.1.1 Planning**

Planning is the process of setting goals, determining actions, and allocating resources to achieve those goals effectively and efficiently. Whether it is personal endeavours, organisational initiatives, or community projects, planning consists of creating a detailed roadmap or strategy to guide decision making and implementation (Mintzberg, 1981).

Planning is connected to monitoring and evaluation and decision making (Tufte & Mefalopulous, 2009). Objective-oriented project planning is a method to plan and manage projects based on a participatory approach (Mefalopulous, 2008).

The purpose of planning is to establish the direction, priorities, and actions necessary to accomplish organisational goals. Analysing internal and external factors, identifying opportunities and risks, and developing strategies to capitalise on strengths and minimise weaknesses are all part of planning (Geus, 1988). Planning helps in resource allocation, coordination, and decision making across different departments or teams. Both CH9s and CSOs should be involved in planning that will assist in creating a roadmap that will guide both parties in decision making and implementation to achieve their goals.

Planning is a dynamic process that requires flexibility and adaptability as circumstances change. In addition to providing a structured framework for decision making, planning can also help manage risks and uncertainty (Geus, 1988).

From a participatory perspective, planning is described by Eriksson *et al.* (2021:994–1012) as a sorting process where inputs from different stakeholders are categorised, evaluated, and structured for a participatory process. Similarly, Musyoki *et al.* (2020:51–67) place direct engagement with the community as the centre of participatory planning to emphasise the need to take into consideration the view of the community in any process of development that affects them. Furthermore, planning should be contextualised to keep up with the local context and sociocultural realities of the community (Hilbert *et al.*, 2025). Planning in participatory development also offers stakeholders an opportunity to express their aspirations and consider community needs in any project (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2024; Kgobe *et al.*, 2025). On the contrary, Molebatsi (2013) argues that central planning is problematic to development because of the systems and bureaucracy ending up as an impediment to the same development it seeks to achieve. This shows the importance of CH9s and CSOs equally participating in the planning of all collaborative efforts.

#### **4.6.1.2 Implementation**

Both CH9s and CSOs should participate in the implementation of collaborative efforts. Implementation refers to the process of putting plans, policies, strategies, or projects into

action (Maskin & Sjöström, 2002). It involves the practical execution and operationalisation of ideas, initiatives, or solutions. In implementation, the intended goals and objectives are achieved by implementing the proposed or designed actions (Maskin & Sjöström, 2002). In project management, implementation refers to the execution of activities outlined in the project plan. For this research, both CH9s and CSOs must participate in this execution. In the participatory perspective, implementation means putting the plans into action and ensuring that all that the stakeholders agreed on in the planning phase is actioned (Sebunya & Gichuki, 2024:1-9). However, implementation in South Africa has been found to be problematic due to corruption, skills shortage, poor infrastructure, and lack of skills (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016).

Joint implementation in participation for both CSOs and CH9s can enhance a sense of collective project ownership. The participation in implementation should ensure that CSOs' and CH9s' intentions and goals are translated into tangible outcomes and results. Successful participation in implementation is crucial for achieving the desired results and outcomes for both parties involved. Participation in implementation is imperative for both CH9s and CSOs to ensure that goals are pursued, objectives are met, and targets are achieved. Implementing a project, implementing a policy, or executing a strategy effectively ensures the intended benefits or changes are realised (Maskin & Sjöström, 2002). By participating in implementation, both parties can have a sense of project ownership. Therefore, participation in implementation enriches implementation.

Participation in implementation should not be seen as a one-off, but it should be executed as a dynamic and iterative process that aims to transform ideas into tangible results for both CSOs and CH9s. Both CSOs and CH9s should adequately participate in the implementation of collaborative efforts. This would mean that implementation should be a collaborative effort where both parties ensure that all the plans agreed upon in the planning phase are fully implemented to reflect the mutual beneficial results for either CH9 or CSO.

#### **4.6.1.3 Evaluation**

There has been relatively little explicit analysis of the processes and outcomes of communication as part of evaluation studies (Hogard & Ellis, 2006). According to Alkin (1969), evaluation is the process of ascertaining the decision areas of concern, selecting

appropriate information, and collecting and analysing information to report summary data useful to decision makers in selecting among alternatives (Aikin, 1969:3). Both CH9s and CSOs need to adequately participate in the evaluation of their collaborative efforts.

Every programme evaluation should, at least in part, focus on organisational communication. Evaluating communication can be in the form of a collaborative effort where stakeholders assess what has been agreed against the output. In this context, the CH9 and CSO can evaluate the work of each other against their mandate, unlike the self-regulation as proposed by the cybernetic tradition. Therefore, participation of all parties in the evaluation is critical. In this scenario, observers are limited in their ability to participate in communication situations when observing participant observation (Hogard & Ellis, 2006). This is despite the fact that evaluation requires participation from both parties involved.

The study acknowledges all these factors and views participation in evaluation as an initiative that should involve a collaborative effort of discussing what both CH9s and CSOs feel went well or wrong during the implementation of a project. This means that evaluation should be a collaborative effort where the CH9s and CSOs interrogate the implemented communication to assess whether mutual empowerment was achieved and, if not, what both organisations can do to ensure that beneficiation is not one-sided, as this will impede the participatory effort towards empowerment. Below is the theoretical statement for all participation concepts that have been discussed in the preceding sections.

#### **Theoretical statement 21: Participation**

CH9s and CSOs should participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts.

The following section will unpack the dialogue as the concepts that will be integrated into the proposed communication framework. Its constructs will also be deliberated in detail.

#### 4.6.2 Dialogue

Freire's concept of dialogic communication (see 4.5) is recognised as a standard point of departure of participatory communication, as per Servaes (2003). Other notable philosophers of the late 20th century who contributed to the conceptualisation of dialogue as it is recognised in the participatory approach include Martin Buber. Buber was a prominent Jewish philosopher who lived in Germany and Israel in the early 20th century. Buber (1970) argued that true dialogue requires a genuine connection between participants based on mutual respect and a willingness to listen and learn from one another. He is best known for his ideas about dialogue and human relationships, which he articulated in his influential work "I and Thou." He contrasted this type of dialogue with what he called "I-It" relationships, in which people treat each other as objects to be used for their purposes rather than as unique individuals worthy of respect and consideration (Buber, 1970). According to Buber (1970), dialogue is essential for building authentic human relationships and creating a sense of community and shared understanding. He believed that through dialogue, people could transcend their perspectives and experiences and arrive at a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the world and each other. Buber's (1970) ideas about dialogue have significantly impacted various fields, including philosophy, theology, psychology, and education. His emphasis on the importance of mutual respect, active listening, and openness to new ideas continues to inspire people worldwide who are working to promote understanding, cooperation, and social change through dialogue (Buber, 1970). According to Buber, real listening involves responding to the other as a whole person and creating a space where the other can speak their own words. Listening implies that all participants should pay attention to one another to understand each other's reality and point of view.

Stewart *et al.* (2004:21-38) conducted a comparative study comparing the works of Buber and discovered that tension was the recurring theme in the idea of dialogue. Thomas (1994:52) notes that Freire and Buber describe dialogue as a process characterised by authenticity, reciprocal relationships, and meaningfulness. However, Freire adds that dialogue can be a process based on mutual respect, humility, and co-construction (Smith & Lee, 2023). Buber's concept of community and dialogue helps us comprehend participatory communication, where genuine participation emerges from dialogue. Dialogue is a conversation between two or more individuals where they strive to

understand each other's thoughts and beliefs. It involves maximum cooperative and collective action. The basic premise of dialogue is that reaching an agreement is beneficial and achievable and that all participants are open to listening and making changes (Kincaid & Figueroa, 2009: 510).

Listening and mutual respect are widely accepted as two essential attributes that foster dialogical communication (Freire, 1970:45-46; Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Rahim, 1994:131). Martin Buber (1998), like Freire (1968), argues that listening is a way of embracing the other.

Genuine conversation, and therefore every actual fulfilment and relation between men, means acceptance of otherness. Everything depends, as far as human life is concerned, on whether each thinks of the other as the one he is, whether each, that is, with all his desire to influence the other, nevertheless unreservedly accepts and confirms him in his being this man and in his being made in this particular way (Buber, 1998:59).

Dialogue is used to give all participants the opportunity to speak, collaborate, and contribute to the development agenda. This shared understanding, partnership, and ability to transform situations has the potential to empower individuals and groups alike.

Today, dialogue continues to be essential for promoting understanding and resolving conflicts in various contexts, including diplomacy, education, and business. The practice of dialogue has evolved to include a variety of formats, such as group discussions, town hall meetings, and online forums. It is often facilitated by trained professionals who help to ensure that all voices are heard and that the conversation remains productive and respectful (Streeter *et al.*, 2021).

Dialogue is also linked to Habermas' concept of the public sphere and Freire's (1968) notion of critical pedagogy. Both scholars view ideal communication as based on an equal exchange or dialogue. Dialogue between stakeholders and organisations is essential because it helps to develop a more progressive form of engagement and understanding (Burchell & Cook, 2008:212). Dialogue is often framed as a balanced two-way communication. According to Freire (1968), dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person 'depositing' ideas into another, nor to a simple exchange of ideas to be consumed

by the discussants, because the dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and actions of the actors are addressed to the world that needs to be transformed and humanised. Dialogue must not imply one party naming on behalf of another, since it is an encounter between women and men naming the world (Freire, 1968) (see 4.5).

In dialogue, diverse voices are brought together, resulting in the process of exchange between communities and individuals, which is indefinable and meaningful (Rockwell, 2003). In essence, dialogue is the deliberate and conscious decision to listen without prejudice and bracket one's previous positions from the conversation (Burchell & Cook, 2008). Listening without prejudice is an essential component of the communication framework that is proposed in this research. CH9s must take the input of CSOs on board regardless of the prejudice or political tensions between those involved. Rahim (1994:131) emphasises that all participants in a dialogue have the right to speak and be heard.

Dialogical communication between CH9 and CSO must function with other participatory principles to establish mutual empowerment. These include the constructs of dialogue that involve creating equal partners, communicating horizontally, mutual understanding, meaning being shared, and interpersonal communication (Kloppers & Fourie, 2018). In participatory communication, dialogue involves the right for everyone to be heard and the absence of anyone or any group dictating the dialogue (Freire, 1970; Rahim, 1994). While mutual understanding in dialogue emphasises shared meaning and purposive interaction, the concept is interpreted differently in cybernetic and critical perspectives. From a cybernetic viewpoint, mutual understanding is seen as the alignment of information and feedback loops between communicators, focussing on the transmission and reception of messages within a system to achieve equilibrium (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In contrast, the critical view interrogates power dynamics and social structures underlying communication, suggesting mutual understanding is shaped by contextual factors and may be constrained by inequalities or dominant ideologies (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Habermas, 1984). Thus, whereas cybernetics prioritises efficient information exchange, critical theory foregrounds the role of societal influences and the potential for transformative dialogue (Fuchs, 2022).

This does not necessarily mean that there is an absence of disagreements. The success of dialogues rests on participation, *cultural diversity*, and empowerment (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Otto & Fourie, 2016:28; Polk & Servaes, 2015:165; Servaes, 1996:17). Dialogue in Schellhammer's (2017) description of dialogue in education also involves tension, a significant attribute of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is therefore an essential construct of this research and will be discussed in the next section. Tension and difference in opinion are captured in the agonistic approach to dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012). A dialogue will not necessarily lead to consensus or agreement (Bezuidenhout, 2010), according to Kloppers and Fourie (2018:93):

In an agonistic approach, the focus is on shifting power relationships and identifying vulnerability, while also paying attention to justice, conflict and material needs. The agonistic perspective thus recognises conflict as part of the dialogue, in contrast to consensus approaches, which view dialogue as collaboration or co-option. In a situation where it is assumed that dialogue needs common ground, the stronger partner could dictate the consensus, but agonistic approaches focus on the potential of "subverting" power relations.

For CH9s to get more CSO representation in their initiatives, they must build dialogical communication in conjunction with other participatory mechanisms. For CH9s and CSOs to achieve mutual empowerment, it is important for them to engage in open and respectful communication. This type of dialogue should take place in an environment where everyone is treated equally and can speak and listen. Through dialogue, CH9s and CSOs can become more aware of each other's perspectives, expectations, needs, and realities, as well as of the community's needs and problems, and work together to find solutions. This process of reflection and action is known as conscientisation and praxis.

By employing dialogue, CH9s and CSOs must ensure equal power distribution, balance, accommodation of diverse voices, and equal exchange of ideas. Dialogue is conceptualised distinctly within the cybernetic tradition and the critical paradigm. In cybernetics, dialogue refers to a structured exchange of information, primarily designed to enhance system coordination and control. This perspective emphasises stability and the achievement of predetermined objectives through feedback and regulation

mechanisms (Bateson, 1972; Wiener, 1948). In contrast, the critical paradigm defines dialogue as a two-way communication process centred on consultation, partnership, and negotiation, rather than mere information dissemination. Here, dialogue is understood as a means for mutual understanding, empowerment, and transformative engagement, challenging hierarchical structures and promoting shared decision making (Habermas, 1984; Freire, 1970; Kim, 2021). Thus, while cybernetics focusses on control and efficiency, the critical paradigm prioritises dialogue as a vehicle for social change and participatory processes.

CH9 communication must be empathetic while recognising and respecting the other person as independent. CH9-CSO dialogue should lead to trust, respect, more participation, acceptance of *cultural diversity*, and empowerment. Dialogue between CH9s and CSOs can also be agonistic, meaning a difference in opinion is seen as progressive.

Dialogue must involve mutual respect between parties. Mutual respect refers to the recognition, appreciation, and valuing of the inherent worth, dignity, and rights of every individual. It involves treating others with courtesy, consideration, and fairness, regardless of differences in opinions, beliefs, backgrounds, or characteristics (Bird, 1996). Basically, mutual respect implies that all participants should treat one another as equals (Kloppers & Fourie, 2018). Developing mutual respect requires treating everyone with dignity and expecting them to be respected in the same way we expect them to respect us. The dialogue process is guided by mutual respect, which involves recognising the opinions, perceptions, and knowledge of each individual (see Freire, 1970: 45-46; Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Rahim, 1994:131). In the case of CH9s and CSOs, this means that CH9s should acknowledge the opinions of CSOs and vice versa. This is achieved through active listening and speaking with the goal of creating mutual understanding (see 4.7.2) (as described by Buber, 1970).

Mutual respect is important for CH9s and CSOs, which will lead both parties to recognise, appreciate and value each other's work with dignity. Therefore, it is important for both parties to have mutual respect. As a result of mutual respect, human rights are upheld, positive relationships are nurtured, conflicts are resolved, diversity is cultivated, cooperation and collaboration are promoted, learning and growth are supported, social

harmony is maintained, and a positive example is set (Mayfield & Lucas, 2000). Mutual respect is important for CH9s and CSOs as it builds loyalty amongst each other. When there is loyalty, there will be healthy working relations built on mutual respect (Arvey & Murphy, 1998). Without mutual respect, communication campaigns for CH9s and CSOs are less likely to succeed. Relationships with high social respect have open communication and show care, while those lacking mutual respect may not have these traits (Senge, 1990; Waddock, 2002). When CH9s and CSOs show mutual respect for one another, it can lead to mutual growth and development.

Achieving mutual respect is an ongoing process that requires self-awareness, self-reflection, and a commitment to collective growth. CH9s can foster positive relationships by cultivating an environment of mutual respect, which promotes positive relationships as well as harmonious relationships between individuals (Mayfield & Lucas, 2000). Mutual respect is key to developing valuable relationships for CH9s and CSOs.

#### **Theoretical statement 22: Dialogue**

CH9-CSO communication should include conversations without pre-determined goals and should be based on mutual respect for independent individuals with equal power and a deliberate and conscious decision to listen without prejudice to understand the situation from the other's perspective and arrive at a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the world and each other.

The dialogue is important in culturally diverse environments, where individuals may have different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. By embracing open dialogue and actively listening without bias, participants can bridge cultural gaps, foster inclusivity, and enhance collaboration, ultimately enriching both individual and collective perspectives in a multicultural setting. The next section will focus on cultural diversity and how it relates to dialogue.

#### **4.6.3 Cultural diversity**

Culture is broadly understood as the set of shared values, beliefs, norms, customs, practices, and symbols that characterise a group or society and shape its collective behaviour and worldview (Hall, 2023; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Contemporary scholarship

emphasises that culture is dynamic and continually constructed and reconstructed through social interaction, communication, and adaptation to changing circumstances (Smith & Lee, 2024). In development contexts, culture influences how communities perceive change, interact with external actors, and engage in collective action.

Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, shaped by shared histories, languages, values, traditions, and social practices (Hall, 2023; Jenkins, 2014). Recent literature highlights that cultural identity is not static but emerges through ongoing processes of negotiation, interaction, and co-creation within diverse social contexts (Smith & Lee, 2024). This dynamic character allows individuals and groups to express, adapt, and redefine their identities in response to internal and external influences.

The participatory approach to development recognises culture and cultural identity as foundational elements that must be actively incorporated into participatory processes (Lerouge & Arnaboldi, 2025). It calls for culturally sensitive engagement, where stakeholders' diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and practices are valued and integrated into decision making (Baur *et al.*, 2022). This approach fosters mutual respect, creativity, and equitable outcomes by ensuring that all voices are heard and that interventions resonate with the lived experiences of the communities involved. Inclusive participation is seen as essential for empowering individuals and groups, strengthening group identity, and promoting sustainable development (Hall, 2023; Smith & Lee, 2024).

In the context of this study, it is argued that the principle of cultural diversity should focus on the organisational culture of CH9s and CSOs rather than the cultural identity of individuals. We live in a world of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity involves incorporating cultural norms, values, customs, and indigenous knowledge in development. According to Malan (1998), cultural diversity is centred on the diversity of worldviews, values, indigenous knowledge, customs, beliefs, and symbols in a specific community.

Through the adoption of a shared value system and a willingness to appreciate and respect differences, trust, participation, and empowerment can be enhanced. It is essential that both CH9s and CSOs acknowledge and respect the organisational culture of its counterparts.

Organisational culture encompasses the collective values, beliefs, practices, and symbols that shape an institution's identity and influence its internal and external interactions (Higgins, 2007; Schein, 2017). In participatory approaches, acknowledging and respecting organisational culture is crucial for effective collaboration, trust-building, and empowerment. Diverse organisational cultures can enrich partnerships, expand perspectives, and enhance problem solving, but they also require deliberate efforts to create shared value systems and foster mutual understanding (Cantle, 2014; Cox & Blake, 1991; O'Sullivan, 1994). Recent research underscores that embracing diversity, including differences in organisational culture, strengthens relationships, participation, and the overall effectiveness of development initiatives (Hall, 2023; Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

Integrating clear understandings of culture, cultural identity, and organisational culture into participatory development processes is essential for fostering inclusive, respectful, and sustainable collaboration between institutions. By recognising and valuing the dynamic nature of culture and identity, and by actively engaging with diverse organisational cultures, development practitioners and researchers can build more vibrant, empowered partnerships that drive meaningful change.

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| <p><b>Theoretical statement 23: Organisational Culture</b></p> <p>CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, and embrace each other's organisational cultures and diversity.</p> |
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Acknowledging cultural identity can contribute to empowerment as it accommodates multiple ideas and perspectives and creates a space for all to combine strengths in an inclusive manner.

#### **4.6.4 Empowerment**

The concept of empowerment has evolved to include various approaches and strategies, including capacity building, participatory decision making, and enabling environments that support individual and collective agency (Yassine & Masa'deh, 2018). Empowerment is another contested concept (see Fawcett *et al.*, 1995; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Pretsby *et al.*, 1990; Rappaport, 1984; Rich *et al.*, 1995; Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Zimmerman,

1995) that assumes different definitions based on theoretical perspectives, populations, or contexts (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Hur, 2006; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Lincoln *et al.*, 2002; Starkey, 2003). Using an empowerment paradigm, participatory development communication strives towards building local capacity and equity while empowering people. Empowerment can be considered both a process and an outcome in which the marginalised and more vulnerable individuals or groups become aware of and have agency against discrimination, resulting in a change in circumstances or structure, allowing them to make free strategic decisions. In keeping with cultural diversity, individuals with diverse racial, gender, ethnic, class, and social backgrounds will seek different forms of empowerment due to the differences in demographics and life opportunities (Fishman, 1998).

From the vantage of the critical tradition, empowerment is not only about access or capacity, but about transforming power relations, enabling actors to become aware of structural constraints and act on them. For example, Zimmerman (1995) conceptualises psychological empowerment as including a cognitive component: a commitment to collective interests, leadership, and decision-making skills, and an understanding of social and civic opportunities. This underscores that empowerment involves understanding and agency, not merely resources.

Scholars in community psychology, such as Rappaport (1987), emphasised empowerment as the process by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs and control over the structures which shape their lives. Jennings *et al.* (2006) build a critical social theory of youth empowerment which emphasises collective efforts, safe contexts, equitable power-sharing, critical reflection, and engagement in sociopolitical processes. Within development communication, Melkote and Steeves (2001) argue that empowerment must be located in power relations, for it is a mechanism by which individuals, organisations, and communities gain control over social and economic conditions, over political processes, and over their own stories.

For long-term progress to occur, people must have control over their destiny (see Cornwall & Perlman, 1990; Geroy *et al.*, 1998; Salzer, 1997; Vogt, 1997). A large portion of the literature on empowerment outcomes focusses on psychological empowerment, involving measures such as collective efficacy (the belief that people work together) and

outcome efficacy (the belief that action produces results), as well as political efficacy (the belief that just one person can make a difference in the political process, organisations, and communities) (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Empowerment has been studied from an ecological perspective, with interrelated processes and outcomes analysed at the community level, at the organisational and setting level, and at the psychological level (Zimmerman, 2000). Critical thinking abilities and participation are also measures of empowerment (Knol & Van Linge, 2009; Laschinger *et al.*, 2001). For Dutta (2015:58), among the most important steps of women's empowerment are access to financial, health, and media resources, as well as access to spaces outside the home (Siegal & Gardner, 2000; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

One of the earliest examples of empowerment can be seen in the social and political movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as the suffragette movement and the civil rights movement, which sought to give women and racial minorities greater control over their lives and greater representation in the political process (Collins, 1999). In the 1960s and 1970s, empowerment became a central concept in social and community development efforts, as activists and policymakers sought to address poverty, inequality, and social exclusion through programmes that gave people greater control over their own lives and communities (Abbatye, 2018; Cindog & Toktas, 2002). This included providing education and training, creating job opportunities, and promoting community organising and activism. In the 1980s and 1990s, empowerment expanded to include a broader range of issues, including women's rights, environmentalism, and global development. Empowerment also became an important concept in corporate management and leadership as organisations began to recognise the importance of giving employees greater autonomy and control over their work (Bordin *et al.*, 2006).

Today, empowerment continues to be an essential concept in a variety of contexts. Researchers in various academic disciplines have discussed empowerment widely, including community development, education, health care, and human rights (see Fawcett *et al.*, 1995; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Kroeker, 1995; Pretsby *et al.*, 1990; Rich *et al.*, 1995; Serrano-Garcia, 1984). The section discusses empowerment through participation, empowerment through knowledge and skills development and access to resources and empowerment through the distribution of power.

Empowerment in all its various forms can lead to redistribution and equalisation of power. However, the concept of power is not universal and has different meanings and interpretations. Christensen (2023) draws from Foucault, Bourdieu and Habermas' concept of power and describes power as possession by the powerful exercised on the powerless and considers it as oppressive. Both Foucault and Bourdieu argue that power is multidimensional namely: possessed, rational, and contextual (Christensen, 2023). Other scholars like Avelino (2020) argue that power is a contested concept which must be studied and understood in the context of social change and innovation. This works hand in glove with Freire's position that:

people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (Freire, 1968:83).

Empowerment can contribute to sustainable development by facilitating the participation of all interested parties (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Empowerment can allow both CH9s and CSOs to reach their full potential (see Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Empowerment can lead to control over the collective's value and wealth, an increase in the ability to control projects and processes, and an increase in the ability to change the world and its circumstances (Tengland, 2008). These are important attributes that can lead to mutual empowerment of both CH9s and CSOs.

Empowerment is also defined through a lens of participation. Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988:380) define empowerment as:

a social action process that promotes the participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and the larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterised as achieving the power to dominate others, but rather the power to act with others to effect change.

One of the forms of psychological empowerment is behavioural empowerment. According to Christens *et al.* (2016), psychological empowerment includes actions taken in civic and community settings to exert influence and gain control. Psychological empowerment

captures how role players (such as CH9s and CSOs) feel empowered or otherwise. According to Zimmerman (1995), the cognitive component of psychological empowerment includes a commitment to collective interests, leadership and decision-making skills, and an understanding of social and civic opportunities. Social psychologists see empowerment as intervening to improve the lives of marginalised or disenfranchised people. In community psychological theory and research, empowerment has been defined as “a group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalised or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environments, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduce societal marginalisation” (Yassine & Masa’deh, 2018:18-20). In the empowerment communication literature, researchers have highlighted the significant psychological benefits of empowerment strategies when discussing stakeholders’ behavioural outcomes (e.g., Hancer & George, 2003; Sembada, 2018)

Empowerment is considered an expansion of the concept of citizen participation (see 4.7.1). Citizen participation has been framed as a set of activities such as voting and seeking to influence policy debate or writing a letter to a newspaper (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Community participation, also called psychological empowerment, can include participation in community and organisational activities (see Peterson, 2014). These membership dynamics include membership in organisations, the number of times a person has participated in organisational activities, and attendance at community meetings (Speer & Peterson, 2000). The other kind of empowerment is emotional empowerment. It has been conceptualised and measured as sociopolitical control by Bandura (1982) and a sense of self-efficacy or motivation to control one’s environment. Sociopolitical control can be characterised as leadership competence and policy control. In organisational and community contexts, leadership competence refers to the skills and confidence necessary to lead. Policy control involves perceptions that one can influence decisions in these contexts (Christens *et al.*, 2016:94). Empowerment seeks to promote participation of different stakeholders in their communities while exercising some control over the process.

Freire (1968) views empowerment as born out of the participation of people in group action and dialogue. A process of empowerment involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which those who lack an equal share

of valuable resources can gain access to and control over the resources they need (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). By focussing on empowerment, several underlying constraints in directed social change can be identified, including the lack of power among the recipients of development initiatives (Yagnik & Melkote, 2020).

CSOs need to see themselves as belonging to the broader agendas in CH9 visions and be seen actively in attendance of workshops, meetings, and seminars so they feel empowered. The organisation and its constituency are each other's stakeholders and are better off when empowered. This shows that empowerment from an organisation's point of view should not be monolithic but mutual. In an ideal scenario, the CH9 is empowered simultaneously with the CSO. Feedback on whether CSOs feel empowered constitutes a significant part of the CSO-CH9 communication framework's cycle.

Empowerment also takes place through knowledge and skills transfer and access to resources. The other form of empowerment is cognitive empowerment. As part of psychological empowerment, one can see how policies and systems are formed and comprehend how to change them (Christens *et al.*, 2016).

The context of this study differs from that of traditional development initiatives, where there is a strong focus on one (or more) party being empowered through the support of others. In this study, it is argued that none of the role players should see it as their task to empower others; rather, both CH9s and CSOs should be empowered through their relationship, whilst simultaneously empowering each other.

For CH9-CSO relationships, then, the critical tradition mandates that communication frameworks address: (a) how power is structured between CH9s and CSOs, (b) how agendas are set and by whom, (c) how resources are allocated, and (d) how narratives are controlled. Without this critical lens, the relationship may inadvertently reproduce dominance, tokenism, or one-way communication. Mutual empowerment thus requires a conscious shift: from CH9s holding power over CSOs to a co-constructed relationship where both parties have agency, voice, and joint control.

The participatory communication approach offers the practical orientation through which mutual empowerment becomes feasible. Further, Prawira and Maulida (2020) found that

participatory empowerment communication involves multiple actors, co-designed messages/media, access, and resource mobilisation (face-to-face and digital).

#### **4.7 Mutual empowerment**

The idea of mutual empowerment in this study builds on the work of Crabtree (1998:183), who conceptualised mutual empowerment as a two-way process where participants mutually empower each other rather than a one-way process where the “advantaged” empowers the “disadvantaged”. Although he positioned this mutual empowerment within the context of participatory development, focusing on social justice, intercultural communication, and service learning, the concept can be applied to other contexts as well. Crabtree’s (1998) conceptualisation of mutual empowerment as a communicative process of reciprocal learning and agency-building is an accurate reflection of how mutual empowerment is envisaged in this study.

Mansvelt’s (2022) work supports that of Crabtree and is also especially relevant to this study. These authors argue that empowerment becomes “mutual” when power, decision making, and knowledge creation are shared equitably. This aligns with the arguments presented in this chapter, grounded in the overarching principles of the participatory approach, which emphasises the role of shared power and decision making in the context of the CH9-CSO relationship in contributing to the empowerment of both institutions.

Mutual empowerment constitutes the core objective of participatory development in generating authentic social justice outcomes within cross-cultural contexts. Crabtree (1998) contends that this concept fundamentally shifts away from traditional, paternalistic development models, which perpetuate inherent power imbalances between organisations. The approach mandates genuine reciprocity, wherein both CH9s and CSOs are recognised as both contributors and recipients of knowledge, competencies, and resources. By institutionalising this balanced exchange, mutual empowerment can actively address the systemic structural inequalities that precipitate marginalisation.

The operational viability of mutual empowerment depends significantly upon robust, reflexive communication between CH9s and CSOs. In this context, deliberate dialogue is required to negotiate meanings and accurately identify inherent power differentials and motivations, as highlighted by Mansvelt (2022). In the process of negotiating meaning,

expertise and knowledge are central to the decision-making process, positioning outside partners as co-learners rather than as experts. This requires establishing a relational posture of reciprocity where CH9s and CSOs both commit to the continuous growth of the other, effectively preventing the development of a dependency dynamic. Mansvelt (2022) and Tanno (2023) further suggest that communication fostering genuine reciprocity creates a secure environment for vulnerability and honest critique, essential for authentic partnerships and collaborations between organisations. Thus, mutual empowerment functions as a critical communicative framework, transforming engagement into a circular process of shared learning that drives structural reform.

The enduring importance of mutual empowerment lies in its explicit trajectory towards collective structural change and solidarity, surpassing mere individual benefit. Park (2021) highlights that this process underscores partners with mutual self-interest rising above systemic obstacles through shared knowledge, support, and structural advocacy. CH9s and CSOs are therefore compelled to transcend simple, mutually beneficial transactional exchanges in favour of a deeper, ethical requirement for co-creation. This higher standard necessitates commitment to collective empowerment (see Mansvelt & Van Niekerk, 2019), ensuring that systemic issues such as exclusion are dismantled collaboratively. Accordingly, mutual empowerment remains the fundamental aim, strategically guiding participatory initiatives towards genuinely equitable and transformative partnerships. In this study, mutual empowerment is also discussed in detail using constructs such as collective agency, shared power and control, access to skills, knowledge and resources, and collaboration to give context and meaning to its application to the study.

#### **4.7.1 Collective agency**

Collective agency has received attention in participatory approach research, especially on issues of development. Its central element is that collectiveness is more important than individual agency and that collective efforts are needed in this entangled world (Orman, 2024). Mantero *et al.* (2024) argue that collective agency can be used as a tool for mutual empowerment for people who identify themselves as having the same struggle in complex situations of gender, race, and social justice. Collective agency can also be used to describe a process through which a collective, through social mobilisation, can

challenge social and political power through collective action (Urrea Yela & Osoria-Garcia, 2024). Collective agency has also been used in understanding how social movements emerge in times of crisis (Hiedeman, 2018). In the context of a participatory approach and mutual empowerment, collective agency can take the form of a multi-sectoral approach to complex social issues through collective action by those who seek to find solutions from a multi-social approach (Cambell, 2020). CH9s and CSOs can facilitate mutual empowerment through collective agency in collaborative efforts to confront similar social or political situations, as in most cases, their mandate is not far from each other.

#### **4.7.2 Shared power and control**

The concept of power and agency, which links to control, has received attention in development research due to their ambiguities (Drydyk, 2013). Power is negotiated and so is its distribution, and this rests within the concept of shared power and control (Massengale & Sage, 2012; Thusi & Mashabela, 2023:89-97). There has been contrasting views on power and empowerment, with some seeing power and domination from the perspectives of scholars such as Luke's and Foucault's work on power (Haugaard, 2012). From a critical tradition, power can be described as a process of emancipation, which can contribute to mutual empowerment that is not abused but shared. According to Mafle Ferreira Duarte *et al.* (2021), power and some social practices are linked and can lead to outcomes of empowerment. As such, these need to be analysed effectively. Sharing power and control mutually requires equal participation of all stakeholders and shared control over decisions to ensure equality. Information and communication must be provided to ensure that every voice is heard and that communication is emancipatory in its nature and practice. CH9 and CSOs can negotiate the sharing of power and control over decisions and programmes to achieve mutual empowerment.

#### **4.7.3 Access to skills, knowledge, and resources**

Collective agency and sharing of power mean nothing for mutual empowerment if there is no access to skills, knowledge, and resources for empowerment. Skills are important to address some of the challenges that different parties may experience (Sakamoto, 2019). In the context of this study, one of the main arguments is that CH9s and CSOs

have different skills, knowledge, and resources, which they can and should share towards the empowerment of both parties. There have been paradoxes in access to resources for empowerment and development in the public and private sectors, and this led to different understandings of access (Simarasl *et al.*, 2024). In mutual empowerment as emancipatory process skills, knowledge and resources play an important role. Information is used to emancipate, rather than achieve equilibrium, as is the case in the cybernetic tradition.

#### **4.7.4 Collaboration**

Collaboration is at the heart of mutual empowerment. Stakeholders can share ideas and collaborate on finding solutions in a more participatory manner (Public Participation Framework, 2013). Like participation, mutual empowerment requires a collective effort from all parties involved to collaborate through resources, skills, and knowledge to achieve mutual strategic goals (Arnstein, 1984). In this context, the CH9s and CSOs should collaborate instead of focussing on conflicting or duplicating efforts, which can be directed to achieving mutual empowerment.

Mutual empowerment in the relationship between CH9s and CSOs is therefore conceptualised as a reciprocal and dynamic process through which both parties gain collective agency, share power and control, access resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and within society at large. This section examines how this understanding of mutual empowerment is grounded in the critical tradition and operationalised through the participatory communication approach.

Mutual empowerment is critical because it strengthens the legitimacy, sustainability, and effectiveness of the CH9-CSO relationship. When CSOs are genuinely empowered, they bring grounded community perspectives, act as agents of accountability, and strengthen the responsiveness of CH9s. When CH9s are empowered in this relationship, they gain deeper community intelligence, legitimacy, and adaptive capacity.

These are both core aims of the critical tradition and the participatory approach. Without mutual empowerment, relationships risk reverting to asymmetry, where CH9s instruct and CSOs comply or CSOs are tokenised and excluded from agency. The critical tradition

warns that empowerment is not simply inclusion but the transformation of structures and relations of power, which is in line with the purpose of the proposed communication framework.

#### **Theoretical statement 24: Mutual empowerment**

Both CH9s and CSOs should experience gaining collective agency, shared power, and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and in society at large.

### **4.8 Ubuntu communication perspective**

This section reflects on how an ubuntu communication perspective can provide a more contextualised understanding of communications in the South African context. Ubuntu has been written about extensively by communication and media scholars such as Tavernaro-Hidarian (2018) and Mertz (2015), among others. Although many of them focussed heavily on media ethics, ubuntu has been underrepresented in public relations discussions, despite it being a familiar concept among public relations scholars.

Mbigi (1997) suggested using the ubuntu philosophy as a foundation for organisational culture in South African management practices, arguing that its focus on reconciliation and harmony provides a solid basis for relationship building. Holtzhausen *et al.* (2003) identified the ubuntu model of public relations in South Africa, asserting that it builds on African perspective practices and that it represents a sincere attempt to build relationships between organisations for mutual benefits. In 2011, Mersham *et al.* presented a case for public relations theory building on the African continent in which they postulated that such theories must give indigenous epistemologies, especially the African philosophy of ubuntu, a central position.

Therefore, this study also integrates the ubuntu model from the South African perspective to build a mutually beneficial relationship between CH9s and CSOs. This model can differentiate itself from the Western model as it contributes a unique perspective derived from common values and the cultural diversity of the continent. Limited researchers across South Africa indicated that communication practitioners recognise these values

as important practices, yet they are not historically fully explored and reflected in African public relations (Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2003, Mersham *et al.*, 2011, Natifu & Zikusooka, 2014, Skinner & Mersham, 2009). They have only been recently acknowledged in recent scholarship (Ngondo & Klyueva, 2022, Shoji & Thaldar, 2023). The current study acknowledges the existence of ubuntu communication perspectives and that these are parallel to Western theory.

#### **4.8.1 Towards an Afro-centric ubuntu perspective of stakeholders and communication**

The previous sections discussed critical meta-theoretical tradition, Habermas' public sphere, critical pedagogy, and the participatory approach to development communication to provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how mutually beneficial relationships are developed, why they matter, and how they contribute to mutual empowerment. While these concepts provide much-needed context and theory, they may not sufficiently account for the African context. To address this, the study integrates the Afro-centric communicative perspective using the Ubuntu philosophical approach. Ubuntu is a term originating from the Zulu adage 'ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', meaning a person is made who he or she is by other people and the way he or she treats others reflects the self (Louw, 2001), thus calling for "humanity towards others". Ubuntu is also rooted in the Nguni word 'umuntu', which translates to 'a person'. The discourse of ubuntu prescribes certain humane values whose absence is conflated with a lack of complete or legitimate personhood. Ubuntu philosophy presupposes that people are immersed in a social setting in which respect, dignity, and rationality are highly recommended (Prinsloo, 2010). Despite divergent cultures and identities in the African continent, ubuntu remains the cultural and spiritual mainstay of a way of life (Louw, 2001:2). Ubuntu calls for the upliftment of community interests and values over that of individuals (Kamwangalau, 1999 cited in Sibanda & Ndlovu, 2020). The ubuntu worldview emphasises collectivism and participative initiatives, as well as aiming for the common betterment of the people (Arnoldi-Van der Walt, 2000). Furthermore, ubuntu is a social concept that combines authentic Afro-centric value-based behaviour in the socioeconomic, cultural, and political arenas. Another essential element of ubuntu is the formation of intentional connections centred on principles of respect, dignity, acceptance, and caring to model a culture of devotion (Arnoldi-Van der Walt, 2000; Broodryk, 2006). According to Broodryk (2006),

ubuntu manifests in how individuals treat others, often described by the balanced and courteous handling of others to nurture others productively.

There is an increasing demand for communication expertise that lends itself to international communication, intercultural dialogue, and programming tailored for communication with traditional domestic stakeholders (Pratt & Adamolekun, 2008; Merham & Skinner, 2009; Anofuechi & Klaasen, 2024). For Africa and ubuntu, a thinking tradition places a high premium on negotiation, inclusiveness, transparency, and tolerance (Fourie, 2008). According to Skinner and Rensburg (2011:196), “many traditional African views of communication are connected by the underlying philosophical principles of humanism (ubuntu) and communalism (*ubunye, ubudlelwane*)”. Communication, as defined in ancient African philosophies that relate to communication (*ukulingisa endaweni ubuhlobo babantu*) and becoming a person through one's relationships with other people (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*) also forms part of these philosophies (Skinner & Rensburg, 2011). When necessary, community interests may be deferred to by individuals. In ubuntu, the community does not oppose the individual or diminish the individual (Skinner & Rensburg, 2011; Farao *et al.*, 2024:7). In ubuntu, the self cannot be imagined without considering the other (Skinner & Rensburg, 2011). Using ubuntu, the CH9 is framed as an entity existing among entities whose rights are mediated by CSOs. Ubuntu is therefore an essential philosophical tenet that informs the sensibilities in the CH9-CSO communication framework.

Ubuntu is important because it humanises organisations and their responsibilities towards each other in the name of humanity, rather than profit. The African environment allows researchers the opportunity to explore both generic communication practices as well as culturally specific ones developed in Africa to address social, political, and economic issues specific to the continent using African communication models (Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2002:3). Merham *et al.* (1995) argue that for members of underdeveloped African communities, no other group, society, group within that community, or individual can prescribe methodologies superior to those they may envision. Those practising communication in Africa must first urge stakeholders to bring their concerns to the surface. Using this model, the initiator in the traditional CMR (communicator-message-recipient) communication model becomes the recipient (Skinner & Rensburg, 2011; Marovah & Mutanga, 2024: 501–516). Finally, initiators and

facilitators become the recipients of community messages. While this was not explicitly integrated in the communication framework, they helped guide the sensibilities of the framework in keeping with the African context where it is being proposed.

***Theoretical statement 25: Ubuntu***

CH9 institutions and CSOs must embrace the ubuntu philosophy in decision making and mutual empowerment to reflect the collective approach rather than individualism.

Building on this understanding, the following section translates these theoretical insights into practical constructs that inform the proposed communication framework between CH9s and CSOs. The table below outlines the key theoretical statements and corresponding constructs that underpin this framework. It demonstrates how concepts such as ubuntu, two-way symmetrical communication, dialogue, cooperation, and mutual empowerment are operationalised to promote sustainable, trust-based, and participatory relationships between CH9s and CSOs within the African context.

Below is a table that summarises the concepts, constructs, and theoretical statements covered in this chapter.

**Table 4.1: Summary of concepts and constructs**

| Concept                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Constructs                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Habermas's public sphere</b></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 18: Public sphere</b></p> <p><i>Communication between CH9s and CSOs should consist of free speech, open debate, and exchanging of ideas where power structures can be challenged with the aim of identifying and addressing social issues.</i></p> | <p>Free speech</p> <p>Open debate</p> <p>Exchange of ideas</p> <p>Challenge power structures</p> <p>Truthful</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 19: Ideal speech situation</b></p> <p><i>Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be truthful, authentic, understandable and appropriate for the context.</i></p>                                                                                                                                  | <p>Authentic</p> <p>Understandable</p> <p>Appropriate</p>                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p><b>Freire's critical pedagogy approach</b></p> <p><b>Theoretical statement 20: Critical learning</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should actively participate in a process of critical engagement, ongoing reflection, and critical thinking towards a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change.</i></p> | <p>Critical engagement</p> <p>Ongoing reflection</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Critical consciousness</p> <p>Mutual learning and change</p>                                                                     |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 21: Participation</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts.</i></p>                                              | <p>Equal partnership</p> <p>Participation in Collaboration</p> <p>Participation in Decision making</p> <p>Participation in Planning</p> <p>Participation in Implementation</p> <p>Participation in Evaluation</p> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 22: Dialogue</b></p> <p><i>CH9-CSO communication should include conversations without pre-determined goals, and should be based</i></p>                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Mutual respect</p> <p>Listening without prejudice</p>                                                                                                                                                          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>on mutual respect for independent individuals with equal power and a deliberate and conscious decision to listen without prejudice in order to understand the situation from the other's perspective and arrive at a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the world and each other.</i></p>                                                                   | <p>Mutual understanding</p>                                                                                                 |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 23: Organisational Culture</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, and embrace each other's cultural and organisational identity.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>Respect organisational identity</p> <p>Understand organisational identity</p> <p>Embrace organisational identity</p>     |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 24: Mutual empowerment</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large.</i></p> | <p>Collective agency</p> <p>Shared power and control</p> <p>Access to knowledge, skills, resources</p> <p>Collaboration</p> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 25: Ubuntu</b></p> <p><i>CH9 institutions and CSOs must embrace sensibilities of ubuntu to position both entities as interdependent agents striving for mutual empowerment (3.6.2.9).</i></p>                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Interdependence</p> <p>Mutual empowerment</p>                                                                            |

## 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the critical metatheoretical tradition, critical theory, Habermas' public sphere, Freire's critical pedagogy, and the participatory approach to development communication as interconnected foundations informing the proposed CH9-CSO communication framework. Collectively, these perspectives underscore communication as a social, ethical, and transformative process that relies on participation, dialogue, and shared power.

At the centre of this theoretical discussion lies the participatory communication approach, which provides the philosophical and practical backbone of this study. Participation reframes communication as a two-way, inclusive process where all stakeholders, particularly those historically marginalised, have voice, agency, and influence in decision making. It challenges hierarchical and top-down communication models by promoting collective ownership, dialogue, collaboration, and reflexivity, thereby aligning with the democratic values that underpin CH9 institutions and the civic missions of CSOs.

Within this context, mutual empowerment is conceptualised as the outcome of a genuinely participatory communication process. It is not a unidirectional transfer of power but a reciprocal process in which CH9 institutions and CSOs engage as equal partners, co-creating knowledge, negotiating meaning, and working toward shared goals of social justice, accountability, and transformation. Mutual empowerment emerges through dialogue, transparency, trust, and shared decision making, reinforcing both institutional legitimacy and civic agency.

In sum, the participatory approach serves as the unifying thread connecting all the theoretical foundations discussed in this chapter. It provides the ethical and methodological grounding for mutual empowerment, which in turn embodies the ubuntu-inspired principles of interdependence, solidarity, and shared humanity. Together, participation and mutual empowerment define a communicative relationship where CH9s and CSOs act as co-creators of knowledge and agents of transformation through dialogue. The chapter also integrated the Afro-centric communication approach guided by the ubuntu philosophy to provide a more contextual communication perspective to achieving mutual empowerment. The next chapter builds on these theoretical insights to

present a contextual communication framework that operationalises these principles within the CH9-CSO relationship.

## CHAPTER 5: CH9-CSO COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 focussed on the cybernetic tradition as a meta-theoretical tradition, and the two-way symmetrical model and stakeholder relationship management theory as two specific theoretical perspectives within this meta-theoretical tradition. Some stewardship strategies found in stewardship theory were also included in the discussion. From the discussion of these theoretical perspectives, theoretical statements were formulated, which will be used to determine the theoretical constructs that will be included in the communication framework for the building of mutually beneficial relationships between CH9s and CSOs in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the critical meta-theoretical tradition was discussed, and as part of this tradition, Habermas' public sphere, the ideal speech situation, Freire's critical pedagogy, and the participatory approach to development communication were discussed. The chapter revealed the essential constructs necessary for the CH9-CSO conceptual communication framework that this research will present to *empower* the two entities mutually. Different communication theories and approaches are needed to provide a multidimensional approach to mutual empowerment between CH9s and CSOs.

The objective of this chapter is to answer the following specific research question:

*What theoretical constructs should be included in the conceptualisation of the / communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment? (Chapter 1 Section 1.4.1)*

With this question in mind, this chapter will conceptualise the communication framework. The chapter aims to integrate perspectives from Chapters 3 and 4 into a tailored communication framework that both CH9s and CSOs can adopt to build positive, mutually beneficial relationships towards mutual empowerment.

### 5.2 Conceptualising the CH9-CSO communication framework

The *CH9-CSO communication framework* aims to facilitate a mutually beneficial relationship between CH9s and CSOs that should empower both entities towards their

mandate of empowering society. The discussion will elaborate on the purpose as the rationale for the framework, the communication philosophy that would guide the nature of communication in this framework, and specific operational guidelines that the two institutions should apply to achieve certain outcomes.

To accomplish this, the communication framework integrates constructs that come from corporate communication theory (on the left) with those that are derived from development communication theory (on the right), in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Constructs of corporate and development communication relevant to the CH9-CSO communication framework**

| CORPORATE COMMUNICATION                                                                                                | DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PURPOSE</b>                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                 |
| Mutually beneficial relationships                                                                                      | Empowerment of society                                                                                                                          |
| <b>COMMUNICATION PHILOSOPHY</b>                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                 |
| Dialogue                                                                                                               | Public sphere<br><br>Ideal speech situation<br><br>Participation<br><br>Dialogue                                                                |
| <b>COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES</b>                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                 |
| Cooperation<br><br>Conflict resolution<br><br>Openness and disclosure<br><br>Assurance<br><br>Access<br><br>Networking | Organisational culture<br><br>Empowered participation<br><br>Mutual empowerment (transfer of knowledge, skills and resources and collaboration) |

|                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Sharing tasks          |                      |
| Positivity             |                      |
| Reciprocity            |                      |
| Relationship nurturing |                      |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>        |                      |
| Trust                  | Mutual understanding |
| Satisfaction           | Social change        |
| Commitment             | Mutual empowerment   |
| Control mutuality      |                      |
| Mutual understanding   |                      |

### **5.3 Purpose: mutually beneficial relationships towards the empowerment of society**

Purpose can be defined as “the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists” (Oxford Dictionary, 2024). A shared purpose inspires people and organisations to pursue their vision (Mourkogiannis, 2014). In the *CH9-CSO communication framework*, the purpose will serve as the rationale for the communication between CH9s and CSOs, and for the creation of the framework.

From the discussion of the corporate communication theory in Chapter 3, the rationale for the communication between CH9s and CSOs was identified as establishing long-term, positive, mutually beneficial relationships (see 3.8.1). The discussion on development communication in Chapter 4 provided context in which mutual empowerment must take place and how CH9s and CSOs must embrace a participatory approach to development communication and subsequently achieve empowerment of society (see 4.8). These two perspectives are being integrated into a new overarching purpose: a synergistic relationship (between CH9s and CSOs) towards societal empowerment.

The research focusses on the development communication and corporate communication perspectives to justify the importance of a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs towards societal empowerment. Drawing from Chapter 3, it is imperative to note that there is a relationship between the cybernetics proposed therein and synergistic relationships. Cybernetics emphasises the interconnectedness between different parties and the dependence of those parties on systems of interaction that can lead to more positive outcomes for both parties (see 3.2).

Therefore, partnerships will achieve better synergistic outcomes as opposed to individuals (or individual organisations) working alone (Jones & Barry, 2011). Such synergistic relationships that function in an open system, where the combined effect of a partnership is greater than the sum of individual efforts (see 3.2), ensure that organisations working together achieve more than they would achieve individually. Within such open systems, parties have the capability of receiving matter and energy from their environments as well as the ability to transmit those same elements back to them, thus emphasising the importance of feedback in creating and maintaining synergistic relationships (see 3.2). Synergistic relationships, guided by continuous feedback, can lead to more efficient use of resources by minimising duplication of efforts and leveraging each partner's strengths.

Synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs can be a powerful mechanism for empowering societies. Such relationships can facilitate the pooling of resources, knowledge, and expertise, driving innovation and addressing societal challenges more effectively than isolated efforts could. Through these collaborative efforts by CH9s and CSOs, both organisations can be better equipped to empower society collectively.

From a development communication perspective, the purpose of the CH9-CSO framework was identified as the empowerment of society, which is the mandate of CH9s and CSOs. The critical tradition advocates for the recognition and empowerment of marginalised groups and seeks to create a more equitable and just society. Like cybernetics, the critical tradition also emphasises feedback, as it recognises the importance of ongoing reflection, revision, and critique to challenge and transform power structures in pursuing social change (see 4.2).

With the empowerment of marginalised groups being the mandate of both CH9s and CSOs, their synergistic relationship should be guided by an ongoing process of reflection, revision, and critique of how different power structures should be transformed to fulfil their dual mandate.

By integrating these perspectives from cybernetics and the critical tradition, the integrated purpose of the CH9-CSO communication framework can be defined as follows:

### **5.3.1 Integrated purpose: a synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment**

#### **Theoretical statement 26: A synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment**

The rationale for the *CH9-CSO communication framework* is to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs through their interconnectedness that enables them to jointly fulfil their shared mandate of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback and reflection on the transformation of society.

A synergistic relationship that aims to empower marginalised groups in society should be guided by a communication philosophy to describe the nature of communication within such a relationship.

## **5.4 Communication philosophy**

Philosophy is defined in the Oxford Dictionary (2024) as the guiding principle for behavior. Within this framework, a communication philosophy would guide the nature of communication between these two institutions by incorporating existing understandings of communication between CH9s and CSOs from a corporate and development communication perspective.

In the *CH9-CSO communication framework*, the communication philosophy is informed by dialogue from a corporate communication perspective (see section 3.5.1.1) as well as from a development communication perspective (see 4.7.2). Participation (as a principle of communication) (see 4.7.1), an ideal speech situation (see 4.4), the public sphere (see

4.4), and critical learning (see 4.5) discussed in Chapter 4 from a development communication perspective will also be included in the communication philosophy.

Communication between CH9s and CSOs should take the form of the *public sphere* and should consist of free speech, open debate, and exchanging of ideas where power structures can be challenged with the aim of identifying and addressing social issues (see 4.4). Communication in the public sphere should take place according to the principles of the *ideal speech situation*, and such communication should be truthful, authentic, understandable, and appropriate for the context (see 4.4). The ideal speech situation works well in a transparent environment where all information is in the clear, allowing CH9s and CSOs to commend or criticise any ideas that they are not in agreement with. This should lead to *critical learning* where all participants should actively participate in a process of critical engagement, ongoing reflection, and critical thinking towards a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change (see 4.5).

It is argued that communication within the public sphere that reflects the ideal speech situation towards critical learning should be informed by open two-way communication. From a corporate communication perspective, two-way symmetrical communication could inform such communication through engagement in dialogue, cooperation, and commitment to conflict resolution to build and maintain mutually beneficial, long-term positive relationships (see 4.4). Dialogue, within two-way symmetrical communication, is defined as a continuous, interactive process of consultation, engagement, participation, and bargaining that reflects reciprocity, empathy, and mutual respect (section 3.5.1.1) and is especially relevant to the communication philosophy. The other constructs within two-way symmetrical communication (cooperation, commitment, and conflict resolution) will be included in the communication guidelines below.

Given the focus of mutual and societal empowerment, dialogue, as defined from a development communication perspective, should also be included in the communication philosophy. Dialogue, from a development communication perspective, is defined as conversations without pre-determined topics that should be based on mutual respect for independent individuals with equal power and a deliberate and conscious decision to listen without prejudice to understand the situation from the other's perspective and arrive

at a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the world and each other (section 4.7.2).

Although the definitions of dialogue from a corporate and development communication perspective seem similar, their intention differs. Dialogue from a corporate communication perspective aims to achieve preset objectives whereas dialogue within development communication is an aim in itself. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine dialogue to support the purpose of this framework. Dialogue as part of the communication philosophy is thus defined as a continuous process of conversation between CH9s and CSOs, based on mutual respect and characterised by listening and feedback to reach a deeper understanding of how they can collaboratively fulfil their dual mandate.

Within this continuous process of conversation, all participants should actively participate as equal partners (see 4.7.1). Equal participation should underpin all dialogical communication that takes place in the public sphere, based on the principles of the ideal speech situation towards critical learning.

The public sphere, the ideal speech situation, critical learning, dialogue, and participation are intersecting and complementary aspects of the communication philosophy because the proposed framework relies a great deal on modes of exchange that are inclusive and democratic in nature.

Merging these concepts to inform the philosophy, the communication framework adopts the following integrated communication philosophy: **critical dialogue**.

#### **5.4.1 Integrated communication philosophy: critical dialogue**

##### **Theoretical statement 27: Critical dialogue**

Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in free speech and open debate, where ideas are exchanged and criticised to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, authentic, understandable, and appropriate for the context.

In this study, it is argued that this communication philosophy of critical dialogue should inform the communication guidelines that the CH9s and CSOs should follow in fulfilling their purpose.

## **5.5 Communication guidelines**

Communication guidelines suggest possible actions to “enhance the effectiveness of communication” (Canale, 1983:11) to fulfil a specific purpose. The guidelines for this framework include constructs from two-way symmetrical communication, relationship management theory, and stewardship theory, namely cooperation (3.5.1.2), conflict resolution (3.5.1.5), openness and disclosure (3.5.2.1), assurance (3.5.2.2), access (3.5.2.3), networking (3.5.2.4), sharing of tasks (3.5.2.5), positivity (3.5.2.6), reciprocity (3.5.2.7) and relationship nurturing (3.5.2.8). These constructs will be integrated into the framework as guidelines rather than strategies because critical dialogue, as the communication philosophy, informs this framework instead of pre-set strategies. Guidelines allow the CH9s and the CSOs to critically dialogue on these guidelines to determine how they could be applied. Included in the guidelines are principles of the participatory approach, namely empowered participation (4.7.1), cultural diversity (4.7.3) and empowerment (4.7.4). They will also be discussed as communication guidelines to reach specific communication outcomes (section 5.6) towards the overall purpose of building synergistic relationships and towards societal empowerment through critical dialogue.

### **5.5.1 Access, openness, and disclosure**

This guideline promotes access, openness, and disclosure as essential principles of transparency to inform the communication framework. The theoretical statement of access states that CH9s and CSOs should be accessible to one another by using communication channels that are accessible to both parties and by availing themselves to participate in communication with the other when the need arises (section 3.5.2.3). Such access would include *openness* about the information and *disclosing* all relevant information. Thus, CH9s and CSOs need to be open to each other by providing transparent information on the nature of the organisation and what they are doing and allowing engagement from the other with this information (section 3.5.2.1).

This communication framework defines **transparency** as the ability of CH9s and CSOs to understand clearly what their purpose is and to share with each other without concealing any information.

Transparency as a guideline is described in the theoretical statement below.

**Theoretical statement 28: Transparency**

CH9s and CSOs must provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to sustain the relationship and fulfil their mandate. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are accessible and understandable to both parties to encourage critical dialogue.

### **5.5.2 Cooperation, reciprocity, networking, and sharing of tasks**

This proposed guideline brings together cooperation, reciprocity, networking, and sharing of tasks. *Cooperation* between CH9s and CSOs entails collective efforts, including collective decision making, to reach mutual goals that will contribute to mutual benefit. CH9s and CSOs should cooperate to contribute to mutual goals that will positively influence each other's actions, which should lead to mutual benefits (section 3.5.1.2).

Such cooperation would also entail the *sharing of tasks* when addressing mutual problems and goals by dividing responsibilities between them when planning and implementing projects (section 3.5.2.5). Also supporting the notion of cooperation is *reciprocity*, where CH9s and CSOs not only share tasks but should also exchange resources, knowledge, and skills to benefit both organisations (section 3.5.2.7). From a development communication perspective, this links to empowerment by sharing knowledge, skills, and resources (see 4.7.4).

Part of *exchanging knowledge, skills, and resources* would be the *sharing of networks*, where CH9 and CSOs give each other access to their networks and maximise common advantages (section 3.5.2.4). The question of maximising common advantages is one that speaks to the value of synergy.

Therefore, cooperation, sharing of tasks, and sharing of networks are integrated into a communication guideline of **collaboration** that entails the following:

**Theoretical statement 29: Collaboration**

CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills and by dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal towards mutual benefit.

**5.5.3 Assurance, positivity, relationship nurturing, and conflict resolution**

The proposed framework also proposes affirmed mutuality by integrating assurance, positivity, relationship nurturing, and conflict resolution. Affirmed mutuality is a term derived from the combination of the two words: affirmation and mutuality. Affirmed mutuality speaks to how both CH9s and CSOs affirm that every task they work on supports their synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment and, through that, nurtures their relationship. Relationship nurturing states that CH9s and CSOs should express care for one another by involving each other in relevant initiatives, giving recognition to each other's contributions, and communicating important information before it goes to the public (section 3.5.2.8).

Affirmed mutuality that values the nurturing of the relationship should also include assurance. CH9s and CSOs should assure each other that any raised concerns are legitimate and will be addressed in the agreed timeframe (section 3.5.2.2). These raised concerns could result in conflict. Therefore, conflict resolution is important where CH9s and CSOs should employ a win-win approach to conflict resolution by solving problems collaboratively, taking the needs and constraints of both parties into consideration (section 3.5.1.5). This could ensure that the relationship is still nurtured, despite disagreements.

Nurturing the relationship between CH9s and CSOs through assurance and conflict resolution should create a positive relationship. Positivity entails that CH9s and CSOs should deliberately try to make the relationship pleasant and worthwhile for each other through positive and constructive interactions (section 3.5.2.6).

**Affirmed mutuality** as a concept will be defined in the theoretical statement:

**Theoretical statement 30: Affirmed mutuality**

CH9s and CSOs must affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing each other's concerns timeously, finding constructive and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and recognition of the other, and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken in consideration.

#### **5.5.4 Empowered participation**

CH9s and the CSOs should *participate* in communication as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration processes. Empowered participation (see 4.7.1) needs to occur on a level playing field with all decision makers present. Participation is about influencing decisions, changing power distribution, making sure all parties have equal access to information and resources, and facilitating engagement (Croft & Beresford, 1992). As discussed in sections 4.7.1.1, 4.7.1.2 and 4.7.1.3, CH9s and CSOs should participate as equal partners in decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts. Therefore, empowered participation as a communication guideline is defined as follows:

**Theoretical statement 31: Empowered participation**

CH9s and CSOs should actively participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts.

#### **5.5.5 Organisational Culture**

Organisational culture encompasses the collective values, beliefs, practices, and symbols that shape an institution's identity and influence its internal and external interactions. It is argued in the context of this study that both entities will have a form of institutional knowledge, rather than indigenous knowledge. Organisational culture would

therefore incorporate diverse worldviews, values, institutional knowledge, customs, beliefs, and symbols from CH9s and CSOs (see 4.7.3).

In the CH9-CSO relationship, participants should be aware of the different organisational cultures and the different ways in which they are fulfilling their mandate towards society. In a synergistic relationship, these differences should not be seen as obstacles to cooperation, but as opportunities to learn from each other to allow both entities to better fulfil their mutual mandate. The theoretical statement below captures these tenets:

**Theoretical statement 32: Organisational culture**

CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate organisational culture in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of their mandate.

The abovementioned guidelines should guide communication between CH9s and CSOs and contribute to reaching specific outcomes. Reaching these outcomes should contribute to reaching the overarching purpose of the communication framework.

## **5.6 Outcomes**

Outcomes can be defined as “something that follows as a result or consequence” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024). In the CH9-CSO communication framework, the outcomes are seen as the result of communication between CH9s and CSOs, ascribing to the philosophy of critical dialogue and following the proposed communication guidelines within the context of this communication philosophy. In the end, reaching the identified outcomes should contribute to the purpose of the framework, namely, building synergistic relationships towards societal empowerment.

The outcomes of the communication framework, as identified from a corporate communication perspective, include relational outcomes such as mutual understanding (section 3.5), trust (section 3.5.1.1), commitment (section 3.5.1.2), satisfaction (section 3.5.1.3), and control mutuality (section 3.5.1.4). From a development communication perspective, transformative change (section 4.3) and mutual empowerment (section 4.9.4) of both CH9s and CSOs will be discussed as outcomes.

### 5.6.1 Outcome 1: Trust, commitment, and satisfaction

In Chapter 3, *trust* as a relationship outcome was defined as “the willingness to rely on the other party in whom one has confidence” (section 3.5.1.1). Trust, in this context, is both a foundation and a product of relationships. Trust in the relationship between CH9s and CSOs can be seen in how they can depend on one another without suspicion of each other’s intentions. A relationship of trust is evident where CH9s and CSOs know fully that the partners will deliver on their promises and commitments. Trust is a prerequisite for synergistic relationships since it can require parties to show vulnerability, such as admitting uncertainties or sharing strategic insights that could be exploited if trust were absent. The act of making oneself vulnerable and not being taken advantage of can significantly deepen trust. Trust enhances collaboration, making it more robust and likely to achieve its mutual goals. A transparent, accountable, and open relationship cultivates trust over time (see 3.5.1.1). This makes trust an important outcome resulting from the communication philosophy and respective communication guidelines.

A second relationship outcome identified in Chapter 3 is *commitment*. In section 3.5.1.2, commitment was defined as the extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy on to maintain and promote. There is a strong link between trust and commitment. Premised on trust, commitment can be assessed through the number of times a party “shows up” and their level of engagement. The commitment of CSOs and CH9s becomes evident when both parties experience that the relationship is worth the effort and, based on this belief, honour their commitments in the relationship. In this case, commitment is an outcome that can lead to mutually beneficial relationships and fulfilling the mandate of empowering society. Commitment leads to more synergistic relationships among the involved parties, as the benefits derived from these collaborations encourage ongoing engagement and dedication. Commitment in this context means a willingness to invest in the relationship, maintain it over time, and work through challenges collectively.

Linked to trust and commitment, *satisfaction* was identified as an important relationship outcome in Chapter 3. In section 3.6.1.3, satisfaction was identified as the extent to which one party feels favourable towards the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. When a relationship yields more benefits than costs, it is

considered satisfying (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20). This question of benefits and costs is important because both CH9s and CSOs must feel that they are getting a fair deal from their partnership. Satisfaction should lead to synergistic relationships by fostering an environment where all parties feel valued, understood, and effectively supported towards achieving common or complementary goals. This satisfaction stems from multiple aspects of the relationship, which can include personal fulfilment, achievement of objectives, and the positive experiences generated through collaboration. Like trust, the presence of satisfaction is evinced by an increased commitment towards collective programmes.

Given the interdependence of trust, commitment, and satisfaction, these outcomes are integrated into the communication framework under solidarity. A deep level of trust, commitment, and satisfaction in the relationship often characterises **solidarity** (Kolers, 2012).

#### **Theoretical statement 33: Solidarity**

Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, with both parties honouring their commitments and trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their mandate.

### **5.6.2 Outcome 2: Mutual understanding**

From a development communication perspective, Habermas's approach viewed mutual understanding through communicative action as dialogue to resolve conflicting views and promote consensus and cooperation between the parties (see 4.4). The participatory approach also identified mutual understanding as the outcome of participation in dialogue towards empowerment (see 4.7.1). From a corporate communication perspective, mutual understanding is identified as the outcome of positive relationships through two-way symmetrical communication to achieve a mutual goal (see 3.5). This relationship is made positive by the existence of an appreciation of different views, approaches, goals, and expectations.

#### **Theoretical statement 34: Mutual understanding**

Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to them fulfilling their mandate.

#### **5.6.3 Outcome 3: Control mutuality and empowerment**

In Chapter 3, control mutuality was identified as an important relationship outcome (see 3.5.1.4). Within the CH9-CSO relationship, control mutuality refers to the extent to which both entities are satisfied with their level of influence in joint decision making and perceive the relationship as balanced in terms of power and control. It is a consensual process where both parties contribute to and are represented in the decisions that affect them. Control mutuality, therefore, sustains synergistic relationships by maintaining equilibrium in decision-making dynamics, ensuring that neither CH9s nor CSOs dominate the relationship.

Mutual empowerment, as discussed in Chapter 4, denotes that collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, and resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions are essential to bring meaningful change in their relationship and society at large. Equalisation of power can occur through participatory communication, knowledge, and skills transfer, and access to shared resources. It encompasses both cognitive empowerment where parties develop critical awareness of policies, systems, and power structures as well as behavioural empowerment where they act collectively to transform those structures (Christens *et al.*, 2016; Zimmerman, 1995). In the CH9-CSO context, empowerment manifests when both entities engage as equal partners in communication processes, exercising agency and contributing to shared objectives.

When control mutuality and empowerment co-exist, they produce **mutual empowerment**: a higher-order outcome grounded in the critical and participatory communication traditions. Mutual empowerment occurs when CH9s and CSOs not only achieve parity in control and participation but also collectively experience growth, transformation, and enhanced capacity as a result of their interdependent relationship. Through dialogue, shared decision making, and reciprocal resource exchange, both

entities uplift one another and co-construct meaning, thereby contributing to democratic governance, inclusivity, and social justice. This outcome reflects the African ethos of ubuntu, where empowerment is not an individual gain but a shared advancement that strengthens both parties and the communities they serve (Crabtree, 1998; Freire, 1970; Jennings *et al.*, 2006; Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

#### **Theoretical statement 35: Mutual empowerment**

CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power, and control, as well as the ability to access, knowledge, skills, and resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large.

#### **5.6.4 Outcome 4: Social and organisational change**

From a development communication perspective, social change is defined as change taking place in society toward empowerment (see 4.3; 4.9.4). From a corporate communication perspective, cybernetics argue that organisations, as open systems, should continually adapt to feedback from their environment for survival (see 3.2). Within the context of this study, continual change should take place within the CH9s and CSOs, based on the input from society, to be able to fulfil their mandate for societal empowerment (see 4.7.1; 4.7.2). Such change within society and organisations is defined as **transformative change**.

Transformative change refers to profound and comprehensive shifts in the fundamental structures of an organisation, society, or individual to address the root causes of problems and create lasting, positive outcomes (section 4.3; Bruggen *et al.*, 2019). To produce transformative change, institutions must fundamentally rethink their power structures and search for innovative ways to conceptualise what diversity and excellence are.

**Theoretical statement 36: Transformative change**

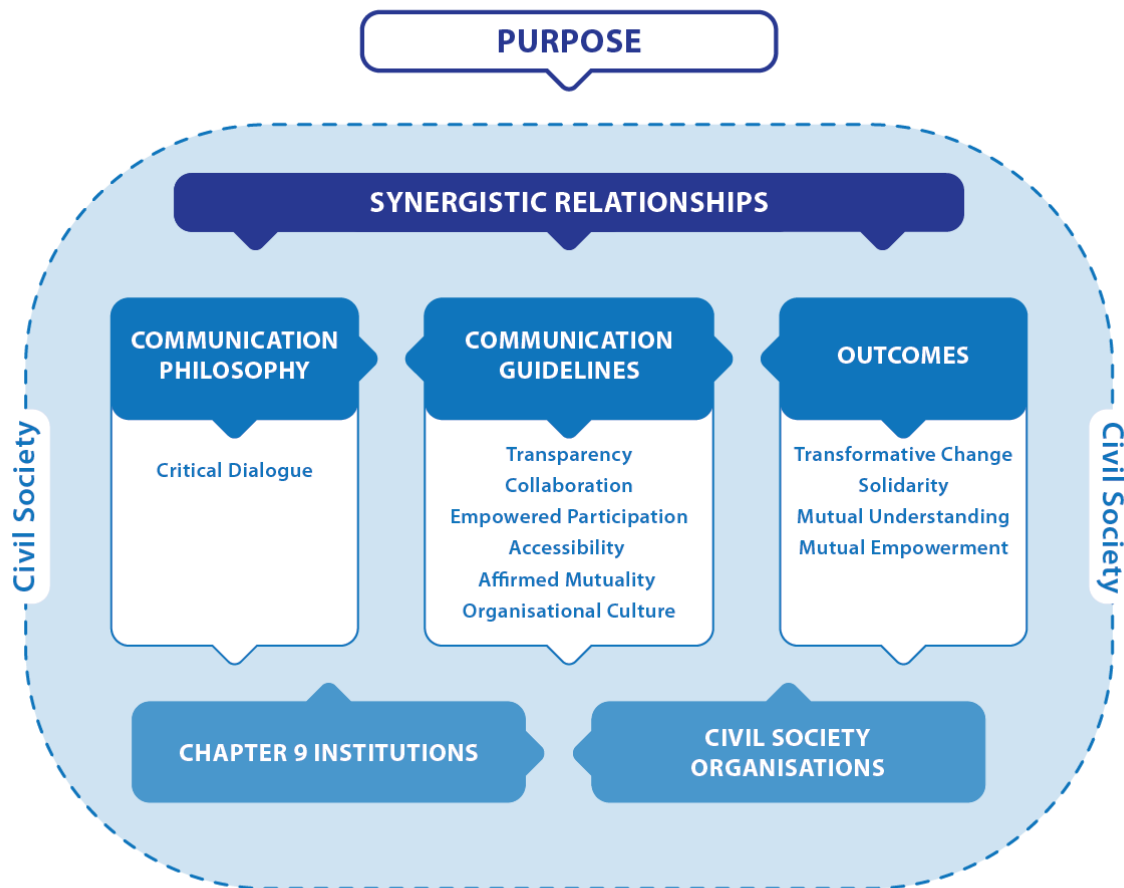
Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies a commitment across different parts of the organisations to integrate new thinking on the issues affecting society. Transformative change includes being open to structural changes in the organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling their mandate.

**5.7 THE COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK**

The proposed communication framework relies on integrating a purpose, communication philosophy, strategy, and outcomes from the fields of corporate communication and development communication. The communication framework that derives from this exercise will be outlined in the next section.

**Table 5.2: Constructs of the CH9-CSO communication framework**

| <b>PURPOSE</b>                  | <b>A SYNERGISTIC RELATIONSHIP<br/>TOWARDS SOCIETAL<br/>EMPOWERMENT</b>                                   |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Communication Philosophy</b> | Critical dialogue                                                                                        |
| <b>Communication Guidelines</b> | Transparency<br>Collaboration<br>Affirmed mutuality<br>Empowered Participation<br>Organisational Culture |
| <b>Outcomes</b>                 | Solidarity<br>Mutual understanding<br>Mutual empowerment<br>Transformative change                        |



**Figure 5.1: The prospective communication framework**

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has described the different constructs that will be incorporated into the CH9-CSO communication framework. The essence of the communication framework derives from integrating the constructs from the two meta-theoretical traditions of cybernetic and critical traditions. This informed an integrated conceptual framework that is built upon a clearly defined purpose, an overarching communication philosophy, communication guidelines that align with the philosophy, and specific communication and relational outcomes, which in turn should contribute to the framework fulfilling its purpose. The overall purpose of the communication framework is to build synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards the empowerment of society. The communication will take the form of critical dialogue, centred on communication guidelines of transparency,

collaboration, affirmed mutuality, participation, and cultural diversity. The framework's success or failure will be determined by observing whether or not solidarity, mutual understanding, transformative change, and mutual empowerment have been realised, which in turn lead to synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs that contribute to societal empowerment. The next chapter discusses the research approach and design.

## **CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter conceptualised the proposed communication framework. The essence of the communication framework is derived from integrating the constructs from the two fields of corporate communication and development communication. This, it is envisaged, helps to inform an integrated conceptual framework that is built upon a clearly defined purpose, defining a communication philosophy, and stipulating complementary guidelines that align with the philosophy to reach specific outcomes, which in turn, support the purpose of the framework.

Chapter 6 will discuss the empirical part of the study, where this framework was evaluated in practice. The chapter will motivate why a qualitative research approach was adopted for the research. The chapter will also cover the research method, sampling, the interview schedule, and the data analysis. Further, ethics and challenges faced in the research will be discussed before the validity and trustworthiness of the findings are explained.

### **6.2 The qualitative research approach**

Developing a communication framework for CH9 institutions to contribute to relationship building with CSOs towards societal empowerment demands the use of a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding how participants perceive, experience, and construct their worlds (De Gialdino, 2009; Mason, 1996). It is best suited for this study because it involves collecting and analysing non-numerical, qualitative data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Creswell, 2013). Because it is "reflexive and process driven, ultimately producing culturally situated and theory enmeshed knowledge through an ongoing interplay between theory and methods, researcher and researched," qualitative research can help translate an understanding of people's perspectives into practical frameworks (Biber *et al.*, 2006:5), which is the aim of this study. In the section below, a set of characteristics of qualitative research that aid in evaluating a communication framework will be discussed. These include the ability to collect descriptive data, accommodate divergent, subjective, and open-ended views, as well as triangulate data with existing literature and frameworks.

The research was deductive in nature. A deductive approach entails formulating hypotheses derived from established theory and subsequently devising a research plan to evaluate those hypotheses. It transitions from the broad to the specific, first with a theoretical foundation and subsequently focussing on data collection and analysis.

### **6.2.1 The ability to collect descriptive data**

The first characteristic of qualitative research that aids the evaluation of a communication framework is that the approach allows the researcher to collect descriptive data. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research employs various data collection methods to gather culturally and contextually relevant descriptions and interpretations. This methodological approach is ideal for descriptive data analysis and results that allow in-depth interpretations and understanding of the research topic (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:134; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014:48). A qualitative approach allows the researcher to investigate participants' views in greater depth, report their views in detail, and enable them to express their opinions (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In this study, it was important to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' views on the proposed framework to allow for their input to be incorporated into the final framework.

### **6.2.2 Accommodating divergent, subjective, and open-ended views**

Second, qualitative research accommodated the capturing of a variety of viewpoints that are often divergent, subjective, and open-ended. This characteristic is important to ensure that the interviews aid in the evaluation of the central part of this communication framework, which is that it should be able to facilitate continuous and open debate between equals. Qualitative research considers the different views and perceptions that people have and that individuals attribute meaningfully to events, concepts, and situations. Moyer-Packenham and Westenskow (2013) explain qualitative research as examining human behaviour and the social, cultural, and political contexts within which it occurs. According to Richards (1991), the central method in qualitative research is simply talking and listening to people. In qualitative research, every opportunity for investigation and increasing knowledge is essential. In this study, it was important to provide opportunities for divergent and subjective views to be heard and reflected in the proposed framework.

### **6.2.3 Triangulating data with existing literature and frameworks**

Qualitative research finally allowed the researcher to triangulate the data as it was informed by the theory, literature, and methods. It provided a better understanding of the CSO and CH9 communication by gaining insights from people who have firsthand experience of these roles (see Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) while maintaining integral respect for their worldviews. As reported in Alhojailan (2012), qualitative data collection is often interpreted, which means it concerns data that needs explanation. Qualitative data landed itself to an aligned process of (a) triangulation with literature that was thematically aligned to the development of a communication framework that can create synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs, and (b) triangulation of CH9's and CSO's experiences regarding the characteristics of the communication framework that was developed by drawing on integrated constructs from the two scholarly fields of corporate communication and development communication.

The next section will address the research questions and methods of the study that the researcher deployed in a bid to realise the three characteristics that have been identified as relevant to the qualitative research approach.

### **6.3 Research questions and research methods**

The general research question that guided this study asked:

*What should a communication framework for CH9s include to contribute to relationship building with CSOs towards the mutual empowerment of both institutions? (1.4)*

To answer this question, four specific research questions have been formulated. In Table 6.1, the research questions are indicated, along with the research methods that were used to answer them.

**Table 6.1: Specific research questions and research methods**

| Research question                                                                                                                                                              | Method                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| What theoretical constructs should be included in the conceptualisation of the communication framework for relationship building with CSOs towards mutual empowerment? (1.4.1) | Literature review                                          |
| What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.4.2)                                                             | Semi-structured interviews with CH9 communication managers |
| What are the perceptions of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.4.3)                                                                              | Semi-structured interviews with directors of CSOs          |

#### **6.4 Research methods**

The empirical part of the study consists of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are an effective data collection method for trying to understand the world of the participants. The empirical study was exploratory as the researcher wished to gain new insights into the research, draw conclusions, and make recommendations (see Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

This qualitative research method assisted in expanding an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives on the proposed communication framework and expectations and experiences from CSOs regarding communication with CH9s to form an informed evaluation. It puts the researcher in a position to investigate subjective, personal, and socially constructed realities as the context of a phenomenon and the human experiences deemed central to the research topic. The focus was thus on the participants' points of view, and how they think and feel about a certain issue (see Bless *et al.*, 2013:16).

#### 6.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that combines a predetermined set of open-ended questions to be asked of all participants, with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further by asking follow-up questions that may arise (Bihu, 2020; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Dikko, 2016). The semi-structured interview was not merely a list of questions to be asked but rather a means of creating dialogue between the participant and the interviewer (see Babbie, 2012:291-292; Mason, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005:7). The researcher kept a record of the conversations by taking notes and recording them, ensuring that the necessary consent was granted by the research participants (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews allowed for collecting rich qualitative data that can capture experiences about the world of communication. They also enabled the researcher to clearly explain the investigation topic before persons agreed to be interviewed (see Corbin & Morse, 2003). These interviews provided more flexibility in data collection to capture extra distinctive characteristics that were unique across the two institutions of CSOs and CH9s (see Gill *et al.*, 2008). Semi-structured interviews effectively elicited individual experiences, opinions, detailed responses, contradictions, connections, and relationships in this study (see Mack *et al.*, 2005).

Any method of study that hopes to be successful must consider what data would best address particular research questions and what approaches are most useful in acquiring that data. In this study, semi-structured interviews helped in eliciting the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s as well as the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework. This data, answering two of the specific research questions (see Table 6.1), ought to be rich, thick, detailed as well as descriptive, which demanded the use of the semi-structured interview as a method.

In these semi-structured interviews, the questions were open, providing the opportunity to explore unanticipated issues that arose during the conversation (see interview guides in 6.6). These questions were complemented with more probing questions where the broad issues to be covered were clear, but the order in which they were asked was determined by the flow of the conversation (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1995).

The researcher still maintained control over the discussion as Kabeer (2005) asserts that the distinguishing feature of qualitative interviews is their continual probing and cross-checking of information and a cumulative building on previous knowledge rather than adherence to a fixed set of questions and answers. This control was maintained while ensuring that people can talk about their experiences, respond to open-ended questions, and are subjected to conversational and interactive relationships that involve human contact.

#### **6.4.2 Population and sampling**

In qualitative investigations, the scope of the study determines the sample size. Because qualitative research is not intended to be generalised to persons or organisations outside the scope of the study, it requires a thorough examination of possible participants relevant to provide insight into the research problem, ensuring a manageable sample size (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). Purposive sampling is a strategy of identifying and recruiting respondents “that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” (Kelly, 2010:317). The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable one to answer the research questions (Rai & Thapa, 2015; Shaheen *et al.*, 2019). This method was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the selection of a group that is knowledgeable, experienced, and able to contribute to the evaluation of the framework in an expressive, articulate, and reflective manner (see Pilankas *et al.*, 2015:534). According to Queirós *et al.* (2017:279), such a small sample size enables the soliciting of rich information from participants in response to research questions.

There were two populations in this study: Communication practitioners representing CH9s and directors of CSOs. Three CH9s were selected purposefully. The SAHRC, the PP and the CGE were selected because they all share the mandate of empowering citizens.

Secondly, the researcher purposively selected CSOs that deal with human rights, gender equality, and administrative justice, which are linked, and work together with the three identified CH9s (the SAHRC, PP, and CGE). These institutions were selected because the researcher has had prior interactions with their work from a professional level, hence

there were also assumptions and familiarity on the type of work they do and the challenges they face. These institutions are as follows:

- Foundation for Human Rights
- Institute for Democracy in South Africa
- Treatment Action Campaign
- Abahlali base Mjondolo
- South African Council of Churches
- Lawyers for Human Rights
- Sonke Gender Justice
- Albinism Society of South Africa
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

From the three CH9s and the nine CSOs, the researcher purposefully identified individuals who are responsible for communication and stakeholder relations in each institution on a strategic level, since they would be able to provide the best insight and input in the proposed communication framework. The identified individuals are responsible for giving strategic guidance and direction to the executives and board members of these organisations based on their relationship with stakeholders. They are responsible for communication and stakeholder relations within their organisations and are in a management, senior management, or directors' position with two to ten years of experience.

The researcher purposively decided to include three communication practitioners from each of the CH9s. This includes three CH9 senior communication managers, three CH9 communication managers, and three CH9 senior communication officers to provide a variety of viewpoints and input regarding the proposed communication framework. The CH9 participants are based in the national head offices in Gauteng. These are the only communicators within the organisation responsible for communications and stakeholder relations, and they have been with the organisation for more than 10 years. In addition, one director was chosen from each of the nine CSOs. These participants were specifically chosen because they are responsible for communication and stakeholder relations within their respective organisations, and they have been working with the organisation for more than 10 years.

In terms of CSOs, the researcher identified the directors of the nine CSOs included in this study as representatives of their organisations. Since the CSOs do not have communication managers working for them, the directors are responsible for communication and stakeholder engagements and were, therefore, suitable candidates to provide input on the proposed CH9-CSO communication framework. The CSO directors were based in national offices in Gauteng.

Permission was requested from each of these institutions to participate in the study through email. For CH9 institutions, the email was sent to senior communication managers, and for CSOs, this was sent to the directors, who then gave permission. In granting permission, they nominated the best-suited participants (three CH9 senior communication managers, three CH9 communication managers, three CH9 senior communication officers and nine CSO directors) and provided their contact details. These excluded junior communication officers and administrators who the institutions deemed non-strategic communication actors. The researcher then reached out directly to the selected participants to invite them to participate in the study, enclosing the details of the study and an informed consent form detailing all relevant information to the study. The potential participants were requested to sign the informed consent form before the agreed interview date. All potential participants were aware that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any point, should they agree to participate. The participants were contacted individually through an email to make an appointment to meet with them virtually to participate in the study, and they all agreed to do so.

## **6.5 Data collection instruments**

The schedule for a semi-structured interview containing standardised questions were developed to help the interviewer evaluate the communication framework while interacting with the participants during data collection (see Du Plooy, 2009). The research instrument was an interview schedule containing a section on participants' information, a brief explanation of what the study is about, and open-ended questions were developed. The interview schedule was developed from the theoretical statements and outcomes in Chapter 5 (see sections 5.3.1; 5.4.1; 5.5.1; 5.5.2; 5.5.3; 5.5.4; 5.5.5; 5.6.1; 5.6.2; 5.6.4; 5.6.4). The open-ended questions focussed on the proposed communication framework

(informed by the literature study) and participants' input on the framework. The questions were guided by the constructs of the study: critical dialogue; synergistic relationships; transparency; collaboration; affirmed mutuality; participation; cultural diversity; solidarity; mutual understanding; mutual empowerment, and transformative change (see 6.6 for the interview schedules).

The table below discusses all the theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs of the research to lay a background for the issues the interviewees responded to in Chapter 7. The theoretical statements formulated in Chapters 3 and 4 were integrated and adapted in Chapter 5 to answer specific research question 1 by identifying the theoretical concepts and constructs relevant to the conceptualisation of a communication framework for building relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment. All the new theoretical statements will be adopted from this chapter onward.

**Table 6.2: Theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs**

| Theoretical statements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Concepts                         | Constructs                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 26:<br/>Synergistic relationships</b></p> <p><i>The rationale for the CH9-CSO communication framework is to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs through their interconnectedness that enables them to jointly fulfil their shared mandate of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback and reflection on the transformation of society.</i></p> <p>(5.3.1)</p> | <p>Synergistic relationships</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared mandate</li> <li>• Continuous reflection</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 27:</b><br/><b>Critical dialogue</b></p> <p><i>Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in free speech and open debate where ideas are exchanged and criticised to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, authentic, understandable, and appropriate for the context.</i></p> <p>(5.4.1)</p> | Critical dialogue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal partners</li> <li>• Free speech</li> <li>• Open debate</li> <li>• Exchange and criticism</li> <li>• Shared critical consciousness</li> <li>• Mutual learning and change</li> <li>• Truthful</li> <li>• Authentic</li> <li>• Understandable</li> <li>• Appropriate for the context</li> <li>• Specific platforms and communication channels</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 28:</b><br/><b>Transparency</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to sustain the relationship and fulfil their mandate. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are accessible and understandable to both parties to encourage critical dialogue.</i></p> <p>(5.5.1)</p>                                                                       | Transparency      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Openness and disclosure</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 29:</b><br/><b>Collaboration</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills, and by</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Collaboration     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills</li> <li>• Dividing tasks and responsibilities</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal, towards mutual benefit.</i></p> <p>(5.5.2)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 30:</b><br/><b>Affirmed mutuality</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing each other's concerns timeously, finding constructive and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and recognition of the other, and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken into consideration.</i></p> <p>(5.5.3)</p> | Affirmed mutuality      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Timeously addressing concerns</li> <li>• Constructive and positive feedback</li> <li>• Care and recognition</li> <li>• Win-win</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 31:</b><br/><b>Empowered participation</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should actively participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts.</i></p> <p>(5.5.4)</p>                                                                                                                                       | Empowered participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation</li> <li>• Equal partnership</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 32:</b><br/><b>Organisational culture</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Organisational culture  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Understand</li> </ul>                                                                                                   |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate different organisational cultures in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of their mandate.</i></p> <p>(5.5.5)</p>                                                                                                                                               |                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embrace</li> <li>• Incorporate</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 33:</b><br/><b>Solidarity</b></p> <p><i>Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, both parties honouring their commitments, and trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their mandate.</i></p> <p>(5.6.1)</p> | Solidarity           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual support</li> <li>• Honouring commitments</li> <li>• Reciprocation</li> <li>• Mutual benefit</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 34:</b><br/><b>Mutual understanding</b></p> <p><i>Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to them fulfilling their mandate.</i></p> <p>(5.6.2)</p>                                 | Mutual understanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding worldviews</li> <li>• Understanding realities</li> <li>• Understanding issues</li> <li>• Understanding needs</li> <li>• Understanding limitations</li> <li>• Understanding expectations</li> <li>• Understanding goals</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 35:</b><br/><b>Mutual empowerment</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power, and control, as well as the ability to access, knowledge, skills,</i></p>                                                                                                                      | Mutual empowerment   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared power and control</li> <li>• Access to knowledge, skills, and resources</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                       |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                       |                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large.</p> <p>(5.6.3)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                       |                                                                                                      |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 36:</b><br/><b>Transformative change</b></p> <p><i>Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies a commitment from both organisations to integrate new thinking on the issues affecting society. The transformative change includes being open to changes in the two organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling their mandate.</i></p> <p>(5.6.4)</p> | Transformative change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate new thinking</li> <li>• Open to change</li> </ul> |

For the purpose of data analysis, the theoretical statements were used to indicate how these concepts are interpreted within this study.

## 6.6 Interview guide for Chapter 9 Institutions

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

- Please tell me about yourself.
- How long have you worked in this position?
- What are your responsibilities in your institution?

### SECTION B – QUESTIONS

| Questions                                                                                               | Relevant constructs |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you see as the mandate of your institution?</li> </ul> |                     |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you see the current relationship between CH9s and CSOs?</li> <li>• To what extent are you personally collaborating with CSOs at the moment?</li> <li>• What is your opinion on the potential for CH9s and CSOs collaborating to fulfill their shared mandate in the future?</li> <li>• How do you see the ideal relationship between CH9s and CSOs?</li> </ul>                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment</li> </ul>                                                                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your perception of communication between CH9s and CSOs in general?</li> <li>• If you personally collaborated with CSOs in the past, how did you experience communication?</li> <li>• Please describe the communication that takes place between your organisation and CSOs.</li> <li>• What strategies or guidelines do you follow in your communication with CSOs?</li> </ul>                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical dialogue</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Affirmed mutuality</li> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Cultural diversity</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you collaborated with CH9s in the past, what was the outcome of these collaborations?</li> <li>• What do you see as the ideal outcome of communication between CH9s and CSOs?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Mutual understanding</li> <li>• Mutual empowerment</li> <li>• Transformative change</li> </ul>                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your opinion of your communication with CSOs producing solidarity, that is, standing together in mutual support?</li> <li>• What is your perception of communication with CSOs leading to mutual understanding? By this, I am referring to an understanding of each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to both of you fulfilling their mandate.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Mutual understanding</li> <li>• Mutual empowerment</li> <li>• Transformative change</li> </ul>                                               |

- How do you perceive your communication with CSOs leading to mutual empowerment? By this, I am referring to both of you having equal power in the relationship and participating in joint decision-making processes as equal partners, allowing both parties to better carry out their mandates.
- What is your opinion on your communication with CSOs leading to transformative change? By this, I am referring to a commitment across different parts of the organisations to integrate new thinking on the issues affecting society. The transformative change includes being open to structural changes in the organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling the mandate.

**Interview prompts:**

*After receiving an overview of the current situation, I presented my framework to the participant by sharing my screen; explaining what I was suggesting and how it should work. I would then ask them to have input on everything I was proposing in the framework. Following the explanation and discussion, I would ask them five questions on the framework (only asking the questions not answered during the discussion).*

- What is your perception of the feasibility of the proposed framework?
- What do you consider to be the most positive aspects of the framework?
- What challenges do you foresee in implementing the framework?
- What examples can you provide of how the framework can be applied in your communication with CSOs?

|                                                                                                                                          |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What suggestions can you provide for the adaptation of the framework to be feasible?</li> </ul> |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

**Thank you for your time and your cooperation. If you have any further questions about this study or its results, feel free to ask me now.**

### **6.6.1 Interview guide for CSOs**

#### **SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS**

- Please tell me about yourself.
- How long have you worked in this position?
- What are your responsibilities in your institution?

#### **SECTION B – STUDY QUESTIONS**

| Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Relevant constructs                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you see as the mandate of your institution?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you see the current relationship between CSOs and CH9s?</li> <li>• To what extent are you personally collaborating with CH9s at the moment?</li> <li>• What is your opinion on the potential of CSOs and CH9s collaborating to fulfill their shared mandate in future?</li> <li>• How do you see the ideal relationship between CSOs and CH9s?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment</li> </ul>                                                                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your perception of communication between CSOs and CH9s in general?</li> <li>• If you personally collaborated with CSOs in the past, how did you experience communication?</li> <li>• Please describe the communication that takes place between your organisation and CH9s.</li> </ul>                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical dialogue</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Affirmed mutuality</li> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Cultural diversity</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies or guidelines do you follow in your communication with CH9s?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you collaborated with CH9s in the past, what was the outcome of these collaborations?</li> <li>• What do you see as the ideal outcome of communication between CSOs and CH9s?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Mutual understanding</li> <li>• Mutual empowerment</li> <li>• Transformative change</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your opinion of your communication with CH9s producing solidarity, that is, standing together in mutual support?</li> <li>• What is your perception of communication with CH9s leading to mutual understanding? By this, I am referring to an understanding of each other's world views, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to both of you fulfilling their mandate.</li> <li>• How do you perceive your communication with CH9s leading to mutual empowerment? By this, I am referring to both of you having equal power in the relationship and participating in joint decision-making processes as equal partners, allowing both parties to better carry out their mandates.</li> <li>• What is your opinion on your communication with CH9s leading to transformative change? By this, I am referring to a commitment across different parts of the organisations to integrate new thinking on the issues affecting society. The transformative change includes being open to structural changes in the organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling the mandate.</li> </ul> <p><b>Interview prompts:</b><br/> <i>After receiving an overview of the current situation, I presented my framework to the participant by sharing my screen; explaining what I was suggesting and how it should work. I would then ask them to have input on everything I was proposing in the framework. Following the explanation and discussion, I would ask</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Mutual understanding</li> <li>• Mutual empowerment</li> <li>• Transformative change</li> </ul> |

*them five questions on the framework (only asking the questions not answered during the discussion).*

- What is your perception on the feasibility of the proposed framework?
- What do you consider to be the most positive aspects of the framework?
- What challenges do you foresee in implementing the framework?
- What examples can you provide of how the framework can be applied in your communication with CH9s?
- What suggestions can you provide for the adaptation of the framework to be feasible?

**Thank you for your time and your cooperation. If you have any further questions about this study or its results, you should feel free to ask me now.**

### **6.6.2 Conducting semi-structured interviews**

The researcher collected data through Microsoft Teams meetings with participants from both CH9s and CSOs to gain their input and perceptions on the proposed communication framework for the researcher to adapt the framework accordingly.

The process started with two pilot interviews with one CSO director and one CH9 senior communication manager to test the suitability of the research instruments and capture the required data. Where appropriate, the researcher adapted some of the questions based on the answers. For example, in one interview, the researcher realised that a participant did not understand the questions pertaining to power balance within the relationship towards joint decision making. Based on this, the researcher adapted the interview schedule by formulating these questions more clearly to address both parties having equal power in the relationship and participating in joint decision making. In some instances, long-winded questions had to be shortened as participants struggled to follow at times. The researcher also learned where it would be necessary to sometimes probe the participant through follow-up questions without leading the participant.

The researcher followed the principles of informed consent in the interviewing stages by briefing all participants on the nature and possible outcomes of the study. Participants were given a consent form to agree or disagree to participate in the research. Furthermore, the researcher abided by non-coercive procedures throughout the interviewing period, and all participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason at any stage in the interviewing process. After completing the informed consent form, the proceedings of the face-to-face semi-structured interviews were recorded using audio equipment, after receiving permission from the participants to record. The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The researcher informed participants that the study was approved by the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the North-West University; that if they were uncomfortable, they could decline to answer questions without any consequences and that the research interview was strictly anonymous and confidential. The researcher started by asking them the questions as they were aligned with the constructs (see 6.5), and then the researcher visually presented the framework by sharing their screen and asking for input on the framework. On average, each interview took 45 minutes to an hour. These interviews were conducted between 10 July and 15 August 2024.

The risk of participants' identity exposure was precluded by using pseudonyms. The researcher maintained the confidentiality of all data collected from participants and maintained security procedures for the protection of individual and organisation information. The researcher ensured the results of the interviews were credible by interpreting the data according to the theoretical statements and operational definition. A reasonable amount of time was spent virtually with the participants to understand them better and gain insight into their inputs on the proposed framework (see Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The recording allowed for the safekeeping and an audit trail and is a means to prove the credibility of findings. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher. The recorded and transcribed data were stored in the researcher's personal device and encrypted with passwords.

The researcher developed a theoretical framework after extensive engagement with the literature, which guided the production of the theoretical statements and constructs and the development of the themes for the interview guide to subject the theory into practice. The interview guide assisted the researcher in gaining an understanding of the concepts

proposed for the communication framework to make them more contextual and applicable to the organisations under scrutiny.

## **6.7 Data analysis method**

The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

### **6.7.1 Thematic analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis emphasises pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or themes) within data (see also Alhojailan, 2012:40). Thematic analysis is a versatile and useful approach to data analysis thanks to its theoretical freedom (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is an analytical approach that can provide a rich and detailed account of data while also being complex (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Alhojailan (2012), thematic analysis brings a systematic aspect to data analysis, and it also allows the researcher to analyse a frequency theme in connection with the entire content.

In this regard, the researcher adopted both an inductive and a deductive approach to thematic analysis. The deductive aspect was guided by the constructs of the proposed framework: critical dialogue, transparency, collaboration, affirmed mutuality, participation, cultural diversity, solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change, which served as sensitising concepts for exploring participant perspectives. These constructs informed the design of the interview guide and directed attention to specific areas of inquiry, namely the purpose, philosophy, guidelines, and intended outcomes of the communication framework. In this way, the deductive approach allowed the researcher to examine how participants' experiences and reflections aligned with, expanded upon, or challenged the pre-established dimensions of the framework (see Azungah, 2018).

Following this, an inductive approach was used to allow new themes to emerge organically from participants' narratives, ensuring that their lived experiences remained central to the development of the framework. As Thomas (2006:238) explains, inductive analysis involves "detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts and themes", thereby grounding theoretical insights in empirical evidence.

The researcher then followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis, which is well-suited for capturing complex experiences, thoughts, and practices within qualitative datasets (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The steps included: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final analysis. Thematic analysis entailed generating verbatim transcripts of electronically recorded interviews to facilitate detailed qualitative interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The researcher systematically examined both audiotapes and transcripts, using thematic open coding to identify emerging patterns, variations, and categories without prematurely forcing data into predefined codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:88). This process allowed for an integrated interpretation; one that acknowledged both the theoretical lens of the framework and the unique insights derived from the participants' lived experiences, thus producing thick, contextually grounded descriptions of communication practices within CH9s and CSOs.

## **6.8 Challenges**

The researcher faced the following challenges:

1. Recruiting participants: There were many gatekeepers which influenced the availability of participants. This was overcome by being transparent and respectful towards the gatekeepers to get cooperation from them, which made them more comfortable with providing access to participants. This permission also made interactions with participants easier.
2. Budget limitations: Funding for the research was limited. This explains why the researcher conducted cost-effective approaches like online interviews to cut travel costs to make up for this shortage in resources.
3. Connection problems: There were a few connection problems with some of the online interviews on Microsoft Teams, and in these instances, the researcher and participants had to reschedule the interviews, which prolonged the interview process by a week, albeit it that it did not considerably affect the research timeline or the quality of input from the participants.

## **6.9 Ethical considerations**

Adhering to ethical guidelines is an essential step in conducting research (Collis *et al.*, 2019; Wasserman *et al.*, 2021), particularly if it is to be rigorous and trustworthy. The researcher ensured that he understood the North-West University's policies and guidelines on research ethics, completed Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation (TRREE), and applied for ethical clearance from the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) (Ethics number NWU-01015-23-A7). Confidentiality of participants was paramount. Protection of the participants' identities could not be guaranteed, but the risk of identity exposure was reduced by using pseudonyms. The researcher maintained the confidentiality of all data collected from participants and maintained security procedures for the protection of individual and organisation information. The researcher followed the principles of informed consent in the interviewing stages by briefing all participants on the nature and possible outcomes of the study. Participants were given a consent form to agree or disagree to participate in the research. Furthermore, the researcher abided by non-coercive procedures throughout the interviewing period, and all participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason at any stage in the interviewing process.

## **6.10 Reflexivity and trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, a crucial component of qualitative research that guarantees the validity and reliability of findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017), was given top priority by the researcher. Ensuring trustworthiness is essential in establishing the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings, given their inherently interpretive nature (Ahmed, 2024). In this perspective, being trustworthy is not about attaining complete objectivity but about demonstrating credibility, transparency, and rigour throughout the research process (Porter, 2007). The concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research comprises various essential elements, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024). Below summarises how the researcher ensured these dimensions of trustworthiness during the data collection and analysis process.

## 6.11 Trustworthiness process

**Transparency:** To ensure transparency, the researcher grounded the findings purely in participant experiences, using verbatim quotations and clear documentation of how data informed the emerging themes.

**Credibility:** Establishing credibility was vital given the professional nature of the questions. Triangulation was used by drawing from multiple data sources (CH9 communication managers and CSO directors), supported by supervisor feedback to cross-verify interpretations (see Ahmed, 2024).

**Dependability:** Dependability was enhanced through continuous critical reflection on potential biases, regular supervision meetings, and maintaining detailed field notes that provided an “audit trail” linking raw data to final themes (see Ahmed, 2024).

**Confirmability:** Confirmability was achieved by maintaining a reflexive stance throughout the study, ensuring that interpretations were traceable to participant accounts rather than researcher assumptions. The researcher documented analytical decisions, used direct quotations to illustrate findings, and engaged in peer debriefing with the supervisor to validate interpretations. This process ensured that the findings reflected participants’ perspectives as authentically as possible rather than the researcher’s personal biases or expectations.

**Reflexivity**, with adherence to ethics, also ensured the trustworthiness of the processes of the collection and analysis. Reflexivity is a process of self-reflection that requires personal introspection (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). Reflexivity is the researcher’s way of managing the emotional demands of qualitative research (Malacrida, 2007). According to Bailey *et al.* (1999:172), “reflexive management of the research process in the pursuit of qualitative validity should be applied to each stage, from the early planning and establishing of relations in the field, to the writing-up of conclusions”. Reflexivity helps achieve key aspects of trustworthiness like confirmability. This was made possible through constant reflexivity and interrogation of the researcher’s positionality as he conducted this research.

## **6.12 Conclusion**

Chapter 6 discussed the empirical part of the study. The chapter showed that a qualitative research approach was most suitable for the research. The chapter also covered the research questions and method, including the literature review, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. The chapter explained why purposive sampling was regarded as the most appropriate sampling mode in the research and described how it was conducted in this study. The chapter provided a detailed discussion of the empirical research method, semi-structured interviews, and explained how the data generated from the interviews have been analysed. Further, ethics and challenges faced in the research were explained before trustworthiness was discussed. The next chapter will present the findings of the thesis based on the methodology discussed in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION COLLECTED FROM COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS AND DIRECTORS ON THE PROPOSED COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter 1 provided the introduction and the problem statement and outlined the research questions. As indicated in Chapter 1, part of the CH9 mandate is to build functional relationships with CSOs that represent civil society and share the goal of the empowerment of society. In this study, it is argued that CH9s and CSOs should mutually empower each other towards the empowerment of society. As alluded to in Chapter 1, it seems as though there is currently no mutual empowerment between CH9s and CSOs. This gap can be addressed by building mutually beneficial relationships between CH9s and CSOs who have direct access to the citizens and share the objective of empowering citizens. To reach this goal, this study will propose a framework for mutual empowerment between CH9s and CSOs.

Chapter 2 explained the current relationship between CH9s and CSOs and the reason why these organisations should have a closer relationship. This chapter sought to show the benefit a communication framework that would help improve the current relationship between CH9s and CSOs. Chapter 3 focussed on the cybernetic tradition as a meta-theoretical tradition and the two-way symmetrical model and on the stakeholder relationship management theory as two specific theoretical perspectives within this meta-theoretical tradition, which can facilitate positive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between CH9s and CSOs. The critical meta-theoretical tradition was covered in Chapter 4, including Habermas' methodology, critical pedagogy, and the participatory approach to development communication, to identify concepts and constructs which can facilitate mutual empowerment. From the discussion of the abovementioned theoretical perspectives, theoretical statements were formulated, which were used to determine the theoretical constructs in Chapter 5 and will be included in the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs in this chapter. Chapter 5 revealed the theoretical constructs to be included in the conceptualisation of the communication framework for relationship building between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment. These are the theoretical constructs

which were presented to participants for their input, resulting in an integrated framework stemming from discussions in this chapter. Therefore, this chapter builds on the conceptual framework that was created in Chapter 5. The focus of this chapter is to expand on the existing framework by integrating the empirical results.

Chapter 6 discussed the methodological choices that were made in this research. Chapter 6 also explained how the framework developed in Chapter 5 would be empirically evaluated. The current chapter will set out to answer these specific research questions:

*What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.1.2)*

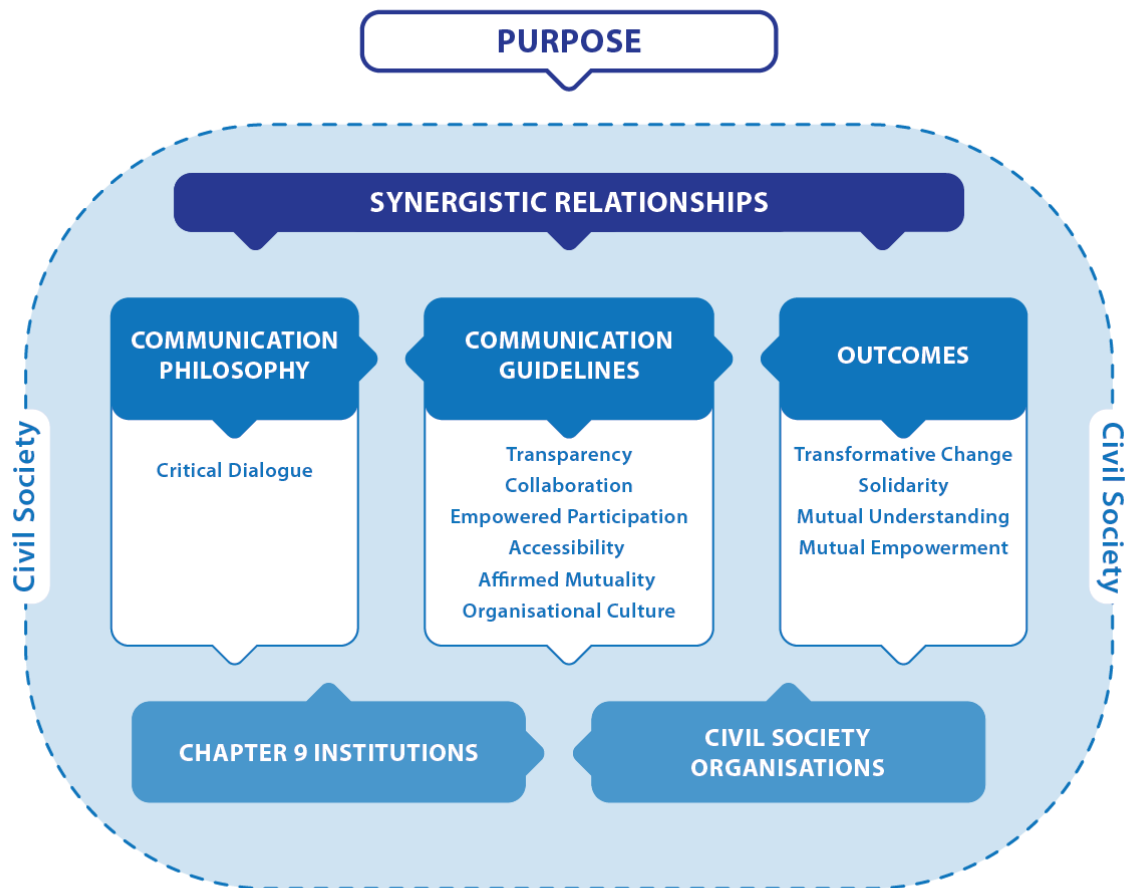
and

*What are the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.1.3)*

These research questions were both answered by conducting semi-structured interviews with the directors of the identified CSO and CH9 communication practitioners from the identified CH9s. Following the participants' inputs, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis based on interview feedback that will help to refine the proposed framework. The results of the semi-structured interviews are covered in this chapter through a thematic analysis. The chapter also reformulates the theoretical statements based on findings, leading to an overall evaluation of the communication framework proposed in Chapter 5.

## **7.2 The proposed communication framework**

The researcher presented the proposed communication framework to the participants to evaluate their overall perceptions of the framework. Their feedback was analysed considering the theoretical statements that include the concepts, constructs, and sub-constructs. Not all participants discussed all the concepts, constructs, and sub-constructs of the framework, and not everything was discussed in equal detail. It is indicated as such in the discussion and analysis of the results.



**Figure 7.1: The prospective communication framework**

The input from participants on the different aspects of the proposed framework will be discussed next.

### 7.2.1 Integrated Purpose: Synergistic relationships

The reason something is done, made, or exists is called its purpose. The purpose of the communication framework is therefore the reason why it is being proposed into existence or use.

## **Theoretical statement 26: A synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment**

The purpose of the CH9-CSO communication framework is *to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs where the two parties achieve more collectively than independently. This entails a cooperative relationship between CH9s and CSOs, through their interconnectedness, that enables them to jointly fulfil their mandate of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback and reflection on the transformation of society.*

The constructs for this concept are:

- joint mandate (including cooperative relationships, achieving more collectively than independently, and empowerment and transformation) and
- continuous reflection and feedback.

Most participants from both CH9s and CSOs agreed on the importance of synergistic relationships between their two institutions. Participant D (CH9D) highlighted the value of a synergistic relationship: *“I like the part of a synergistic relationship ... it is a blended kind of relationship between these institutions and this organisation ... a win-win situation”*. This shows the mutual intention of respondents and the importance of having a communication framework of this nature.

Other examples of CSO feedback affirming synergistic relationships were: *“I am in favour of having a synergistic relationship with CH9s and see all these constructs in action”* (Participant 2, CSO2). *“The synergistic relationship between us is very important and I would like to see more of this with them [CH9s]”* (Participant 5, CSO5). One CH9 participant from CH9A stated that *“We would appreciate having in mind the synergy between our organisation and CSOs that we partner with”*. This importance is also based on the absence of synergistic relationships, as highlighted by some participants, which is an observation in itself. Participant 3 from CSO3 stated that *“there is growing concern over the absence of a lucrative relationship which can foster any form of social transformation”*.

Overall, the idea of a synergistic relationship where both CH9s and CSOs can collectively achieve more than any of the institutions can independently achieve was very well accepted.

Below, will follow a discussion of the constructs of this concept, starting with the joint mandate, followed by continuous reflection and feedback.

#### **7.2.1.1 Joint mandate**

Having a joint mandate is an important attribute for achieving the purpose of synergistic relationships. The construct of a joint mandate was understood by one participant as having like-minded ideas. Participant F from CH9A stated that:

*We want to work with those with like-minded ideas to us, with a joint mandate. Not everyone. Some only find out later that they are doing a collaboration with an institution that has a totally different mandate from theirs.*

This statement indicates that Participant F finds little value in working with a CSO with a different mind and ideas from theirs. While Participant F sees a joint mandate as a precursor to a synergistic relationship, Participant G views a synergistic relationship as impacting whether organisations have a joint mandate or not. Participant G from CH9G stressed the importance of synergistic relationships for a joint mandate in the following words: “A synergistic relationship will also help CSOs to be able to achieve their mandate and at the same time also help us in terms of achieving our very own mandate”. This idea is based on the participants’ understanding of the mutually beneficial nature of synergistic relationships in achieving each organisation’s mandate.

While the joint mandate remains important in the purpose of the communication framework, the definition of this term will need to be revisited. Participant I from CH9I shared the example of a practical scenario where the fluidity of definitions between mandate and interest was made:

*Some CH9s come in and say we are not sharing a mandate; we are sharing an interest. CH9s have a constitutional mandate and need to have a common interest with CSOs, not a mandate.*

In other words, CH9s carry a constitutional mandate while CSOs have interests that tend to shift according to social justice issues arising within their area of influence. Therefore, CH9 mandates can be considered while CSOs pursue temporally and contextually informed interests. Therefore, Participant 1's comments shed light on the importance of reviewing the terms and replacing the term "mandate" with "interest" in the communication framework.

Having a joint mandate was also seen as important in planning together as CSOs and CH9s. In the absence of a shared interest, let alone an understanding of what each organisation does, planning between organisations will be gravely affected. This is also why understandability came up as an important input under critical dialogue, which will be discussed later in the chapter (see 7.2.2). This is mentioned by participant 9 for CSO9, who stated the importance of having a joint mandate with CSOs in the following words: *"Once we understand the mandate and the role of each CH9's office, then we will be able to plan and work together towards the common goal"*. These responses highlight the importance of having initiatives that cement a shared interest in relation to collective planning. The purpose of having a synergistic relationship was therefore seen as important to planning, as this will also be informed by having a shared interest. As evidenced by the responses, planning without having a joint mandate, or shared interest, would be planning to fail.

It is important to note how participants referred to the absence of concrete initiatives that solidify the current joint mandate, or shared interest, between CH9s and CSOs. This absence in concrete initiatives is a strong motivation for their existence in the communication framework. Participants also indicated the absence of understanding of this existing shared interest. Participant 7 from CSO7 highlighted the absence of initiatives that foster a joint mandate between CH9s and CSOs: *"At this moment, there's not really equal partnership or joint responsibilities, you know, in terms of our communication"*. She also emphasised the importance of *"joint responsibility and shared ownership"*. Participant 9 from CSO9 also highlighted the absence of initiatives that concretised the two institutions' joint mandate because of a lack of understanding of the organisation-specific mandate:

*I feel that even some of the Chapter 9 institutions do not know about our organisation, our type of organisation. And they do not understand the mandate that we carry.*

This highlights the absence of understanding of mandates, a key basis for organisations to have before working together, as well as during the process of collaboration. Highlighting this absence, Participant A from CH9A said: *“There is a misunderstanding between CH9s and CSOs and we really wish they could understand our mandate properly and we can work together with them”*. This validates the importance of prioritising understanding to inform the joint mandate, or shared interest through the framework as a means of resolving what Participant A described as a “misunderstanding”. Having a joint mandate, or shared interest or, at the very least, a sense of what the partnering entity is mandated towards, adds clarity to the synergistic relationship being pursued by both CH9s and CSOs. Participant A added that:

*We need to speak with one voice, and we must be I mean. We are seeking to achieve the same mandate, the same goal, so we need to look at this framework and say what it is that is our strategy so that our civil society organisations can understand us and our mandate in the same way.*

This shows the need for CH9s to apply more effort towards creating a better shared understanding of what their shared interest is. This can produce a form of synergy where CH9s and CSOs can both ‘speak with one voice’. This finding also reveals the importance of having organisations with a shared interest to work together in the first place. Therefore, while this finding shows the importance of having a shared interest when aiming for synergistic relationships, it also shows the need to establish the nature of one’s mandate/interest before assuming that they can come together for the purpose of creating a synergistic relationship.

Having unpacked the construct of joint mandate, which was adapted to a shared interest, this section will now turn to cooperative relationships, one of the joint mandates, or shared interest sub-constructs.

#### 7.2.1.1.1 Cooperative relationships

In addition to having a shared interest, synergistic relationships rely on a sense of collectiveness and togetherness to be able to cooperate in joint efforts. Therefore, while jointness is important in mandates, findings also reveal the importance of joint efforts founded in cooperative relationships. Participant 3 emphasised the importance of having joint efforts from both CSOs and CH9s:

*If we can get into those spaces that are open to that form of critical inquiry, we will have something to say together that should be powerful and potentially should result actually in joint programs or joint projects that tackle the issues that we're speaking about.*

This statement reveals the impact Participant 3 associates with a unified voice and how such cooperative relationships would result in joint programmes and projects. Therefore, the relationship between synergy and jointness is not linear but multiply reinforcing. This means that one can produce the other in no direct or predictable order. According to participants, a joint mandate creates a stronger force to reach collective goals through cooperative relationships. For example, Participant 8 from CSO8 stated the importance of having a joint mandate, particularly when it comes to joint litigation: *"We have seen the value of a joint mandate when we worked with CGE in joint litigation"*. This enhances the momentum in comparison to having institutions go at it alone. Cooperation, therefore, remains relevant.

Rallying on Participant C's reference to joint interest, it seems CSOs also seek joint efforts and ownership of projects. Participant H referred to synergistic relationships as coordinated relationships and showed how these can shape public leadership, which can transform society in the long term. Participant H from CH9A said:

*Through a coordinated relationship CH9s and CSOs can shape public leadership and many other areas that, in the long run, they transform society, they transform the kind of the leaders that we're going to have tomorrow.*

This shows the importance of having synergistic and cooperative relationships, as these will impact on public leadership, which is important in the long-term transformation of society. In addition, participants indicated that synergistic and cooperative relationships are connected to the empowerment and cooperation with marginalised groups in order to achieve more collectively, as affirmed by Participant F from CH9A: *“An ideal relationship between a Chapter 9 institution and CSO is any relationship that results in an empowered community”*. This means that when CSOs and CH9s work together cooperatively, they can achieve more, especially in terms of empowering the community. The joint mandate, or shared interest of CH9s and CSOs, is the empowerment of society.

This notion of empowerment will be discussed in section 7.2.1.1.2 below, which focusses on empowering and transformation that is also a subconstruct of joint mandate. Cooperative relationships are deemed to lead to empowerment and transformation by participants. The two sub-constructs will be discussed in the next section.

#### *7.2.1.1.2 Empowering and transformation*

Most participants concurred that the transformation of society was part of their organisation’s mandate or goal. However, Participant 7 from CSO stated that *“CSOs and CH9s don’t have any direct link for communication that would enable us to play an effective socially transformative role”*. Here, the participant highlights the link between effective communication among CH9s and CSOs and their ability to transform society. Despite pointing this out, Participant 3 stated that having empowerment and transformation in the framework add value:

*I like this approach where we seek to strengthen groups of people to claim their rights so that there's more chance of it being a sustainable approach to rights realisation, so definitely it must be reciprocal, leading to social transformation.*

The participants also perceived that empowered people can transform society. Participant A from CH9A stated that *“Once people are empowered, they will possess agency to transform the collective group”*. This, therefore, shows the inferred relationship between empowerment and transformation as stated by Participant B from CH9B: *“I think empowerment relates to transformation”*. This can be seen as a normative assumption of

the relationship between empowerment and transformation. Such empowerment can be achieved through both organisations working together as a collective force. Participant F explained:

*I always link it to the bigger meaning. If you are a Chapter 9, and then you are CSO, then you come together when you both walk away. What you want to do is a transformed situation or a transformed kind of like a community, it's an empowered community.*

Participant D from CH9D supported the importance of synergistic relationships in relation to the empowerment of marginalised groups: *"Empowerment of marginalised groups will simplify all our work because everyone will have the capacity to resolve issues"*. Participant F from CH9B also highlighted the importance of empowering marginalised communities: *"There's a lot of work to be done to empower marginalised communities"*. Most participants agreed that empowerment contributes to the transformation of all, which stems from synergistic relationships. Therefore, most of the participants highlighted the importance of synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards empowerment and the transformation of society. Participant E from CH9E stated that:

*Synergy is important because there's not much relationship between civil society organisation and chapter 9 institution and the good thing about civil society organisation is that they've got access to the people on the grassroots; they understand the issues that are happening on the grassroots, so by collaborating and partnering with this organisation, it will assist chapter 9 institutions to have easy access to the society, to educate them, to empower them about the services to which they are normally excluded from.*

Empowerment of various community groups, therefore, adds to the transformation component envisioned in the communication framework's purpose. Participants explained the links between synergistic relationships and the transformation of society in different ways. One participant from one CH9 stressed the importance of the transformation of society by indicating its importance for various community groups. Participant H from CH9A stated that:

*We are looking for transformation in as far as one aspect is concerned, but if you look at other Chapter 9s, they are looking for transformation for persons with disabilities, transformation for different race groups, transformation for religious communities so, it's all about transformation, so for me that is the way that stands out.*

This marks transformation as an important subconstruct within the framework's purpose. Participant E from CH9E stated that: *"I think that having synergistic relationships must also help transform the communities we are mandated to serve"*. Participant B from CH9B emphasised the importance of synergistic relationships in the transformation of society and how working individually would have the opposite impact:

*Through these synergistic relationships, civil society may be guaranteed societal transformation. But if you know that you work in patches here and there, everyone is pulling their own thing; you are not going to achieve mass transformation, you know.*

According to participants, the transformation of society as a construct of synergistic relationships contributes to a will and purpose that considers the society at large. According to Participant H from CH9A, this purpose relies on a good relationship with CSOs for them to thrive: *"We need to have a good relationship with other CSOs to avoid working in silos if we are to transform these communities"*. 'Working in silos' is a phrase used to describe working in isolation, regardless of the existence or availability of other parties. Overall, the transformation of society was considered important. It was also deemed to be dependent on a good working relationship between CH9s and CSOs.

Overall, this section discussed the construct of joint mandate and its two sub-constructs, namely, cooperative relationships and empowerment and transformation. It is apparent to the researcher that having a joint mandate, or a shared interest, can be a positive stimulus for cooperative relationships which, if introduced to joint programming that is carried out well, will lead to empowerment and transformation. The next section will look at continuous reflection and feedback, which is a second construct of synergistic relationships.

#### 7.1.1.1. Continuous reflection and feedback

The operational definition for synergistic relationships highlights feedback. Participant C from CH9C shared the importance of feedback for synergistic relationships. They were in agreement that feedback had to be continual, and they proposed committees that include CSOs in ensuring this process:

*For synergy, it is important that we create different committees that include civil society organisations, and we then task them to assist us with monitoring, so they would go to schools and monitor and give us feedback on what's happening on the ground. Yeah, so that's another way in which we should work with civil society organisations.*

Participants specifically highlighted the relationship between feedback to enable empowerment and transformation. In a similar way, Participant C indicated that feedback may come indirectly to them through their relationship with CSOs. Participant E further noted that CSOs have access to grassroots communities and can draw on these connections to help empower marginalised groups within the societies where those grassroots organisations operate. While the value of receiving feedback from CSOs who engage directly with grassroots citizens is acknowledged, participants did not emphasise the significance of CH9s offering feedback to CSOs regarding their work. Instead, feedback is perceived as a one-way process rather than a reciprocal exchange between both parties, as suggested in theory and the conceptual framework. Participant 7 from CSO7 stated that:

*We need each other so we can do advocacy for CH9s, so we give them grassroots feedback, and with two organisations, like we always say, two brains are better than one, you know. We're more like an extra pair of hands for them [CH9s] in terms of generating public awareness for some of the programmes that they have, therefore being both empowered and empowering society.*

The phrase 'two brains are better than one' captures how having another party provide feedback improves the quality of an organisation's work. Feedback in synergistic relationships subsidises effort and labour for CH9s through the feedback

they receive from CSOs, as it emerges from their grassroots constituencies. This shows the value of feedback for empowerment and the transformation of society.

Feedback is also deemed to be facilitated through open debate. Participant I from CH9I stated that:

*I like the open debate because it may have the chance to create open forums, town halls, or regular feedback sessions which can be great ways for us and CSOs to make respectful exchanges of ideas.*

Open debate is, therefore, a platform for the generation of feedback. It is considered a precursor for the introduction and creation of platforms that facilitate feedback from all parties.

Regarding the notion of continuous reflection, participants did not explicitly state it by name. However, they did allude to the importance of looking at successes and failures on an ongoing basis. Continuous reflection is also inherent in dialogue platforms where there is open communication and all differences in opinions and ideas are openly discussed.

#### **7.2.1.2 Overview of synergistic relationships**

Most participants affirmed the importance of various constructs that speak to synergistic relationships. The constructs that were predominantly acknowledged by CH9s and CSOs were jointly fulfilling their mandates (or interests), empowering marginalised groups, transformation of society, and feedback. Interconnectedness and reflection were not explicitly mentioned by participants and were also observed to be empirically negligible. Their absence is important for analysis. It suggests that although CH9s and CSOs emphasise action-oriented mandates or interests like empowerment, transformation, and accountability via feedback mechanisms, they may not have fully developed or expressed their work in relational or introspective frameworks. Including notions that were not substantiated by the data risks imposing operational definitions that were not validated in practical experience. Consequently, their omission from the findings enhances the analytical integrity of the study by maintaining fidelity to the participants' own perspectives and priorities. One participant raised an important point around the use of mandate, and

the researcher is convinced that joint mandate is informed by a joint interest. The joint interest may change; therefore, the joint mandate/joint interest must be reflected on continuously to ensure cooperative relationships. This is so because CH9s have a set mandate, while CSOs' focus or interest changes according to needs or circumstances. Therefore, their common interest should continuously be redefined through continuous reflection according to the changing mandate of the CSOs to reestablish joint interest characterised with joint responsibility and ownership. Participants rarely mentioned a formal, institutionalised mandate in their relationship. Instead, aligned interests evolved, particularly around human rights, service delivery, and social justice.

Based on the above discussion, the terms were reviewed, and "mandate" will be replaced with "interest" in the communication framework. Overall, there are important links between feedback, empowerment, and the transformation of society. Both empowerment and transformation of society were considered valid constructs as part of the purpose of having synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs. Based on this input, the framework needs to maintain transformation and empowerment as key constructs of fulfilling the purpose of synergistic relationships. Therefore, the theoretical statement for synergistic relationships that was a theoretical statement 26 is adjusted, and the new theoretical statement was formulated as follows:

***Theoretical statement 37: synergistic relationships***

*The rationale for the CH9-CSO communication framework is to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs through an understanding of their individual mandates and interests, which enables them to jointly fulfil their shared interest of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback towards the transformation of society.*

The next section discusses the responses participants gave regarding the proposed communication philosophy.

## **7.2.2 Communication philosophy: Critical Dialogue**

Communication philosophy speaks to the nature of communication that must exist between CH9s and CSOs as well as the ethical dimensions that shape it.

## **Theoretical statement 27: Critical dialogue**

According to section 5.4.1 of the thesis, critical dialogue as the communication philosophy entails *communication between CH9s and CSOs that should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in free speech and open debate and where ideas are exchanged and criticised to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, authentic, understandable, and appropriate for the context.*

The constructs of critical dialogue are:

- equal partners
- free speech (including open debate and constructive criticism)
- critical consciousness
- mutual learning and change
- understandability of communication
- truthfulness

Participant 7 endorses critical dialogue as the communication philosophy in the proposed framework in the following words:

*If you ask me, the most powerful side here is critical dialogue and if it's genuinely critical dialogue, also learning from both ways. It'll be fantastic, and we can roll from there.*

This notion resonates well with the sub-constructs of shared interest presented above in sections 7.2.1.1.1 on cooperative relationships and 7.2.1.1.2 on empowerment and transformation, where the need for CH9s and CSOs to work together and achieve more was emphasised; this can only happen through critical dialogue. the next section will discuss CH9 and CSO responses to the constructs of critical dialogue.

### **7.2.2.1 Free speech**

Free speech as a construct of critical dialogue was endorsed by most CH9 participants. It is, however, important to note that one CH9 representative acknowledged its

importance while pointing out the challenges that may arise from free speech. This reflection is in keeping with ongoing mainstream arguments around free speech and how it also needs to be balanced out with responsibilities towards ensuring that communication remains respectful. Participant I from CH9I stated that:

*One of the biggest challenges CH9s and CSOs face is finding the balance between upholding free speech and ensuring that communication aligns with each organisation's values. For example, one organisation may encourage open dialogue, but if someone's speech promotes division or negativity, it can harm the relationship.*

A fair balance, therefore, should be struck between free speech and the maintenance of respect and integrity. Participant I's view was also affirmed by Participant E, who, while acknowledging the importance of free speech, argued that such freedom ought to be checked:

*It's always a challenge to navigate the fine line between freedom of speech and the values or goals of the CH9. While both parties should feel free to express themselves, this freedom can sometimes conflict with our branding, mandate, or public image. I think that it is important to have a framework that addresses this potential conflict while also respecting free speech (Participant E, CH9E).*

Free speech was therefore endorsed by Participants I and E, albeit with some reservations. This input underscores the importance of explicitly stating that respect and integrity are key tenets of the construct. Others endorsed the importance of free speech without such reservations as participants I and E. One of their perspectives tied free speech to the eradication of feelings of being discriminated against. Participant F from CH9A unequivocally endorsed free speech: *"Free speech should never be silenced, and both organisations must ensure that they do not discriminate against others"*. This finding is linked to the equal partnership construct, which some CSO participants endorsed because it would eliminate feelings of inferiority and exclusion. This also tallies with the need for leaders and agenda setters to understand the importance of free speech since they are more likely to determine the programming and collaborative efforts and the nature or form they should take. Participant B from CH9B stated that:

*It is important to share this framework with leaders. Leaders play a critical role in upholding free speech within an organisation by setting the tone for respectful dialogue. If the leaders also accommodate free speech between our organisations, this shows the other people its importance for everyone.*

Once the importance of free speech for everyone is established, critical dialogue as a communication philosophy can be unashamedly entrenched as a communication attribute for the entire organisation internally and externally. Free speech was therefore considered important for CH9s. CSOs also expressed their agreement with free speech. They show how free speech leads to meaningful engagement and how such an open environment benefits the people they are meant to serve. Participant 3 from CSO3 stated that:

*Freedom of speech is the foundation of any meaningful engagement with Chapter 9 institutions. If civil society cannot speak openly and critically, these bodies cannot be held accountable or remain connected to the people they serve.*

In other words, accountability of CH9s to the community can also be lost where there is no freedom of speech. CSOs, therefore, are the main representatives of communities that CH9s are mandated to serve, and open speech improves their accountability in fulfilling this mandate. Free speech was also protracted as enhancing activism by making young activists working in CSOs and engaging with CH9s feel heard.

Free speech was therefore seen by CSOs as a desirable philosophy, regardless of whether the opinions expressed were taken up, regardless of whether they were unpopular or not. In conclusion, most participants from CH9s and CSOs agreed on the importance of free speech as part of the communication philosophy. Therefore, it will be retained in the communication framework.

#### **7.1.1.1.1. Open debate, authenticity and truthfulness**

The previous reflection on free speech is also tied to open debate as its sub-construct. By virtue of allowing free speech regardless of the unpopularity thereof, critical dialogue constructs such as these also facilitate open debate. This also makes open debate, another construct of critical dialogue, important. Participant C from CH9C said:

*It is critical to get this one [construct] in because I was part of a project where a CSO had different priorities from us. We focussed on [specific topic] and they focussed on community development, and we came together to create a social impact programme. Through open and continuous debate, we found a way to meet both objectives.*

This shows how open debate can be productive as some form of brainstorming for sustainable solutions and meeting objectives. Acknowledging the agonistic nature of dialogue allows for both CH9s and CSOs to embrace polarised views towards a more reasonable outcome. In other words, open debate recognises that it is okay to disagree, as this facilitates informed decision making (see Concannon *et al.*, 2015; Gokcen & De Marneffe, 2015; Misra & Walker, 2017). Open debate was also associated with solid programmes that some respondents find important. This shows the importance of clustering setting programmes that centre the communication philosophy proposed for CH9s and CSOs.

Participant E from CH9E stated that:

*Sometimes you may want to be transparent, you might collaborate, but if people feel that they are not respected in those meetings or in that particular platform, then it renders your communication, whatever that you want to achieve in terms of creating the platform not to be genuine. Yes, it's more like window dressing in the boxes.*

Critical dialogue platforms or initiatives can also include rules of engagement that ensure a balance between free speech, open debate, and respect. Apart from being potentially problematic, open debate was also mentioned as leading to good conversation. Debate as a term in either society, politics, or economics is frequently viewed negatively, yet this participant's feedback debunks this association. Participant D from CH9D stated that "open debate will allow us to have a good conversation on critical issues with CSOs". As debate is inevitable, there is a need to incorporate views that acknowledge its quotidian nature and importance (Misra & Walker, 2017). Participant E from CH9E stated that:

*Debates are inevitable, and they can be productive as long as they do not lead to a complete breakdown in our collaborations. We can also come up with protocols of respect to make sure we are all good at the end of the day.*

Therefore, it is important to integrate respect into critical dialogue based on the way it was emphasised under the free speech and open debate constructs.

CSO representatives also acknowledged the importance of open debate. Their responses consider consultative efforts that exclude open debate 'unreal' or inauthentic. Therefore, the type of engagement participants recommend moves beyond formal consultation. Participant 7 from CSO7 stated that: *"Open debate allows us to move beyond formal consultations into real engagement"*. In other words, consultation does not necessarily entail that real engagement has taken place.

This also ties to authenticity. Authenticity and truthfulness involve the attitude people should have when participating in dialogue. However, it is hard to evaluate whether what parties are saying is true, spin, or public relations because individuals frequently hold subjective opinions about what is 'true' based on their knowledge, values, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. In the ideal speech situation, 'truthfulness' is a basic condition, but participant narratives did not emphasise it as a relevant or operative characteristic of their exchanges. CH9 and CSO officials did not mention truthfulness, unlike mutual understanding, legitimacy, or inclusiveness. However, 'truthfulness' will be included even though participants did not highlight it. This is so because the willingness to communicate truthfully is fundamental to dialogue. One cannot have a critical dialogue when one is not sharing information as truthful as they can, or trying to deceive the other party. One CSO respondent spoke to the importance of truthfulness in critical dialogue: *"It's important to have truthful conversations in the spaces of dialogue we create to engage CH9s"* (Participant 4, CSO4).

Open debate, although potentially leading to discomfort, was seen as powerful in changing the status quo. This speaks to the proposed communication framework's theoretical leaning on critical theories. These theories propound that the communication framework informed by such will result in the disruption of power imbalances (Felluga, 2015; Haugaard *et al.*, 2010). Participant 9 from CSO9 stated that: *"We must embrace*

*discomfort if we want to meaningfully engage with as CSOs and CH9s. Although it's not always simple, open debate is where justice, change, and creativity start”.*

Overall, participants from both CH9s and CSOs recommended the adoption of open debate as a construct of critical dialogue between CH9s and CSOs. Its inclusion also warrants drawing up a list of platforms for open debate and mechanisms to ensure that it does not degrade into toxicity. This connects to the next construct on constructive criticism.

#### *7.2.2.1.1 Constructive criticism*

Constructive criticism is a sub-construct of free speech, and it is integrated into open debates. While criticism is an important construct of the communication philosophy of critical dialogues, it also needs to be constructive. Constructive criticism helps to deal with public opinion and integrate it as part of advocating for change. According to Participant D from CH9D:

*Constructive criticism is an important aspect of dialogue for our organisation to be able to engage CSOs on issues that affect both of us and our communities. We want to maintain the relationships.*

Through constructive criticism, relationships can be strengthened, and this links to open debate and equal partners because an open debate among partners can be arguably a fertile ground for constructive criticism. Participant F from CH9F stated: *“We need an open environment for constructive criticism that helps both organisations identify weaknesses and explore areas for improvement collaboratively”*. Constructive criticism is one of the most effective ways of improving weaknesses, making it beneficial for both organisations.

CSO representatives also highlighted the relevance of constructive criticism in their engagement with CH9s. Responses show that there is a tendency of constructive criticism towards the CSO by CH9. This shows the importance of having constructive criticism as a construct of critical dialogue, and to also offer clarity on what both its meaning and value are. This will help organisations not to feel attacked or scrutinised whenever it comes up. Participant 3 from CSO3 stated that:

*Constructive criticism is not an attack – it's a contribution. When we challenge Chapter 9 institutions, it's because we believe in their mandate and want to see them succeed in serving the public.*

Participant 3, therefore, views constructive criticism in a positive light. It is not a negative act; rather, it is one that they perceive can aid CH9s in succeeding in serving the public. According to Participant 6 from CSO6:

*Dialogue without constructive criticism is just applause. Our role as civil society is to raise the tough questions, not to undermine, but to strengthen the work of our constitutional institutions.*

This response shows the participants' endorsement of continuous reflection and feedback. This response affirms the idea that criticism is a necessary act of critical dialogue, which goes a long way in strengthening the work of CH9s. CSOs also stated how they benefit from constructive criticism. Based on their reflections, it is important for both CSOs and CH9s to create the necessary conditions for constructive criticism to be taken on board harmoniously. Participant 2 from CSO2 stated that, *"when civil society points out gaps or weaknesses in our performance, it's not to shame but to shape. That feedback loop is crucial for learning, reform, and public trust"*. This shows how CSOs themselves also stand to benefit from constructive criticism. Through a continuous culture of critical dialogue, both CH9s and CSOs can view constructive criticism differently – that is, seeing it for its benefits rather than treating it as a critique of their ideas or capabilities. Participant 7 from CSO7 noted the importance of constructive criticism in their reporting:

*Once we had a report which we did, and we presented it to other CSOs and CH9s. We remember getting some criticism here and some reviews there, and that helped us talk and improve the work we had come up with.*

This case demonstrates the practical positive outcomes of constructive criticism. Such criticism is not always verbal but also in response to any published outputs that CSOs release. All these forms of critical dialogues are important in nurturing critical consciousness, a construct to whose findings the chapter now turns to.

### 7.2.2.2 Critical consciousness

Most participants from CH9s did not share their responses regarding critical consciousness. This could be attributed to either of them having fewer experiences of working with it or defining it. While participants from CH9s had nothing to say about critical consciousness, some participants from CSOs did. Reflections from respondents reveal how critical consciousness is seen as a way of thinking and acknowledging existing inequalities between CH9s and CSOs. For instance, Participant A from CH9A stated that:

*Critical consciousness is vital because it helps us identify and address potential inequalities in our communication. For example, as CH9s, there is a risk of unintentionally dominating discussions, so being critically aware ensures that smaller CSOs are heard.*

This shows critical consciousness as being connected to having the sensibilities to open up space for equal participation, without having one entity come off as dominating. Through this, parties move from prioritising the size of an organisation towards the prioritisation of ideas. Participant 2 from CSO2 added:

*I like the part where you talk about critical consciousness in your model. It's obvious that the most influential organisations often dictate whose voice is heard the most. With critical consciousness, we can actively work to be inclusive and have everyone be heard at least.*

Thus, critical consciousness was perceived as an awareness that ensures that smaller CSOs are also heard. Being heard forms a fundamental part of critical dialogue. Some CSO participants also viewed critical consciousness as a way of levelling the playing field. This refers to how organisations can use critical consciousness to even out power disparities. The respondent also made use of the term 'awareness' to validate the meaning and importance of critical consciousness. Participant 2 from CSO2 stated that *"I think it's important to always be aware of other organisations. Being conscious allows us to create a level playing field, fostering more real and meaningful dialogue"*. Critical consciousness is a prerequisite for mutual understanding as an outcome of communication. Consequently, Participant 2 believes that critical consciousness also leads to more real and meaningful dialogue. Critical consciousness, therefore, speaks to

the earlier discussed construct of equal partnership. This is because it is considered an important attribute in a dialogue that will more likely be equal and afford everyone a fair opportunity to be heard. This shows that critical consciousness is thought of as improving the quality of critical dialogue. Participant 5 from CSO5 gave an example that reinforces this finding:

*During a cross-sector dialogue on climate action, critical consciousness ensured that grassroots groups had an equal voice alongside governments and corporations, leading to more balanced and culturally sensitive solutions.*

Based on these responses, the research deems critical consciousness to be an important construct of mutual understanding. These responses also show the importance of adding awareness as a construct of critical dialogue, as it came out resoundingly strong in responses given by participants.

#### **7.2.2.3 Mutual learning**

Mutual learning is a construct of critical dialogue, and it was perceived as a way of learning from each other. This construct is closely related to joint mandates subconstructs of cooperative relationships and empowering and transforming, because where people learn from each other, they often achieve more together than individually. Like in mutual empowerment, mutual learning was considered important by the researcher because it is a basis for both CH9s and CSOs knowing more about each other's worldviews, ideas, and experiences. However, only a few participants mentioned mutual learning. This shows that it is not a standout construct. This also shows that learning might not necessarily be understood as active during CH9-CSO engagements but that it is passive and takes place through other means that may not be explicitly labelled 'learning'. Participant 7 from CSO7 stated that: *"It is important to learn from each other mutually- it's a two-way thing. It goes both ways"*. Participant 5 from CSO5 stated that: *"We need a way of mutual learning from each other"*. Both participants grasp what mutual learning entails, hence also its importance. Asked to comment on critical dialogue, Participant 7 from CSO7 stressed the importance of having mutuality in dialogue:

*If there's genuine critical dialogue, one would trust that it isn't just an end in itself and that it flows with your arrows and that critical dialogue will lead to that form of mutuality that you're speaking about.*

This response, therefore, affirms the position that learning may be experienced in moments of dialogue or what Participant 7 has referred to as mutuality.

Effective partnerships between CH9s and CSOs thrive on collaboration, which not only enables them to leverage each other's resources and strengths but also fosters mutual learning. By engaging in collaborative efforts, both organisations are exposed to diverse perspectives, skill sets, and expertise, allowing them to learn from one another and adopt best practices that might otherwise remain inaccessible. This process of mutual learning enhances their ability to develop innovative solutions and achieve a greater collective impact than working in isolation. Without such collaboration and shared learning, CH9s and CSOs risk inefficiency, missed opportunities, and limited growth.

The fact that only CSOs endorsed mutual learning and no one from the CH9 space did can be used to infer that CH9 participants might not feel like they have much to learn from CSOs, which is not in line with the idea of equal partnerships or cooperation as discussed above. Even though only a few participants referred to mutual learning from CSOs and no CH9 actors raised it, the research recommends retaining mutual learning on the communication framework's critical dialogue constructs because mutual learning is necessary for mutual empowerment (see 4.5). Mutual learning fosters mutual empowerment by enabling all partners to share knowledge and experiences, thereby strengthening their collective capacity and promoting equal participation.

#### **7.2.2.4 Change**

Change is important as one of the constructs of critical dialogue. In other words, critical dialogue must lead to conversations that result in change among participants. However, some participants understood change differently instead seeing it as a change in communication approaches. According to Participant 3 from CSO3:

*Dialogue often highlights areas where communication needs to change. So as an organisation, it is important that we incorporate active listening to adjust our approaches based on the feedback we get.*

Participant 6 from CSO6 was excited by the framework's potential to shift the communication style:

*I think with this framework we can be able to change communication styles to suit the needs of our different partners on projects enables and this can enhance better collaboration.*

Change was also framed as something that preceded dialogue, meaning changing communication style to have a better dialogue. Change is also seen as adapting to the needs of partners. Change can therefore be seen as both a condition and a product of critical dialogue. Learning from previous dialogues can lead to a change in communication style, which also changes the nature of communication going forward. This shows the need to represent what change looks like in the communication framework. Participant B from CH9B shared that:

*I was part of a cross-sector initiative where we had to change our communication approach to dialogue, to align with the public protector's formal processes. This shift enhanced our relationship and ensured the project's success.*

This also shows the shifting role and understanding of change. Participant 8 from CSO8 stated that:

*One challenge in changing communication is resistance to change, especially in long-established organisations. Overcoming this requires demonstrating the tangible benefits of new approaches and providing training where needed.*

Critical dialogue in this instance was seen by participants as a concept that should lead to change in communication, not change among participants. This adds a more sophisticated dimension to the theoretical statement's initial input. Others, however, saw change more broadly and perhaps more in line with the proposed intervention. When

CH9s speak without getting feedback, this is seen as a challenge to change. Participant 4 from CSO4 stated that:

*We have had situations where some CH9s talk, and we cannot give feedback. We cannot have a platform that leads to change if there is no dialogue taking place between us.*

Against this backdrop, change is an important construct of critical dialogue which most CH9 and CSO participants who mentioned it endorsed. There are also paradoxes of change found in change as an element of critical dialogue used as a means to change communication and on the other hand, change seen as preceding critical dialogue.

#### **7.2.2.5 Context-appropriateness and respectful engagement**

Context-appropriateness and respectful engagement are a construct of critical dialogue. While context appropriateness was identified before, participants came up with a new word in the form of 'engagement' during their responses, which was then linked to respectful engagement in this section. For example, Participant 3 from CSO3 mentioned how CSOs and CSH9s ought to have a form of 'respectful engagement.' This is a new construct for critical dialogue. At first, 'respect' was added as a necessary condition for deliberative or participatory interaction. For example, Participant E in section 7.2.2.2.1, among others. *"Sometimes you may want to be transparent, you might collaborate, but if people feel that they are not respected in those meetings or in that particular platform, then it renders your communication, whatever that you want to achieve in terms of creating the platform not to be genuine. Yes, it's more like window dressing in the boxes"*. However, when the data were analysed, it became clear that this word alone did not adequately describe how participants valued interaction between CH9s and CSOs. People talked less about abstract mutual respect and more about how players interact with each other in real life. The act of actively engaging, interacting, or getting engaged in something, especially in a meaningful or committed way, is referred to as engagement. It suggests being involved, connected, and receptive. While engagement involves a range of participatory activities that may or may not entail dialogue, dialogue stresses meaningful, reciprocal communication for understanding. Moving forward, it is vital that both individuals and institutions embrace engagement, not only as a theoretical ideal but as a transformative process for fostering a more just society.

In this study, respect is considered a guideline that could be used to monitor an approach tolerance and accommodation of other and not lead to offensive behaviour. Any successful and long-lasting collaboration between organisations is built on respect. It entails accepting one another's contributions, backgrounds, ideals, and areas of competence without passing judgment or placing one another in a hierarchy. Organisations are more inclined to listen intently, work together honestly, and settle disputes amicably when there is respect. Respect can foster a trusting atmosphere where a range of opinions may be heard, and differences can be handled carefully. Most participants who spoke to this construct agreed on its importance for the framework.

First off, respect was considered as having the ability to humanise all parties involved. Participant A from CH9A stated that *“part of that framework, you mention diversity, but it is a critical component to have respect for all human dignity”*. Respect also considers the variety of people in the partnership. Participant G from CH9G stated the following: *“When we work with CSOs, we consider their diverse and spread-out nature. I mean, we speak to new and older CSOs, and our communication must cater to and respect both”*. According to Participant E from CH9E, *“The ideal situation is whereby we learn to be respectful towards one another”*. The framework was also seen as a tool that would create an environment where respect for CSOs would take place. Participant E from CH9B stated that:

*What is important from your framework is creating an enabling environment that would be a good result for CH9s to be able to exercise their role while respecting the rights of CSOs.*

This also highlights the need to strike a balance between the freedom of CH9s to play their role and respect for their work in the same light. This comment also shows the subjective nature of respect, because it may mean different things to different individuals. Participant 3 from CSO3 stated that:

*sometimes you may want to be transparent, you might collaborate, but if people feel that they are not respected in those meetings or in that particular platform, then it renders your communication futile.*

They also said: *“This framework will work if the parties feel that they are respected”*. Two conclusions can be drawn from these two responses: first, that the absence of respect can lead to a total disregard of the communication in question. Second, respect is also considered an essential factor in determining whether the entire framework will be effective or not. This construct resonates well with cooperative engagement, and being equal partners because it is clear that people feel very strongly about respect. Respect was also seen as extending to issues of how both CH9s and CSOs view each other’s roles or mandates. The first point of departure is how a lack of respect was framed by one participant as a challenge: Participant 6 from CSO6 stated that:

*the relationship between the CH9s and CSOs would be a relationship that addresses one of our major challenges, which is a lack of respect or let's say, undermining the role of each other.*

Participant 3 from CSO3 stated that: *“for an ideal beneficial relationship, there needs to be that respect for each other’s role and respect for the independence of each other’s mandate”*. From this, it can be deduced that respect is not only a moral issue but a professional requirement. This endorses the communication framework based on context and respectful communication, a construct that addresses both professional and moral concerns in the relationship between CH9s and CSOs.

Context appropriateness also relies on the understandability. Once parties' communication lacks understandability, it will be difficult to have any context appropriateness. Confusion, misinterpretations, and possible confrontations can result from communication that is not understandable. Misunderstandings came out strong from participants in CH9s and CSOs pointing to the desire to have communication that is understandable *“Sometimes there is that misunderstanding and we really wish CSOs could understand our mandate properly and work together with us”* (Participant F). The lack of understanding also motivates why both CSOs and CH9s require such a framework. Participant D from CH9D also stated the lack of understanding in some areas:

*At times you'll find that there's a blurring of lines, maybe from the CSOs, not understanding, and also from some of ourselves internally, not understanding the mandate, or how is it that the commission does things.*

Participant H from CH9B indicated that: *“the office has not really sort of like got to understand the role of civil society and in terms of how he can also help to strengthen its mandate”*. He also stated that *“lack of understanding is a potential challenge. But it's something that I believe that with constant education, more than anything else, that challenge can be overcome”*. Understandability of communication as part of context appropriateness is more about everyone focussing on deliberately communicating in an understandable way.

Based on the discussion in this section, critical dialogue is linked to synergistic relationships because critical dialogue is the mindset that leads to synergistic relationships. Thus, synergistic relationships can be built through critical dialogue.

#### **7.2.2.6 Overview of critical dialogue**

In conclusion, the discussion of findings in this section necessitated a new theoretical statement that was formulated as follows:

#### **Theoretical statement 38: Critical dialogue**

*Critical dialogue between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in engagement, free speech, and open debate where ideas are exchanged and constructive criticism is welcomed to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, context-appropriate, and respectful.*

Having discussed critical dialogue and its associated constructs in this section, the next section discusses the responses to communication guidelines.

#### **7.2.3 Communication guidelines**

Critical dialogue discussed above is a way of thinking or mindset in which specific communication guidelines should be applied. These guidelines include transparency, collaboration, empowered participation, affirmed mutuality, and organisational culture

### 7.2.3.1 Transparency

According to 5.5.1 (adapted to replace shared mandate with shared interest as per the discussion of the empirical findings above):

#### Theoretical statement 28: Transparency

*CH9s and CSOs must provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to sustain the relationship and pursue their shared goals. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are accessible to both parties to encourage critical dialogue.*

The constructs for transparency are:

- access to information
- openness and disclosure

A few CH9s and CSOs representatives agreed on the importance of transparency as a communication guideline. Transparency entails the creation of an open environment, including accessible communication channels and processes that facilitate mutual disclosure, leading to an understanding of relevant information and enabling critical dialogue.

Some participants indicated the importance of transparency: “*As we communicate, we should strive for transparency, you know, in all our communication*”(Participant5, CSO5). Participant A from CH9A said that “*our code of conduct is transparency, be transparent to each other about what we are really doing*”. The next section discusses access to information as a construct of transparency.

#### 7.2.3.1.1. Access to information

Access to information is an important construct in transparent communication. By being transparent, parties must reveal all relevant information to the other, which helps to improve the quality of the relationship. Access to information was important because it

was considered a missing element in the current communication between CH9s and CSOs. It is therefore an area that requires further strengthening. This strengthening can be done by deliberately deploying ambassadors or representatives who ensure this access. Participant G from CH9G agreed on feasibility but stressed effective communication channels: *“It is feasible, but the outcomes must merge mutual understanding with enhanced communication channels”*. Participant C from CH9C stated that:

*It's a matter of strengthening accessibility and like I said, that's the gap we've identified within our communication to say okay now let's have the ambassadors so that where we can't get some the civil society can be able to chip in.*

They also hinted at the importance of making sure that information access is directed towards those who need it the most. CH9s need to be intentional about who they send which information to, to ensure relevance. Participants also encouraged their potential partners to be more proactive in making their information accessible.

Participant B from CH9B stated that:

*I think misunderstandings may have arisen during a lot of our communication and I know that people may come into a relationship seeking different goals and if you don't satisfy their goals, they will not be comfortable working with you for example, a CSO may come wanting to get access to certain levels of sources or information.*

The importance of having a CSO database or repository in place showing the various thematic areas of their work and its importance for CH9s stands out in this narrative. It contributes that every partner may contribute significantly to the decision-making and implementation processes, irrespective of their size, location, language, or ability. Investing in accessibility is not just a moral requirement; it is also a strategic imperative that builds trust, improves results, and makes teamwork truly inclusive and effective (Brinck, 2005). Participant I from CH9B stated that *“You always have that at the back of your mind because we are a state institution, so we must be accessible for all”*.

CH9s further recognise the value of providing CSOs with full access to information. Participant A from CH9a stated that “*we believe that nothing must be hidden from CSOs. If they have full information on what is going on, our records and data, they can be more equipped*”. Participant E from CH9E stated that:

*We have as an institution a need and appreciation for a lot of information exchange with CSOs to maintain a transparent relationship. We appreciate a situation where we have access to their information, goals and initiatives.*

The vast majority of participants highlighted the importance of making relevant information accessible to each other. However, some participants focussed on other aspects of accessibility.

Being accessible and understandable is also inherent in the language the CH9s and CSOs use in their interactions. This came out in Participant 5’s response:

*I’ll give an example of collaborative work we did in a township called Progress. There when you’re going to be interacting with the civil society organisations there, you must speak to them in that language so that you are accessible, and they can also access you.*

This links to understandability as part of critical dialogue where one should be deliberate in their focus on being understandable. By using accessibility as a construct within communication guidelines, CH9s and CSOs can also consider the role language plays in communication. Both parties have to be mindful of the limitations and opportunities of, for example speaking in English, providing that other official languages need to be strategically considered when framing communication initiatives.

Organisations looking to establish equitable and significant collaborations must make information as available as possible and provide access to information. In a nutshell, easily accessible information is essential for productive, responsible, and inclusive teamwork. Participant 5 from CSO5 stated that:

*I would like to see civil society organisations, including us, who work with sensitive information, sharing compelling stories, you know, narrating stories*

*in an impactful manner, not just summarising our achievements, but really taking CH9s through the processes and the experiences of our populations.*

Overall, access is an important construct. Based on feedback from both CH9s and CSOs, it should remain in the communication framework.

#### **7.2.3.1.2. Openness and disclosure**

Openness and disclosure is one of the constructs of transparency, which acts as a communication guideline. The inputs gathered in this study reaffirm that when working on information outputs, both CH9s and CSOs need to remember that they are communicating to a wider audience that requires explicit direction and instruction on where the information lies. Participant D from CH9D agreed with the constructs on the importance of open information and disclosure of information as part of transparency. They said:

*If an ordinary person, for example, I'm from Giyani, I tell a person about your organisation, most of them wouldn't know about the organisation. But if you have an open relationship with a local civil society, where for example you can also leave your information booklets there so that when people come to report certain issues to those civil society organisations, they will refer them to the relevant Chapter 9 institution.*

This also shows that information must be shared through accessible means, particularly when dealing with a rural group. The framework views openness and disclosure of information as key constructs, which are required to build trust and accountability. When goals, constraints, financing sources, and decision-making procedures are openly shared, all parties can participate fairly and with knowledge. Uncertain expectations, covert goals, or perceived disparities in authority and accountability could jeopardise relationships if they are not transparent. Openness in this situation is a strength that establishes the groundwork for moral, successful, and long-lasting collaboration rather than a weakness. Participant 1 from CSO1 stated that: *"We need a radical openness in our relationships with CH9s and that doesn't have people fearful to voice an opinion. Yes so, I'm saying I can see that in the framework"*. Asked on the feasibility of the framework, he stated that *"I do think it's feasible if both of us are open. I certainly know in relation to*

*my senses, CSO1 has an appetite for an open engagement at the moment”*. Reference to radical openness is important because it suggests the need to take an extra mile in pursuing openness between parties. This also ties to the idea of willingness, without which openness cannot be attained.

For some CH9B participants, partnering CSOs aids in getting more people informed about CH9's function. Participant H from CH9H stated that:

*We need an understanding of each other's worldview realities with the several social and non-profit organisations, right? Now, you don't want a situation whereby you are holding information. You must always be ready to release information.*

Openness and disclosure of information can therefore enhance a referral system. This system will involve the CH9s having all the information they need about CSOs so that they can share it with the public, who will get to know about the CH9's mandate.

Participant I from CH9I stated that:

*a structured relationship between this Chapter 9 institution and NGOs is a vehicle through which they can take these kinds of like messages, therefore, a structured relationship is very important, that's the situations where they sit around the table and they work on a model of information, a model of collaboration that would ensure that information reaches the people on the ground.*

These findings show the importance of having a bigger-picture understanding of how all parties stand to benefit from making information open and disclosing it upfront.

#### *7.2.3.1.1 Specific platforms and communication channels*

Other responses also suggest that there is a connection between openness, disclosure, and full access to information. Participant 6 from CSO6 stated the importance of disclosing information: *“It is very important and as stakeholders that are within [specific focus], we need to have regular information disclosure and sharing sessions with our CH9S”*. This also shows the importance of tailoring specific platforms for transparency if

it is to become more than just a concept. This openness construct ties with the specific platforms and communication channels construct discussed in the next section because channels can also facilitate openness. Participant 5 stated that: *“I think we need to improve on our communication channels and coordination mechanisms for this openness to be realised”*. Participant 4 from CSO4 also advised on the need for setting up specific platforms and communication channels: *“We already have quarterly stakeholder engagements. So, we need more specific channels where finances, goals, and objectives are transparently disclosed”*. This affirms the need for and importance of well-tailored channels for openness and disclosure for transparency between CH9s and CSOs.

CH9 participants also address the issue of specific platforms and communication channels. Participant A from CH9A stated that:

*currently, there isn't necessarily a platform through which our activities can be coordinated. We can inform each other that this is what I'm, doing this is what you're doing, how do we work together, you know.*

This shows the type of commitment that CH9s and CSOs will require of each other to implement certain elements of the framework. Such commitment includes the creation of portals of information. This finding is, however, one that requires scrutiny as most CSOs attested to having websites with all relevant information for stakeholders. This shows that having platforms and channels of communication does not always mean they are accessible. Participant F from CH9B who highlighted the need for CSOs to make their information more accessible, for example, indicated the absence of a repository on the CSO's side:

*There's no repository sort of like where you can find all the information about the let's say the CSOs, for example, meaning it's very difficult to know which CSO deals with vulnerable groups which CSO deals with sports which CSO deals with vulnerable groups, which CSO deals with education, which CSO deals with what. So, it makes communication a bit of a challenge.*

Accessible platforms, therefore, also require the systematic organisation of CSOs with different agendas and goals into respective groups.

#### 7.2.3.1.2 Overview of transparency

In a nutshell, all constructs of transparency proved to be relevant, making transparency a communication guideline that should remain in the communication framework. Since the constructs of transparency were endorsed by most participants from CH9s and CSOs, the theoretical statement remains as follows:

*CH9s and CSOs must provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to sustain the relationship and fulfil their mandate. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are accessible and understandable to both parties to encourage critical dialogue.*

The next section discusses the communication guideline of collaboration.

#### 7.2.3.2 Collaboration

Collaboration as a communication guideline entails the exchange of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills, with tasks and responsibilities allocated according to each party's strengths and capacity all working toward a shared benefit. Such collaboration can be strengthened through synergistic relationships that support collaborative relationships.

##### **Theoretical statement 29: Collaboration**

According to section 5.5.2: *CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills, and by dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal, towards mutual benefit.*

The constructs for collaboration are

- sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills; and
- sharing tasks and responsibilities.

Most participants endorsed the value of collaboration, speaking to it in general as well as its respective constructs. Participant 1 from CSO1 stated that the lack of collaboration between their CSO and CH9s was not ideal:

*At the moment, like I said, our collaboration is not as ideal as it should be in terms of being allowed the space for innovation and transformation as a civil society organisation, you know.*

Their reflection reveals a feeling of being marginalised as a CSO. While collaboration as a communication guideline is important, the willingness of both sides to cooperate, overcome obstacles, and concentrate on the shared goals of advancing democracy, equality, and human dignity is what determines how well CH9s and CSOs collaborate. This resonates with the joint goals because collaboration can enable both CH9s and CSOs to achieve more together. More synergistic relationships cannot take place without collaboration. Participant 9 from CSO9 went further to show their CSO's readiness to collaborate:

*I think there's a lot that we can leverage from each other just by collaborating together, and I can say without that civil society is always ready to seek that collaboration.*

Participant A from CH9A stated, *"collaboration is certainly the way to go for both parties"*.

These two responses show that both parties are willing to collaborate and that they see the value of collaborating. Successful partnerships between CH9s and CSOs are fuelled by collaboration, which allows them to take advantage of one another's resources and strengths in order to accomplish common objectives. When organisations collaborate, they contribute a variety of viewpoints, skills, and abilities that result in more creative solutions and a bigger overall impact than could be attained separately (Mattessich & Johnson, 2018). Collaboration can eliminate effort duplication, while increasing efficiency, stimulating innovative problem solving, and creating synergy (Barfield, 2016). CH9s and CSOs may suffer from inefficiency, missed opportunities, and isolation if they do not collaborate. Collaboration is therefore more than just a manner of working; it is the cornerstone of bringing about long-lasting, revolutionary change that is advantageous to

both CH9 and CSOs. Collaboration was considered important by both CH9s and CSOs. Participant B from CH9B stated that:

*it is really in our interest as the institution to be able to get involved more in terms of partnering with civil society to make sure that everyone else, I mean, gets the information about the CH9s.*

Collaboration was therefore seen as important by both CH9s and CSOs. Collaboration includes the sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills. This will be discussed in the next section.

#### *7.2.3.2.1 Sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills*

Through collaboration, networks, resources, and expertise should be shared. CH9s and CSOs can transition from transactional cooperation to transformative collaboration when they pool their resources, including finance, infrastructure, relationships, and knowledge. This sharing can ensure that every partner, regardless of size or status, makes a significant contribution, balances power dynamics, and builds collective capability. Additionally, it can create new avenues for sustainability, reach, and creativity that are impossible for one organisation to do on its own. Sharing of networks, resources, and skills also means that efforts can be shared or spread out across parties. Participant F from CH9B was asked what he saw as an ideal relationship between a CH9 institution and a CSO:

*It will be like, you know, sharing of good practices and also doing a referral system... Let's say we've got a case which is in human rights in nature, we refer to our sister civil society organisation.*

Sharing of resources requires knowing who they are and what type of work they specialise in. Sharing also leads to a wider reach. Participant D from CH9B stated that:

*Looking at the resources that the office currently have, it would actually be impossible for the office to reach everyone else so it is very much important for the institution to reach out to those CSOs who are within the communities to be able to assist the office in terms of carrying out the educational messages that the office would want to extend to every member of society.*

Sharing of resources can involve seeking a hand from an organisation that is in an area that the other cannot access, leading to effective cost-cutting. Further, sharing resources is considered important because it would facilitate the success of reaching out to previously unreachable constituencies. Sharing of resources as a construct of collaboration shows how limitations of one organisation can be addressed by collaborating with the other. Participant B from CH9B stated the importance of collaboration, particularly in relation to resources:

*CH9 and CSO collaboration is important because if we have a civil society organisation, and one's got problems where maybe we don't have a footprint or we're not there as often as we wish because resources are also one of our challenges, that civil society organisation can assist us in a way. So that's why this is important for the communication framework.*

When resources are shared, the impossible becomes possible. Participant I from CH9I stated that “*we can reach communities through CSOs who are willing to work with us because it's a matter of resource sharing*”. Collaboration is therefore seen as a way to improve resource sharing, thus enhancing the reach of CH9s. It also facilitates the creation of an organic pool of partnerships that addresses the needs of CH9s where they are incapable of meeting them. An example is a CH9 having a CSO partner in rural Limpopo, where a vibrant CSO working there can provide statistics or help them evaluate a needs assessment for the area. Participant 4 from CSO4 stated that:

*we need an ideal relationship. This would be one where there is true collaboration on advocacy and policy influence. Where we truly collaborate for projects, not where there is a handover from one stage to another. It also means resource sharing. Like I said, we are quite underfunded as a civil society organisation, so I think a resource pooling would also, you know, lead to a more ideal working relationship between us as a civil society organisation and our partners' CH9 institutions, Chapter 9 institutions.*

This response affirms CSO participants' willingness to share resources. Participant 5 from CSO5 stated that:

*And then even with our collaborations, right, they would be improved because we would know exactly how far the other one can go in terms of resources and implementation and planning. And then we would also be able to optimise our resources because, for instance, if we know that a certain Chapter 9 institution has, let's say, funds for this section of the project, we have, let's say, the human capacity, you know, we will bring those together effectively if we know exactly what who has. So that would somehow improve our partnerships and collaborations.*

While these reflections align with CH9 responses, there is also a need for parties to define the resources they have, and the kinds of expectations associated with funding.

Sharing of resources was also recommended because of how it assists with funding challenges. This is important because there are funding disparities across organisations. Another finding showed the importance of sharing resources to reduce expenditure:

*We are based in Gauteng, some of these CH9 organisations are based outside Gauteng, so now there is an issue of capital resources because we have to travel. This can be shared across (Participant 5, CSO5)*

Participant 7 from CSO8 stated that:

*you raised a very important fact there, that to share resources because obviously with our organisation as CSO, we always have a strain on budgets, you know, so collaboration is the way to go for us in order to reach the volume or the number of people that we need to reach, so collaboration with the Chapter Nine institution will be ideal.*

Resource sharing can be embraced where CH9s and CSOs consider each other to be the resources. In other words, it is not all about the tangible resources that institutions have but about seeing the value of being associated with the other's brand or entity. Not all resources are tangible – things such as reputation and trust that CH9s and CSOs have with their respective stakeholders matter and add value to a collaboration. Participant E stated that “CSOs have a good reputation and trust with their communities, and this is a valuable resource we can spread out”. Other CSOs also have documents with people's

lived experiences, resources that no amount of money can buy. Participant D from CH9B stated that CSOs are themselves a resource:

*CSOs are a resource to us. They are a resource because most organisations have documents. Beautiful documents that talk about change. That talk to strategies and projects that must empower and emancipate communities from the dire situations that they find themselves in.*

This perspective is important because it shows how CH9D places value on CSOs not only for their material contribution, but how they have important empirical evidence that can strengthen the work of CH9s. Asked what they would like to see as the outcome of collaboration, Participant 6 from a CSO6 responded:

*I would say increased coordination of activities and work because currently there is not necessarily a platform through which our activities can be coordinated. We can inform each other that this is what I am doing, this is what you are doing, how do we work together you know, so just increase coordination, I would say.*

Resources, funding, and human capacity are therefore considered important factors to include when thinking of collaboration. Collaboration presents multiple exchanges. These involve some parties bringing funding, while some bring human capacity and connections to the table. Participants' responses reveal the importance of collaboration in getting past the financial limitations that CSOs face. Participant 8 from CSO8 stated that *"we sometimes have financial challenges and when we collaborate with CH9s or other CSOs this can alleviate our issues"*. Ngoben (2014) explores how the South African government changed how it funded civil society, enacting regulations that affected the sector in both positive and negative ways. She also discusses the dwindling area for advocacy and the growing difficulties in obtaining funds for policy and political activism. This could be a reason why some CSOs face funding issues such as those highlighted as being faced by CSO8. Funding is, therefore, an important area that could be addressed by resource sharing. Participant C from CH9C stated that CH9s would benefit more from sharing resources with CSOs because:

*A civil society organisation that gets its funding from wherever may not understand how Chapter 9 institutions account for the resources. So a Chapter 9 institution cannot just decide now that let's stand up and go and build a house here, but that doesn't mean that they don't understand that there's a need for a house but they may be limited by having to follow the treasury regulations to build the house whereby an CSO so long as the money is in the account, letter to the funder can make a big difference. We need them.*

This response shows the funding constraint of this CH9, which is not constitutionally permitted to fundraise – something that a CSO can do. Through collaborations, CH9s can share challenges and reports with CSOs, and they can apply for funding or disburse existing funding to help communities. This construct resonates well with the joint interest subconstruct of cooperative relationships, which here can help CSOs and CH9s to share funding and other resources. Such inter-sectoral collaboration efforts are key. Sharing of networks and resources also warrants shared tasks and responsibilities. In conclusion, sharing resources was seen as a positive construct for the framework. However, there was nothing mentioned on sharing of knowledge and skills, the focus was on funding which has some impediments from the law not to fundraise as matter of independence.

#### *7.2.3.2.2 Sharing tasks and responsibilities*

CH9s and CSOs should not only share networks, resources, knowledge, and skills but also collaborate effectively and responsibly by sharing tasks and responsibilities. Tasks and responsibilities that are clearly defined and matched to each partner's skills promote productivity, cut down on effort duplication, and guarantee that every contribution is appreciated. Additionally, this clarity helps avoid misunderstandings, disputes, and one side being overburdened, particularly in collaborations between CH9s and CSOs which have various sizes or capabilities. Early agreement on who does what, how, and by when allows organisations to concentrate on working together to create effect rather than avoiding preventable misunderstandings. Overall, most participants from CH9s and CSOs agreed on the importance of dividing tasks and responsibilities. They all revealed how it would lead to a lighter load and a greater deal of efficacy in execution. Participant D from CH9B stated that:

*I would think collaboration is the most important aspect because here there will be, when you collaborate, you say, what do they call, what Trevor Manuel used to mention or to refer to, 'all hands-on deck'. So, you don't pass the buck. It's everybody's responsibility.*

While this is an important reflection, it also provokes the thoughts of which responsibilities are everyone's, which signifies the importance of having clarity on who does what. While the notion that *'it's everyone's responsibility'* is enticing, it is important to be intentional about the specific tasks and responsibilities that are shared. Determining who takes what must also be influenced by who can actually perform this task. Participant C from CH9C said *"We all know we have different resources and also our abilities differ. So, it's important that we keep that in mind when we collaborate and give each organisation tasks"*. Without getting carried away with dividing tasks and responsibilities, greater emphasis should also be placed on the details of who does what. Participant 2 from CSO2 stated the existing challenges with working with CH9s:

*At the moment when there's, for instance, when we're collaborating on a project, you'd find that Chapter 9 institutions are the mother, let's say, and then we are the baby, you understand, so at some point I think that civil society organisation also need to be given responsibilities that are equal to those of Chapter Nine institutions even if these can just be limited to the collaborations they have.*

This means that regardless of the contribution a CSO may bring, it is important that everyone has appropriate tasks and responsibilities. Participant 5 from CSO5 stated that *"Like I said earlier, at this moment, there's not really equal partnership or joint responsibilities, you know, in terms of our communication"*. Participant 5 from CSO5 also stated that:

*If there was a situation in which there was mutual empowerment, we would manifest, for instance, by having collaborative decision making, completely joined decisions, equally consulted or equally expected to contribute to the decision-making process, right that's the first one, yes, and then the second one would be joint responsibility, right, and shared ownership.*

There is, therefore, a growing call from CSOs to divide tasks and responsibilities equally with CH9s. This gives both institutions a sense of ownership over the project. In doing so, knowing the strengths and resources of the other is important. This is a practical way *of coming to terms with the fact that difference in capabilities must not entail exclusion from contributing*. Participant 2 from CSO2 stated the importance of knowing the other's strengths: *"You know, if you don't know my strengths and my capabilities, how then do you approach me for support?"* There was a concerning statement around how CH9s were not necessarily tapping into some of their resource base, but instead, stand aloof. Failure to tap into each other's strengths is a liability for the progression of both institutions. Participant 3 from CSO3 stated that:

*I mean, as civil society, we think Chapter Nines are sometimes standing aloof from civil society, which is for us a weakness because almost all Chapter Nines are under-resourced and that collaboration with civil society would strengthen the role of Chapter nines because it would ensure that we share resources, we collaborate, we amplify the voice, but for some reason, you know, there are strained relations between Chapter Nines and civil society, which is unfortunate because it's not serving; all of us are serving the interests of the community.*

This also shows that there is much to be gained by employing each other's strengths, which would ultimately benefit the community's interests. Dividing tasks and responsibilities was also considered beneficial for investigative and research work. People who have resources for this type of work need to be utilised. Participant 6 from CSO6 stated that:

*I think if we work with Chapter Nine institutions, they can go deeper and investigate better, because remember, we are doing this documentation and investigation with limited resources, yes. We have people who have resources and have a mandate to do this work, then it's going to be easier to get to the bottom of the challenges.*

Prior to this, it would be necessary to identify the resources and the parties who have these resources. Implementation would be strategically aligned with the strengths that an entity brings to the table.

It can be concluded that, while task and responsibility allocation is a subjective phrase, it must be guided by fairness. One of the responses spoke to how this division of tasks must also be fair. *“We once had an initiative with a CH9, and we felt like we got more than we could manage. I know they meant no harm, but we learnt to be kinder on ourselves in future”* (Participant 6 for CSO6). While division of tasks and responsibilities is crucial, this chapter stresses that this needs to be a fair division of tasks and responsibilities, taking into account the different parties’ strengths, resources, and limitations. This should guide a form of collaboration between CH9s and CSOs. Overall, the sharing of tasks and responsibilities is important and should therefore be retained in the framework.

#### 7.2.3.2.3 Overview of collaboration

Based on the above discussion, the theoretical statement for collaboration will be adopted as follows:

#### **Theoretical statement 39: Collaboration**

*“CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills, and by fairly dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal, towards mutual benefit”.*

Collaboration between CH9s and CSOs, as discussed above, should result in empowered participation by both partners. This is because collaboration helps distribute resources efficiently, which in turn lessens the load on each party. This makes each CH9 and CSO more capacitated to operate efficiently.

#### 7.2.3.3 Empowered participation

#### **Theoretical statement 31: Empowered participation**

According to the theoretical statement of empowered participation in section 5.5.4, *“CH9s and CSOs should actively participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision-making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts”*. The discussion below discusses the constructs of empowerment, namely:

- active participation, and
- equal participation in decision making.

#### 7.2.3.3.1 *Active participation*

One of the constructs of empowered participation is active participation. Building genuine, accountable, and successful collaborations across CH9s and CSOs requires active participation. Active participation guarantees that everyone's opinions are heard, decisions are reached cooperatively, and duties are distributed rather than imposed. Organisations transition from a passive presence to actual co-ownership of the relationship when they are completely involved, which includes attending meetings, offering ideas, creating strategies, and keeping their end of the bargain. Overall, participants from both CH9s and CSOs stressed the importance of active participation because it transcends a box-ticking exercise, which has zero to little meaningful participation. They deemed “active involvement” a higher level of participation. This means that it adds more depth to basic understandings of participation, which could also mean just being invited while making little significant contributions. Active participation is not that, but more concrete in that all invited parties have a say and contribution in any deliberations. Participant A from CH9A stated that:

*So, either we have a project that we have established, which has its own targets and initiatives, and is funded, where CH9 require our participation. So, beyond participation, active involvement is important.*

The term ‘active’ adds a level of meaning to participation on its own. In other words, it describes the ideal condition that is desirable for every participant. Participant B from CH9B stated that:

*It is very important that when both parties participate actively, you've got a project plan and concept documents where you conceptualise the community outreach where you are going to work together, you conceptualise from the start until the end, so this is where more participation comes in.*

These two responses point towards the importance of a hands-on approach during joint initiatives. Participant F from CH9B stated that “*active participation defines everything*

*more than anything*". This means that active participation is an overarching fundamental for any form of engagement between CH9s and CSOs. Participant F also added that:

*We must come together right, meaning we open up to each other, meaning we even do some peer review of each other. We work together to deliver a particular outcome and as a result, all of us bring different hands into it. We need to have active participants.*

The envisioned exchange during active involvement is one in which each entity takes on certain roles and works towards a shared outcome. Therefore, active participation requires actors in the form of participants who will keep it going. Participant H from CH9H stated that *"I like the point of active participation, you know, when no one will be left outside of you know any processes"*. It is therefore about being included and also being active in whatever initiatives take place. Active participation was also considered inclusive in that it factors in those who would have otherwise been left out. Just like with CH9s, active participation was also considered important by CSOs. Participant 4 from CSO4 stated that:

*I would like to see more stakeholder engagement and participation as much as I've alluded to the stakeholder liaison and engagements that we do, but participation from our existing and potential stakeholders is relatively low.*

Participant 6 from CSO6 stated the importance of active participation: *"Active participation is very important. So, when you talk to participation, both parties need to be active"*. Participant 8 from CSO8 stated that *"I would like to believe that collaborations, participation, and working together is very important"*. These forms of participation are important but should also remain under the premise of it being active. Participant 8 from CSO8 defined participation as a case of *"when no one will be left outside of any processes"*. Inclusion of every party is therefore seen as an important tenet of participation. Against this backdrop, active participation is an important construct that needs to be kept within the framework. Active participation is a tenet that also speaks to equal partnership because it creates an environment where each party can contribute jointly in any initiative. The chapter will now turn to participants' views of equal partnership as a construct.

#### 7.2.3.3.2 Equal partners

Participants from both CH9s and CSOs showed the importance of participating in critical dialogue and all communication initiatives as equal partners. Equality in partnership and engagement is a precursor to critical dialogue. Participants A, D and C from CH9s expressed the importance of having parties engage as equal partners. Asked about the importance of engaging equally, Participant A from CH9A said:

*That's a very good question. I think it is important that all parties engage as equals. This idea of saying a CSO is inferior to a CH9 is not so good at all. We would like to see the communication framework that addresses that.*

From this statement, the relation can be seen between equal engagement and addressing the idea that one institution is inferior to another. Participant D supports the argument made by Participant A, by explicitly highlighting the importance of undoing hierarchy and emphasising the importance of equality between organisations. He said:

*For us, it doesn't, or it mustn't really matter which organisation we are dealing with, because as Chapter 9 institutions we stand to benefit more from having equal partners with civil society organisations that are within our proximity.*  
(Participant from CH9D)

These two reflections from these practitioners demonstrate how valuable equal partnership is to CH9 organisations. If anything, CH9s stand to benefit from the know-how of CSOs. Participant C from CH9C also supports this notion by saying: “*We need equal partnerships to be able to fulfil our mandate. I hope that the model you are proposing here can assist in levelling the playing field*”. Equal partnership is an important construct of the critical dialogue communication philosophy. This binds CH9s and CSOs adopting the framework to a communication philosophy of equal partnership during critical dialogue.

Participants from CSOs also highlighted the importance of entering dialogue as equal partners. They highlighted how feeling inferior in discussions they have had with CH9s in the past impacted the quality of the communication:

*In the past, we have once had a dialogue where the CH9 representatives seemed to be teaching us. We needed to feel that we are all equal, not that they are bigger and there to educate us. (Participant 1, CSO1)*

This illustrates how power or role differentials between CH9s and CSOs affect the feeling that real and meaningful dialogue is taking place, because if people are not equal partners, they cannot participate in dialogue. Another participant also indicated that being allocated equal responsibilities and airtime during workshops is encouraging and helps in producing more robust reports. Participant 5 from CSO5 stated that:

*Equal partnership is another important one because we once had a workshop where all invited CSOs were given equal airtime. This led to a robust report on gender and disability as it was informed by collective experiences.*

Based on the findings, it can be deduced that participating as equal partners in dialogue satisfy all parties involved and also produce more informed reports. Both CH9s and CSOs, therefore, demonstrated a considerable degree of appreciation towards engaging as equal partners. The construct of equal partners can mitigate the existing disparities in implementing roles. Participant 4 from CSO4 also repeated the lack of equal partnership between CH9s and CSOs: *“Like I said earlier, at this moment, there’s not really equal partnership or joint responsibilities, you know, in terms of our communication”*. She further stated that:

*civil society organisations also need to be given responsibilities that are equal to those of Chapter Nine institutions even if these can just be limited to the collaborations they have, and that, “civil society organisations should be given a chance to come up with creative solutions, just as equally that is done with Chapter 9 institutions, you know.*

She argued that *“CSOs and CH9s must come up with solutions together as equal partners”*.

Being equal partners is of importance to CH9s. For organisations collaborating to develop shared ownership, accountability, and trust, equal partnership is essential. It implies that every partner, irrespective of size, financial resources, or prestige, has an equal say in

how decisions are made, access to information, and control over the course of the project (McDonald, 2018). Power disparities in partnerships can result in tokenism, animosity, and unsustainable results. Equal partnerships, on the other hand, make room for sincere cooperation, respect for one another, and acknowledgement of different strengths. Maintaining equality is not just a question of justice; it is a calculated decision that has a more inventive, inclusive, and long-lasting effect (McDonald, 2018). Responses from both CH9s and CSOs both stressed the importance of them being equal partners.

However, Participant D from CH9D explained that equal partnership may be difficult to attain:

*For me, it will be difficult to be equal partners, to have equal powers, because our CH9 derives their power from the constitution. CSOs must always understand that we are accommodating them in the interest of South Africa and social cohesion. So, there is no contradiction about that one.*

This shows how the constitutional mandate provides CH9s with a different standing in relation to CSOs. Therefore, the equality of both parties stands to be affected. Participant D's response also has negative implications for equal partnership. By using the word 'accommodate', they seem to suggest that they are doing CSOs a favour by including them in initiatives. This runs contrary to the idea of joint mandate (shared interest) discussed above, where CH9s and CSOs ought to have cooperative relationships and work together to achieve more, which requires them to be equal partners, not to just merely accommodating of each other. Participant D, however, rectified this statement by stating that equality remains relevant nevertheless:

*We must underline the fact that we do not necessarily do collaborations. They come in as after after-effect. And don't forget, they are not always equal. Hence the importance of your framework.*

By doing this, he demonstrates how the framework could potentially address this challenge. In this study it is argued that, while CH9s and CSOs have different mandates, influence and power, they should deliberately opt to treat each other as equal partners and also engage as equal partners in dialogue. This, therefore, shows how the framework

was deemed an important intervention in directing some form of equal partnership between CH9s and CSOs.

Much like their CH9 counterparts, CSOs also affirmed the importance of equal partnership. Participant 1 from CSO1 showed that CSOs need much of the equal partnership because they are currently not experiencing this in their relationship with CH9s: *"We have had many internal meetings where we have agreed that most of our partnerships with CH9s are not equal. We feel like an afterthought"*. Another participant also revealed the significance of the proposed framework in addressing the deficit in equal partnerships: *"I think this framework here would highly benefit us if CH9s also take it up, so we have equal partnerships, which are not really in existence"* (Participant 6 from CSO6). CSO participants therefore highlighted how they felt disadvantaged in the absence of equal partnership, thus cementing the importance of the framework.

It is essential to note that representatives from both CH9s and CSOs have alluded to the idea that there is currently a hierarchy in the CH9-CSO relationships, where CSOs are perceived as the inferior party. It is furthermore crucial to note that both parties should agree on the importance of changing this imbalance towards equal partnerships to facilitate critical dialogue.

Overall, participants who spoke about equal partnership showed the challenges as well as the benefits that would be associated with such a partnership. This shows the importance of keeping equal partnership as a construct in the framework as part of critical dialogue.

#### *7.2.3.3.3 Equal participation in decision making*

A key component of successful collaboration between CH9s and CSOs is inclusive and open decision making. When all partners equally participate in decision making, from goal setting to resource allocation, it promotes mutual respect, shared ownership, and accountability (Fülöp, 2005). Particularly in partnerships with organisations with varying capacities, excluding partners from important decisions erodes trust and runs the risk of reiterating power disparities. CH9s and CSOs can build a better basis for alignment, creativity, and long-term success by making sure that decision making is collaborative and attentive to all voices. In this sense, decision making reflects the integrity and ideals

of the partnership rather than being merely a procedure. Overall, participants from both CH9s and CSOs affirmed the importance of participatory decision making. Participant A from CH9A stated that:

*Mutual empowerment for me is important for our engagement or communication because it enhances the capacity of each institution to participate in the decision-making process making decisions together.*

As such, decision making is an important construct to maintain in guiding empowered participation. Participant 3 from CSO3 also stated the importance of participatory decision making: *“Our organisation needs to be included when decisions are made during collective efforts with CH9s”*. Participant 4 from CSO4 stated the importance of collective decision making: *“We should be having collaborative decision making, completely joint decisions, equally consulted or equally expected to contribute to the decision-making process, right”*. Equality and decision making, therefore, have a complementary effect. Overall, equal decision making was considered important by the participants and hence should be kept in the framework.

#### *7.2.3.3.4 Equal participation in planning*

True collaboration requires collaborative planning. For collaborations between CH9s and CSOs to be intentional, well-coordinated, and results driven, collaborative planning is essential. Before implementation starts, collaborative planning can enable all stakeholders to establish realistic deadlines, define responsibilities, align goals, and foresee potential obstacles. Most participants agreed on the importance of equal partnership in planning. This also came out as an absence in planning as a tenet in general. The absence of planning in the current relationship was deemed problematic by participants. Participant A from CH9A stated the problem of lack of planning:

*I think ideally one let me say one gap that we can identify is that we are not necessarily planning our years and our activities for upcoming years together, so there isn't a point where we say institutionally, these are our plans for the next five years or for the next year make them work together with CSOs.*

This shows the need to incorporate planning within collaborations. Therefore, the starting point is incorporating collaborative planning and then advancing towards equal partnership in planning. Planning also risks being seen as a strictly internal organisational matter rather than a collective issue. This is a challenge to the ideal of equal partnership in planning. Equality in planning is critical because the roles between CSOs and CH9s are currently considered unequal by some. Participant 4 from CSO4 revealed the difference in roles when planning with CH9s, with CH9s taking a more superior role:

*With most of the Chapter 9 institutions that we collaborated with, CH9s had a more superior role in terms of implementing the programme and communicating the programme, like right from the planning stage to finalisation, or let's say to reporting after the event, you know, their communication was more of top-down approach, like I said. It's probably because that is where planning, funding, and coordinating resources are centred.*

CSO4 thus viewed planning as more in the hands of CH9s. This is the reason why equality in partnership is an important proposal. Participant 4 also offered some ideas on how such equality could play out: *"When there is an event, there is a necessity for planning and feedback meetings so communication then moves openly and smoothly, although it's coordinated from Chapter Nine institutions"*. This shows that communication could be coordinated by one entity; the manner it takes should be one that facilitates equality in planning. The communication framework will therefore assist in decentralising planning from CH9s through its emphasis on synergistic relationships. Equality in planning can also be considered as involving planning together. This contrasts with planning in isolation. Participant 8 from CSO8 suggested the following as a way forward regarding planning:

*I believe that as much as our mandate is to go to the people, create consumer awareness. If we have an ideal relationship, it can be that we plan together, we have an annual plan with the Chapter 9 institution to say, this is what we are planning, how we are going to go to the people and which community and also which province. We tackle it intentionally, you know, it*

*mustn't be a by-the-way issue, we needed to know their plan and they need to have our plan so that we merge it.*

Intentionality to plan together is important. Even though each institution has its own plan, having full knowledge of the plan will help improve equal partnership in planning. Participant 8 also stated that there are currently no guidelines on this:

*I will say personally from my department it will be an issue of reaching out to the contact person that we have in that institution and then to discuss with them what our desires or our plans [are] and how we want to collaborate with them. But there are no documented guidelines.*

The communication framework can therefore help parties reaching out to the other institution when they are planning. Overall, equality in planning is an important construct and will be kept in the refined communication framework.

#### *7.2.3.3.5 Equal participation in implementation and evaluation*

Equal participation in implementation and evaluation is important, as it is related to sharing tasks and planning – a construct discussed above (see 7.2.3.2.2). Both these and other constructs of empowered participation emphasise the importance of each party being seen as equals. Most participants from both CH9s and CSOs who spoke to this construct concurred on its importance. Equal partnership in implementation and evaluation was considered as involving sitting together, coming up with strategies to implement, and discussing how they speak to existing societal issues. Participant D from CH9B stated that:

*We need to sit in the boardrooms [and] collaborate, starting from the crafting of strategies to the implementations and when events and issues happen; we demonstrate that by going together, jointly communicating, supporting or condemning whatever that is happening in society, whatever the issues, that seems to be thorny in our society.*

While the researcher attempted to purely section out each construct, some seemed to overlap. For example, implementation also lies hand in hand with planning. Participant A from CH9A believed that collective implementation can lead to success beyond any

reasonable doubt. This shows the importance of a stage-by-stage process that ensures equal partnership in implementation and evaluation based on their predicted benefits. This successful implementation depends on planning, which was discussed above. CSOs felt like CH9s took up most of the roles in implementation during collaborations. Participant 4 from CSO4 stated that: *“With most of the Chapter 9 institutions that we collaborated with, they had a more superior role in terms of implementing the programme”*. Participant 8 from CSO8 used the word ‘execution’ to describe implementation between CSOs and CH9s; therefore, it was seen as currently having its own power imbalance. There was also a concern about implementing successful projects, and this was seen as requiring collective efforts to enforce. Some participants revealed the importance of equal partnership in implementation and evaluation in the framework by simply affirming it. For example, Participant D from CH9B stated that:

*This [construct] will help us to work with these people, the civil society organisations, in terms of crafting the missions, the plans, and also talking about the possible monitoring and evaluations of the implementations of those plans.*

He also stated that

*The civil society people are there, they know what is going on. These are the people who are providing us with data, the baseline data, so that when we come up with programmes, we are now going to be able, in terms of our monitoring, the indicators and evaluation, to go back to look at the baseline data, which is the original data that these people have, and to say, are there changes that are happening? Is today better than yesterday?*

Implementation and evaluation are, therefore, interwoven and should be considered important constructs in any collaboration between CH9s and CSOs, which should bring about empowered participation. However, equality in this must be emphasised to inform how empowered participation must take place.

### 7.2.3.1.3. Overview of empowered participation

In conclusion, most respondents spoke to the constructs of the theoretical statement of empowered participation. They maintained that all constructs are important because they add value to the relationship between CH9s and CSOs.

Participation closely aligns with affirmed mutuality.

### 7.2.3.4 Affirmed mutuality

#### Theoretical statement 30: Affirmed mutuality

The theoretical statement of affirmed mutuality states that: *CH9s and CSOs must affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing each other's concerns timeously, finding constructive and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and recognition of the other, and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken into consideration* (see 5.5.3).

The constructs are:

- availability,
- timeously addressing concerns,
- constructive and positive feedback, and
- care and recognition.

Participants only commented on the importance of availability. Participant 1 from CSO1 stated that “*we need to be available for each other as organisations*”. This shows the dual nature of the availability that the participant expects. Participant B from CH9 B also said “*we have had instances where we have appreciated CSOs who avail themselves when we have programmes*”, revealing not only that some CSOs do avail themselves, but also that such availability is of significance to their programmatic efforts. However, the other constructs on which the participants did not comment, will be retained in the refined framework due to how existing literature backs their importance. Other constructs such as mutual accessibility and constructive feedback, cooperative relationships, cooperation (see 7.2.1.1.1 and 7.2.2.2.2) also reenforce affirmed mutuality.

Accessibility was integrated with availability. Being available is essential to establishing momentum, consistency, and confidence in organisational partnerships. It shows dedication to the collaboration's common objectives by demonstrating a readiness to participate, react, and show up for work together. Accessibility includes partners being accessible to each other, and accessible channels and platforms. Consistent availability of partners for meetings, decision making, or pressing concerns enhances coordination, increases communication, and guarantees that problems are resolved promptly. On the other hand, a lack of availability may result in misalignment, delays, and damaged relationships. In this way, being accessible is more than just practical; it is a sign of respect and dependability that affirms the mutuality of CH9 and CSO commitment. Participant E from CH9E stated the importance of having organisations affirm and strengthen their mutuality through availability: *‘I think we need to be there for each other so as to endorse one another as well as to add strength to our collaboration of interests’*. Participant H from CH9B affirmed the importance of this construct by highlighting the existing gap: *“I think that the office has not really sort of like got to understand the role of civil society and in terms of how he can also help to strengthen ourselves and how we can be available for others”*.

This shows that a communication framework such as this, if adopted, may resolve issues of unavailability. Availability was also perceived as a means of achieving mutual organisational goals. This draws from availability as seen as an important element in mutual affirmation by some participants. Participant B from CH9B stated that:

*We can only achieve our goals as CH9s and CSOs, but this can only be done when we affirm our connections. How do we affirm them, through being available when we are needed to act or collaborate?*

Participant C from CH9B stated that *“the current relationship with CSO is there. It's just for us to strengthen it by being available when called upon”*. Participants clearly value availability as part of affirming mutuality.

The research findings revealed that feedback is very important for the CH9s and CSOs to affirm their mutuality. However, constructive feedback was specifically highlighted as one of the key features of the construct affirm mutuality because it is through constructive feedback that the organisations can reflect on how they can be there for each other while

showing care and accommodating divergent views. Constructivism in this regard does not mean they agree on everything but acknowledge their differences and identify areas of mutual interest. Availability therefore becomes the cornerstone of affirming mutuality as it provides the basis of timeous and constructive feedback.

Availability from CH9s when CSOs host an event was also seen as an act that validates CSOs that they are indeed doing the right kind of work. Participant 8 from CSO8 stated that: *“We always enjoy it when CH9s attend our event, when they are available, when we call them in to contribute. This has a good effect, and we feel we are on the right path”*. Availability is therefore a mutual act that will have an affirming effect on both CSOs and CH9s.

#### **7.2.3.5 Overview of affirmed mutuality**

The theoretical statement for affirmed mutuality in the communication framework remains the same:

*CH9s and CSOs must affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing each other's concerns timeously, finding construct and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and recognition of the other, and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken in consideration.*

#### **7.2.3.6 Organisational culture**

##### **Theoretical statement 32: Organisational culture**

The theoretical statement of organisational culture in the communication framework states that *“CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate organisational culture in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of their mandate”* (5.5.5).

Partnerships are enhanced by cultural diversity in organisational culture because it brings together a variety of viewpoints, values, and methods of operation that can result in more creative, inclusive, and contextually appropriate solutions. Not only is it polite, but it is also strategically important for CH9s and CSOs looking to collaborate to acknowledge

and embrace organisational cultural differences because it prevents miscommunication. Cultural differences can cause misunderstandings, exclusion, or unintentional domination by one partner's norms if they are ignored. Most participants from CSOs and CH9s agreed on the importance of cultural diversity. Participant G from CH9G stated that:

*looking at it, it's feasible and it's doable, and I like what you've put there on communication guidelines to not to forget to look into cultural diversity. That one is very important for me. Yes, but looking at the whole thing, it's doable. It can be done.*

However, no other participants mentioned the importance of having organisational culture of diversity in the framework. In cases where participants hinted at having an organisational culture of diversity, they did so through reference to understanding of roles, joint mandates and interests or understanding what the other does, not really focussing on understanding organisational culture as defined in this study. Organisational culture was framed in 3.6 as having an ubuntu stance. However, none of this came up in the interviews. In 4.7.3, cultural diversity was assumed to be rooted in identity issues that were also deemed as having core importance in communication between organisations. However, there was no real uptake of this concept from participants. Against this backdrop, cultural diversity will not be retained in the final communication framework.

The next section discusses the outcomes proposed in the communication framework.

#### **7.2.4 Outcomes**

The outcomes are discussed as the results of applying the framework. An outcome is the change or benefit that results from certain efforts in an organisation, initiative, or collaboration; it is frequently expressed in terms of better knowledge, behaviour, conditions, or capacities. This section presents a discussion of findings on the outcomes of the proposed communication framework, namely, solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change.

### 7.2.4.1 Solidarity

#### Theoretical statement 33: Solidarity

According to the theoretical statement of solidarity: *“Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, both parties honouring their commitments, trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their shared interest* (section 5.6.1). The constructs for solidarity are:

- mutual support,
- honouring commitments,
- reciprocation, and
- mutual benefit.

Because not all the participants referred to all these constructs, they will be discussed as a whole.

#### 7.2.4.1.1 Mutual support

Overall, participants from both CH9s and CSOs stressed the importance of solidarity. Mutual support emerges as a natural outcome when communication enables each organisation to feel heard, respected, and valued. Most participants from CH9s and CSOs who spoke to mutual support stated that it was important. Participant E from CH9E demonstrated the importance of mutual support as an outcome of their prior collaboration:

*It was civil society institution like SWEAT when we say decriminalisation of sex work who came up first to say we want CH9E to come on board and speak about these issues. We therefore need a form of mutual support going.*

Mutual support was also seen as both an action and an outcome. In other words, mutual support in action creates an environment where organisations derive a sense that mutual support is on the table. Participant 1 from CSO1 stated that:

*we have women who are survivors of violence and who are trying to build their economic resilience, and we support them, and we would want CH9 to support us there or the Human Rights Commission or both. This would lead to some mutual support between us.*

In other words, offering support would help the other party offer support in return. Participant 1 also added that “*I like your analysis, and your definition of solidarity is the issue of supporting each other and trust and reciprocity*”. Participant 6 from CSO6 stated that:

*Now, we are working towards the same objectives. Therefore, we need mutual support from each other. Those institutions that I mentioned would not succeed in achieving their mandate without our input as a civil society organisation. For instance, we as civil society organisations are very close to communities and the public so whatever grassroots information that we obtain from public engagements we feed into the systems of CH9, which also helps them with them advancing their mandate; it wouldn't be that easy for them to let let's say, go into the public to do advocacy.*

Mutual support as an outcome is an ongoing communal outcome that is constantly exercised in any further engagements between CH9s and CSOs. Mutual support is also about having a sense of belonging within another organisation that one is not necessarily contractually affiliated with. Participant 9 from CSO9, for example, shared the following experience:

*And we need to support each other because even myself, I'm part of a couple of other NGOs outside the institution. So I realised that we could be of benefit to each other, we could support each other's programmes in a much more structured way and in a way each one of us will be able to tick a box to say so that probably, for example, they have a role to strengthen and support constitutional democracy, as a CSO yourself, you say I owe this much to my community, therefore I'm prepared to do this much to help my community. So, if two institutions come and work together, it actually leads to a situation where each one of them, when they stand apart, they're able to say I did my part, but out of a collaborative work. So that kind of mutual*

*support is very important for both institutions. And it actually covers a host of areas, including the areas of information sharing, advocacy, collaboration, information sharing, and many other things.*

Mutual support, therefore, remains an important outcome of the proposed framework. Mutual support also ties to reciprocation and honouring commitments, a construct which will be discussed next.

Some participants who spoke to reciprocation and honouring commitments emphasised their importance. Participant F from CH9A defined solidarity as *“institutions fully supporting each other in an environment of trust, reciprocity, and commitment”*. This reveals an understanding of the importance of reciprocity and commitment as a key construct of solidarity. Participant G from CH9G indicated that *“I think communication is important, and through reciprocated communication, trust can be built”*. This shows how reciprocation and honouring commitments are outcomes of effective communication between CH9s and CSOs.

Mutual benefit is a construct that should guide the concept of collaboration. Participants spoke about the value of mutual benefit. Participant C from CH9C stated that: *All things we do together have to benefit both parties. The positives of our collaborations must be mutually beneficial*. Participant 2 from CSO2 stated that: *“We enter into movements and actions on the basis that there will be some sort of mutual benefit”*.

Participants from both CH9s and CSOs affirmed the importance of mutual benefit from the perspective of participatory decision making. Participant A from CH9A stated that:

*“Mutual empowerment for me is important for our engagement or communication because it enhances the capacity of each institution to participate in the decision-making process, making decisions together”*.

Mutual benefit also came through from a resource-sharing perspective. Participants indicated that people who have resources for this type of work need to be utilised. Participant 6 from CSO6 stated that:

*I think if we work with Chapter Nine institutions, they can go deeper and investigate better, because remember, we are doing this documentation and*

*investigation with limited resources, yes. We have people who have resources and have a mandate to do this work, then it's going to be easier to get to the bottom of the challenges.*

#### **7.2.4.1.1 Overview of solidarity**

Although the participants did not all give their input on all the constructs of solidarity, it can be concluded that it is an overarching concept that will assist both CH9s and CSOs in a cooperative relationship where mandates and interests are aligned. Issues of solidarity were covered under joint mandate (7.2.1.1), cooperative relationships (7.2.1.1.1), collaboration (7.2.3.2), sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills (7.2.3.2.1) and sharing tasks and responsibilities (7.2.3.2.2). The participants emphasised that if the CH9s and CSOs work together through joint mandate or shared interest and sharing of resources and skills, they can benefit from one another. The centrality of mutual benefit is to identify common goals and collaborate to achieve jointly without compromising their mandates. Cooperation and collaboration also came out strongly, pointing to the possibility of mutual benefit if all the parties work towards a joint mandate rather than working in silos.

In conclusion, the aforementioned discussion supports the theoretical statement of solidarity; as such, the statement remains the same: *“Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, both parties honouring their commitments, and trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their shared interest.*

The next section will look at mutual understanding as an outcome of the proposed framework.

#### **7.2.3.2. Mutual understanding**

##### **Theoretical statement 34: Mutual understanding**

According to the theoretical statement, *‘Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other’s world views, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to them fulfilling their mandate’* (5.6.3).

The constructs for mutual understanding are:

- understanding worldviews, realities and goals
- understanding issues and needs, and
- understanding expectations and limitations

Again, not all participants referred to all these constructs. Therefore, the constructs will not be discussed separately. There is, however, an overwhelming importance of these constructs as captured in sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills (7.2.3.2.1) and sharing tasks and responsibilities (7.2.3.2.2.) under collaboration.

Most participants from both CH9s and CSOs affirmed the importance of mutual understanding as an outcome of the communication framework. Most participants who spoke to mutual understanding stated its importance as an outcome of applying the communication framework. Indeed, when CH9s and CSOs engage in regular, respectful, and transparent dialogue, they gain deeper insights into one another's objectives, values, constraints, and operational approaches. This understanding reduces miscommunication, dispels assumptions, clarifies expectations, and ultimately facilitates more equitable and productive collaboration.

From the CSO perspective, Participant 1 from CSO1 succinctly captured the communication aim: *"our communication must be aimed at mutual understanding"*. Participant 2 from CSO2 affirmed this, stating that mutual understanding enables realistic expectations:

*The framework is okay because it would somehow reflect our knowledge of each other's limitations. Our expectations would be more realistic if we communicated in a way that allowed for clearer understanding.*

The same participant elaborated further, emphasising that:

*this framework addresses shared goals, vision, and objectives. If we communicate in a way that yields mutual understanding, it helps us align our goals and implementation strategies in a more beneficial manner.*

Participant A from CH9A stated that *"we would like have a deeper sense of mutual understanding after all these interventions"*. This shows the importance of implementing

the communication framework towards the outcome of mutual understanding. CH9-CSO relationships can quickly break down in the absence of mutual understanding because of misplaced expectations, misunderstandings, or inadvertent disrespect. CH9s and CSOs develop the empathy and mutual understanding necessary to negotiate differences, settle disputes amicably, and jointly develop solutions that are both realistic and considerate when they take the time to get to know one another. Thus, mutual understanding is a key outcome. CH9s and CSO were on board with mutual understanding as a key priority. This is because there is still a lack of understanding between CH9s and CSOs:

*At the moment, there's still somewhat a top-down approach to communication. I believe that is due to the lack of understandable communication maybe or respect or acknowledgement of each other's roles.*  
(Participant 5, CSO5)

This reifies the notion that communication between CH9s and CSOs needs to be horizontal, not vertical. Some CSO respondents stated the feeling of CH9s not having a mutual understanding of the role that their organisations play. Participant 8 from CSO8 stated that *"I feel that even some of the Chapter 9 institutions, they do not know about our organisation, our type of organisation. And they do not understand the mandate that we carry"*. This is a very undesirable predicament which may lead to the breakdown of the relationship between this CSO and the respective CH9s concerned. A solution to erase the lack of understanding is consultation from the initial phase of any collaborative initiative. Participant 1 from CSO1 stated that *"you need to be consulted from the beginning of a project so that you understand each other and the voice of each other is heard"*. The phrase 'understand each other' speaks to the mutuality of understanding, or that it should be two-way. This is an important guideline for more effective communication. This also helps in the management of expectations between CH9s and CSOs. This was evinced in Participant 5 from CSO5 stated that:

*We would somehow within our communication reflect our knowledge of the other limitations, you know, our expectations would be more realistic if we communicate in a manner that allows us to really have a clear understanding of each other.*

This speaks back to mutual understanding as an attribute that aids in the recognition of the other's limitations. By realising the limitations of each, frustration can be managed. Responses from CSOs reveal how CH9s also stand to benefit from understanding what the issues they face in their day-to-day work are. This will assist CH9s in fulfilling their mandate. Participant 8 from CSO8 stated that *"when we collaborate with them [CH9s], we also wanted to achieve to get the cases or get them to understand what the issues on the ground are"*. Understanding also assists in avoiding duplication of work, roles, of efforts. A clash of roles can lead to potential conflict, a situation that needs to be avoided at all costs. Participant 9 from CSO9 stated that:

*We need to understand between the two parties which role does the two parties play, you know, so that we must not feel like we are stepping on each other because these are two different institutions that have two different roles, so we need to understand.*

She added that *"once we understand the mandate and the role of each office, then we will be able to work together towards the common goal"*. This demonstrates that there is a link between understanding each other's mandate and working together, which culminates into transparency and subsequently understanding. CH9 representatives also echoed some sentiments which were shared by CSO representatives. Speaking to how understanding can help in the division of roles, Participant G from CH9B said: *"it is a proven fact that when organisations have a clear understanding of what they will do in a joint effort, that will go smooth, and no egos will be bruised"*. This response shows how, due to the fact that organisations constitute humans with different personalities, having a clear understanding beforehand can avert conflict and, where anything is unclear, there will be fewer issues to address.

In conclusion, there is a need for well-structured and accessible channels of communication strategies between CH9s and CSOs to achieve mutual understanding as an outcome. The mutual desire for transparency underscores the importance of open, two-way information sharing that is both clear and accessible. Notably, the creation of a centralised CSO database detailing thematic areas of work would significantly support CH9s in strengthening engagement and accountability.

#### 7.2.3.2.1. Overview of mutual understanding

Therefore, it can be concluded that all constructs of mutual understanding are considered important for the communication framework.

The theoretical statement for mutual understanding remains the same:

*Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to them fulfilling their shared interests.*

#### 7.2.3.3. Mutual empowerment

##### **Theoretical statement 35: Mutual empowerment**

CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large (5.6). The constructs for mutual empowerment are:

- shared power in relationship, and
- improved ability to fulfil the shared goals.

In this study, most participants from both CH9s and CSOs were eager to see mutual empowerment emerge after applying all the aforementioned concepts and constructs. Of note were responses from two participants, one from CH9E and one from CSO6. The CH9 respondent stated that:

*At the end of the day, all we want to see is both organisations benefiting and being empowered after applying your intervention. I think the framework will guarantee mutual empowerment.*

The CSO respondent stated that “we needed something that can empower both of us as a CSO and also our CH9s. This looks like it can work”. A potent result of deliberate and inclusive communication between CH9s and CSOs should be mutual empowerment. Another way of framing it was the framing of equal power. Most participants agreed that

equal power would be a valid outcome. Equal power was conceptualised as a neutralisation of power: Participant 2 from CSO2 stated that *“what I see in front of me is a more conventional framework that neutralises the power that both organisations can have”*. In other words, power is neutralised as an outcome of the framework. Participant 2 also added that:

*This is good because the word ‘empowerment’ on its own suggests that somebody’s going to empower someone else. I have power so mutual empowerment is good, it suggests some equal process.*

The participant emphasises that both parties possess power within the relationship, and whatever the eventual outcome, this balance of power will remain. Participant 1 from CSO1 also echoes the same sentiments. Referring to the ideal outcome of the relationship between CH9s and CSOs, they posit that:

*Once we are both empowered to the same level, you know, once that mutual empowerment is equal, then we are able to have the same powers and support each other effectively.*

Therefore, mutual empowerment should be understood not merely as a desired outcome but as an ongoing process embedded within the framework itself. This positioning reflects a dynamic and relational understanding of empowerment, where power is continuously negotiated and redistributed through collaboration and the sharing of networks, knowledge, resources, and skills. While participants provided fewer comments regarding the concept of equal power, their responses subtly underscore its importance by highlighting equal participation and open discourse. This indicates that equality is realised via practice rather than expressed as an abstract theory, emphasising that empowerment arises from continuous connection and reciprocal involvement rather than from isolated or conclusive accomplishments.

The improved ability to fulfil their shared goals was not directly mentioned under mutual empowerment. It was, however, discussed as an outcome covered in prior sections. These include transformative change (7.2.4.4) and joint mandate (7.2.1.1). It can be argued that the ability to fulfil mandate was treated as a constant outcome by participants because in most of their responses, they hinted on the importance of having a framework

in place that improves the relationship between CH9s and CSOs, leading to achieving both their shared goals. As such, mutual empowerment as one of the important constructs of this study to guide the communication framework the study seeks to produce has been changed as one of the outcomes to the main aim of the framework.

#### *7.2.4.1.2 Overview of mutual empowerment*

Mutual empowerment can be understood as a dynamic and reciprocal process through which both CH9s and CSOs share equal power, engage collaboratively in decision making, and enhance each other's capacity to fulfil their respective and joint mandates. Rather than positioning empowerment as a unidirectional transfer of authority or capacity, mutual empowerment reframes it as a co-constructed relationship grounded in equality, inclusivity, and shared agency. Participants in the study consistently highlighted that mutual empowerment is achieved when power relations are neutralised, enabling both entities to act as equal partners who benefit equitably from collaboration. This equilibrium of power emerges through deliberate and inclusive communication, open participation, and joint commitment to common goals. Furthermore, mutual empowerment functions not merely as an outcome of effective engagement but as an ongoing process integral to maintaining balanced and transformative relationships between CH9s and CSOs. Ultimately, this reciprocal model of empowerment fosters sustainable partnerships that enhance the collective ability of both organisations to meet their goals while reinforcing principles of trust, accountability, and shared responsibility.

In the context of this study, mutual empowerment has evolved from a conceptual construct into an explicit aim within the communication framework. Participants' perspectives indicated that mutual empowerment is not merely an outcome of collaboration but a continuous process that sustains equitable relationships between CH9s and CSOs. *"We needed something that can empower both us as a CSO and also our CH9s. This looks like it can work"*. As such, the theoretical statement of mutual empowerment remains the same as follows (albeit now as an aim):

*CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access, knowledge, skills, resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large.*

This formulation reflects the participants' consensus that empowerment should be shared and reciprocal, neutralising power imbalances and fostering a partnership built on equality, inclusivity, and shared accountability. Positioning mutual empowerment as an ongoing aim reinforces its centrality to sustainable collaboration, ensuring that both CH9s and CSOs are continually strengthened in their ability to achieve their joint and individual mandates. Mutual empowerment is also tied to transformative change, because power and change are correlated. These perspectives cement the importance of having mutual empowerment as an aim. This will be discussed next.

#### **7.2.4.2 Transformative change**

##### **Theoretical statement 36: transformative change**

The theoretical statement of transformative change (see 5.6.5):

*Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies a commitment from both organisations to integrate new thinking on the issues affecting society. The transformative change includes being open to changes in the two organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling their shared goals.*

*The outcome of transformative change is realised when CH9s and CSOs commit to integrating new thinking on societal issues and remain open to necessary changes within both organisations to effectively fulfil their mandates.*

Although participant responses did not yield extensive data on this construct, the few reflections gathered from both CH9 and CSO representatives affirmed its significance. These reflections include those found in collaboration (see 7.2.3.2), critical dialogue (see 7.2.2.9), and change (see 7.2.2.5). The participant linked transformative change as a collaborative process that is based on critical dialogue and can lead to change if there is a strong civil society working in collaboration with CH9. This link provides the basis for a transformative change to be a dialogical and collaborative process for change.

Participant D from CH9D emphasised that change must be tangible and visible: *“Change is just like justice. It shouldn’t just be heard; it must be seen by everyone clearly visible, as something meaningful that’s happening”*. Participant H from CH9B highlighted the

essential role CSOs play in driving such change, sharing an example of grassroots impact:

*Transformative change driven by civil society is powerful. We've seen the government start formalising informal settlements because of this pressure, restoring dignity to those communities. That's the kind of visible change CSOs are leading.*

From a feasibility perspective, Participant 5 from CSO5 identified change management as key to successful implementation of the communication framework:

*The framework is feasible, but its success depends on how it's communicated to the institutions expected to implement it. Innovation and change need training, buy-in, and clear strategies. Change management is essential for successful adoption.*

Participant 8 from CSO8 further reinforced the importance of visible outcomes: *"transparency is critical, but so is transformative change. Whatever we do in collaboration, we must see real, meaningful change. That element is crucial".*

#### 7.2.4.2.1 Overview of transformative change

To sum up, due to the absence of responses explicitly referencing "commitment", the theoretical statement is refined as follows:

#### **Theoretical statement 40: transformative change**

*Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies integrating new thinking on societal issues. This change includes openness to structural shifts within organisations, where necessary, to better fulfil their shared interests.*

### **7.3 Overall feedback on the framework**

This section discusses the general feedback that CSOs and CH9s shared regarding the communication framework. Several participants emphasised the importance of aligning

objectives and fostering mutual benefit in partnerships between CH9s and CSOs. There were also important insights from respondents regarding the feasibility of the communication framework. Participants generally found the communication framework feasible, while also suggesting ways to strengthen it. Participant 8 (CSO8) suggested giving "critical dialogue" a formal platform: *"I think it is feasible... perhaps the critical dialogue needs a home. Is it an annual engagement or something that creates the platform?"* This also shows why engagement should be integrated into the proposed communication framework.

The development of clear communication guidelines was broadly supported. Participant 6 (CSO6) emphasised the absence of current guidelines: *"The communication guidelines are a very positive component... they don't exist right now as far as I know"*. Due to the absence of communication guidelines for the CSO in question, the communication framework is considered feasible because it contains clear guidelines.

Participant 12 (CSO12) appreciated the philosophical basis of dialogue: *"the most positive one is when you start from the philosophy... people engage robustly with mutual empowerment... not just collaboration but also where Chapter Nines can bring civil society members to speak to stakeholders"*. Critical dialogue was therefore seen as an important overarching communication philosophy.

In some cases, participants weaved together multiple constructs without any intention or instruction from the researcher to do so. Transparency was repeatedly linked to trust, participation, and transformative outcomes. Participant 4 (CSO4) noted: *"An element of transparency linked to participation is very important."* Participant A from CH9A recognised transparency as a constitutional value: *"one of the issues of the constitution is transparency... after 1994, some entities have moved towards advancing it – it's a very good guideline"*.

Participant 8 (CSO8) made the link between transparency and transformative change: *"We need to be transparent with each other ... transparency is very important for me and outcome transformative change"*. Their reflection showed the relationship between one component of the communication guideline to outcomes. This aligns with academic research. For example, Mama (2005) argues that transparency can drive revolutionary

social transformation and empower less powerful actors, while Rogers (2004) suggests it enhances collective power and societal change.

Collaboration also stood out as a core value. Collaboration emerged as one of the most frequently endorsed components of the communication framework. Participant A (CH9A) stated: *"what I would like to see as an ideal relationship is even more increased collaboration"*. Participant 8 from CSO8 agreed: *"I would think collaboration is the most important aspect."* Participant 2 from CSO2 reinforced this, emphasising synergy: *"we need to make sure that we do not leave out collaboration... there must be synergy between the organisations"*. The next section shows the refined integrated communication framework between CH9s and CSOs as informed by feedback from CH9s and CSOs.

#### 7.4 Refined communication framework between CH9s and CSOs

Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the theoretical statement, concepts, and constructs, as per the inputs from the participants. The theoretical statements formulated in Chapters 3 and 4 were integrated in Chapter 5 to answer specific research question 1 by identifying the theoretical concepts and constructs relevant to the conceptualisation of a communication framework for building relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment. In Chapter 7, some of the theoretical statements are retained, while others have been revised based on the findings discussed in this chapter.

**Table 7.1: Conceptual framework**

|                                                                                                                                                                                       | Concepts                  | Constructs                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Purpose</b>                                                                                                                                                                        |                           |                                                                                                           |
| <b><i>Theoretical statement 37:<br/>Synergistic relationships</i></b><br><br><i>CH9s and CSOs should create a synergistic relationship between them through their shared goals of</i> | Synergistic relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared goals</li> <li>• Empowering and transformation</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| empowering marginalised groups leading to the transformation of society.<br><br>(7.2.1.2)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Communication philosophy</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Theoretical statement 38:</b><br><b>Critical Dialogue</b><br><br><i>Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process, where both parties engage as equal partners in free speech and open debate where ideas are exchanged and criticised, to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, content appropriate, and respectful.</i><br><br>(7.2.2.6) | Critical Dialogue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal partners</li> <li>• Free speech</li> <li>• Open debate</li> <li>• Constructive criticism</li> <li>• Critical consciousness</li> <li>• Mutual learning and change</li> <li>• Truthful</li> <li>• Context appropriateness and respectful engagement</li> </ul> |
| <b>Communication guidelines</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Theoretical statement 28:</b><br><b>Transparency</b><br><br><i>CH9s and CSOs should provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Transparency      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Specific platforms and communication channels</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>sustain the relationship and fulfil their shared goals. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are understandable to both parties.</i></p> <p><i>(7.2.3.1)</i></p>                                                                                                         |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 39:</b><br/><b>Collaboration</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills, and by dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal. (7.2.3.2.3)</i></p> | Collaboration      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of networks, resources, knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Sharing tasks and responsibilities</li> </ul>                                                     |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 30:</b><br/><b>Affirmed mutuality</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs must affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing each other's concerns timeously, finding constructive and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and</i></p>      | Affirmed mutuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Timeously addressing concerns</li> <li>• Constructive and positive feedback</li> <li>• Care and recognition</li> <li>• Win-win</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>recognition of the other, and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken in consideration.</i></p> <p>(7.2.3.4)</p>                                                                                                                                                           |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 31:</b><br/><b>Empowered participation</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should actively participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts.</i></p> <p>(7.2.3.3)</p> | Empowered participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation</li> <li>• Equal participation in decision making</li> <li>• Equal participation in planning</li> <li>• Equal participation in implementation and evaluation</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 32:</b><br/><b>Organisational culture</b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate organisational culture in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of their mandate (7.2.3.6)</i></p>                                                                | Organisational culture  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Understand</li> <li>• Embrace</li> <li>• Incorporate</li> </ul>                                                                                    |
| <b>Relationship outcomes</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 33:</b><br/><b>Solidarity</b></p> <p><i>Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, both parties honouring their commitments, trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their mandate (7.2.4.1)</i></p> | Solidarity            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocating and honouring commitments</li> <li>• Mutual benefit</li> <li>• Mutual support</li> </ul>                                                   |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 34:</b><br/><b>Mutual understanding</b></p> <p><i>Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to them fulfilling their mandate. (7.2.3.2)</i></p>                            | Mutual understanding  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding worldviews, realities and goals</li> <li>• Understanding issues and needs</li> <li>• Understanding expectations and limitations</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 40:</b><br/><b>Transformative change</b></p> <p><i>Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies a commitment from both organisations to integrate new</i></p>                                                                                                                     | Transformative change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate new thinking</li> <li>• Open to change</li> </ul>                                                                                              |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                    |                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>thinking on the issues affecting society. The transformative change includes being open to changes in the two organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling their mandate.</i></p> <p>(7.2.4.2.1)</p>                                                                                                                                                                       |                    |                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Aim</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                    |                                                                                                                               |
| <p><b><i>Theoretical statement 35: Mutual empowerment</i></b></p> <p><i>CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, and resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large.</i></p> <p>(7.2.3.3)</p> | Mutual empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal power in relationship</li> <li>• Improved ability to fulfil mandate</li> </ul> |

## 7.5 Conclusion

The chapter sought to answer two specific research questions. The first question asked:

*What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.1.2)*

Communication managers of CH9s broadly welcomed the proposed communication framework, and they recognised its potential to shift institutional engagement with CSOs from transactional interactions toward more relational and transformative practices. Participants highlighted that the framework resonates with their own mandates by facilitating access to grassroots knowledge and improving outreach through CSO networks, thereby minimising duplication of efforts.

CH9 managers particularly endorsed constructs such as *synergistic relationships*, *transparency*, *open debate*, and *respectful engagement*. They perceived these elements as crucial to building trust and sustaining collaboration. Some noted that while equal partnerships are aspirational, constitutional hierarchies and limited resources may complicate their practical application. Nevertheless, the emphasis on critical dialogue was seen as essential, provided that all voices are valued and open debate is conducted in a respectful manner.

The guideline of transparency was especially significant for CH9 participants, who stressed that accessible communication channels and full disclosure were consistent with their codes of conduct. Managers also affirmed the importance of empowered participation and organisational culture, acknowledging that diverse organisational practices enrich collaborative problem solving and prevent miscommunication. For communication managers, each construct is an integral part of structuring communication to foster mutually beneficial relationships. While constructs such as timeous feedback and recognition under affirmed mutuality were not explicitly foregrounded by participants, managers nonetheless affirmed the overarching principle of availability and responsiveness.

Overall, CH9 communication managers perceived the framework as both practical and desirable. They viewed its constructs as integral to structuring communication that fosters mutual benefit, even as they acknowledged constitutional asymmetries. Their responses underscore a willingness to embrace the framework's ideals of transformation and empowerment, provided that its implementation respects institutional realities.

The second specific research question answered in this chapter was: *What are the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework?* (see 1.1.3).

CSO directors consider the proposed communication framework important for their work. CSO directors were equally supportive of the proposed communication framework but approached it from the perspective of grassroots realities and past experiences of marginalisation in their engagements with CH9s. Directors strongly endorsed the framework's emphasis on mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change, and they perceived it as a vehicle to address long-standing power imbalances and extractive modes of participation. They emphasised that effective communication must be rooted in shared responsibility, access to information, and ownership of collaborative processes, rather than one-sided consultation.

Directors valued the framework's focus on synergistic relationships, noting that while their agendas are issue driven and flexible, these can align productively with CH9 mandates. They appreciated the potential of critical dialogue to foster equal partnerships and critical consciousness if it is grounded in free speech, open debate, and respectful engagement. Several participants stressed that in the past they had felt treated as "inferior" in discussions with CH9s, which highlights the importance of the framework's commitment to equality and joint ownership.

Transparency, empowered participation, and organisational culture were also strongly endorsed by CSO participants. They argued that access to information and the creation of joint platforms were essential for ensuring fairness and preventing misaligned expectations.

In terms of outcomes, CSO directors placed particular emphasis on mutual empowerment and transformative change. They interpreted empowerment as the neutralisation of power disparities, a process that benefits both CH9s and CSOs rather than one empowering the other. They also stressed that communication must lead to visible, tangible change, not just dialogue for the sake of dialogue. Transformative change was seen as the ultimate test of the framework's success, requiring training, change management, and clear strategies to ensure implementation. CSO directors perceived the framework as highly relevant and necessary. Their perspectives highlight both

optimism and caution: while they see the framework as a genuine opportunity to reconfigure relationships with CH9s, they insist that its success depends on authentic inclusion, joint responsibility, and measurable outcomes that improve the lives of communities they serve.

This chapter has confirmed the critical importance of a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs to foster mutual empowerment and social transformation. The empirical data, collected through semi-structured interviews with communication practitioners and CSO directors, revealed broad support for the proposed communication framework and its foundational constructs. Participants consistently emphasised the necessity of joint mandates (or at a minimum, aligned interests), collective planning, and sustained feedback mechanisms as prerequisites for effective collaboration.

Notably, the study reaffirmed empowerment and transformation as central pillars of the framework. These constructs were shown to be inextricably linked to the broader objective of addressing systemic marginalisation in South Africa. Furthermore, the communication philosophy, grounded in critical dialogue, was well received. Respondents highlighted equal partnership, open debate, and constructive criticism as vital to achieving authentic and productive communication. However, certain constructs, such as mutual learning and truthfulness, were deemed either insufficiently supported or too abstract to retain in the final framework, while ‘engagement’ emerged as a valuable new addition. In refining the communication framework, mutual empowerment was elevated from a relationship outcome to the aim of the framework. This shift reflects the deeper analytical insight gained from participant data: empowerment is not merely a by-product of effective collaboration but the ultimate purpose driving all communication processes between CH9s and CSOs. Participants consistently emphasised that equitable relationships, shared decision making, and the redistribution of communicative power are foundational conditions for sustainable transformation. Thus, mutual empowerment functions as both the guiding aim and the evaluative benchmark for the framework; it encapsulates the culmination of the philosophical, procedural, and relational principles (dialogue, transparency, participation, mutuality, and solidarity) that together enable CH9s and CSOs to fulfil their shared goals of advancing human rights and social justice.

In terms of practical implementation, the research found strong endorsement for the proposed communication guidelines, particularly transparency, collaboration, and organisational culture. These guidelines were seen as crucial for bridging the gap between CH9s and CSOs and for ensuring inclusive, respectful, and strategic partnerships. The findings also underscore the need for clearer role definitions, shared platforms, and proactive information-sharing systems to institutionalise collaboration and ensure sustainability.

Ultimately, the refined framework offers a pragmatic, theoretically grounded model to guide CH9-CSO interactions. It promotes democratic engagement, addresses historical communication inequities, and enhances the collective capacity of both entities to serve marginalised communities. The refined framework is presented in Chapter 8.

## **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND FINAL COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, outlining the research problem, goals, and questions. It motivated the necessity of creating a communication framework for communication between CH9s and CSOs to facilitate mutually beneficial relationships and mutual empowerment. It showed that these organisations were not empowering each other or working together effectively, which made the necessity for a theoretical and practical intervention clear. A long-term, positive, mutually beneficial relationship between CH9 institutions and CSOs is essential because their mandates, focusses, and strengths complement each other. For instance, they have shared goals of accountability and human rights, they both aim to close the gap between citizens and state institutions and aim to empower society. Thus, mutual empowerment would enable both parties to better achieve their shared objectives of empowering society. A communication framework for CH9s and CSOs is vital in the pursuit of such relationships and mutual empowerment.

Chapter 2 provided the study's institutional and contextual foundation. It focussed on the constitutional duties of CH9 institutions and explained the importance of CSOs for democratic governance and empowering citizens. It mentioned the problems that have come up in the past and present between CH9 and CSOs and made the argument for the need for a systematic way to communicate. This chapter noted that CH9s safeguard democracy through accountability, investigation, and advocacy but face challenges including limited funding, perceived lack of independence, and weak communication with CSOs. CSOs, rooted in communities, enhance grassroots access, advocacy, and public awareness, making them vital partners for CH9s. The chapter outlined nine key CSOs and their capacity to extend CH9 reach. It argues that healthy, structured collaboration can yield mutual empowerment, improve service delivery, and strengthen democratic accountability.

The first metatheoretical perspective was the cybernetic tradition, discussed in Chapter 3. It explained how feedback and balance help communication systems work. The chapter employed theories such as the two-way symmetrical model and stakeholder

relationship management theory to conceptualise communication as structured, two-way, and part of a system. These theories helped shape the first versions of the communication framework. The final proposed communication framework is also based on these theories. This chapter specifically focussed on how communication can be used to facilitate positive, long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between organisations, in this case, between CH9s and CSOs.

In Chapter 4, it was argued that the constructs derived from the corporate communication theoretical perspectives in Chapter 3 would not be sufficient for facilitating mutual empowerment between CH9s and CSOs, which was one of the main focusses of the communication framework. To address this gap, Chapter 4 introduced the critical tradition and highlighted the work of Habermas, Freire, and the participatory approach to development communication as relevant for the outcome of mutual empowerment. In this chapter, theoretical claims were made to determine how communication can help facilitate the mutual empowerment of CH9 and CSOs.

Chapter 5 drew on theoretical ideas from the previous two chapters to define the main ideas and structures that would comprise the proposed communication framework. The chapter noted that the CH9 and CSO communication framework should foster collaboration between CH9s and CSOs to jointly empower society. The chapter argued that the framework's purpose is a synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment. To fulfil this purpose, a communication philosophy, 'critical dialogue', emphasises a dialogical process, characterised by specific constructs. Key guidelines for communication, within the context of critical dialogue, were identified, including transparency, collaboration, affirmed mutuality, empowered participation, and organisational culture. The chapter noted that when applied, these guidelines should facilitate solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change as outcomes. The chapter showed an early version of the framework and highlighted how it would eventually be evaluated through an empirical study.

Chapter 6 provided a detailed discussion about the study's methodological approach to explain how the empirical part of the study had been conducted. It discussed the qualitative design, the sampling method, how the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and explained how the data was analysed through thematic

analysis. It explained how ethical issues had been addressed and how the framework presented in Chapter 5 would be evaluated and adapted based on participants' input.

Chapter 7 focussed on the input of the interviewed communication managers of CH9s and the directors of CSOs on the proposed communication framework. The chapter analysed their answers thematically in relation to the constructs of the proposed framework to reflect their perceptions regarding the proposed theoretical communication framework. It also uncovered gaps and limitations in the original framework and suggested ways to improve the conceptual framework, which were used to create the final framework presented in this chapter.

The current chapter will answer the study's research questions and present the revised proposed communication framework to create synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment. This chapter will bring together the theoretical and empirical insights of the study to present a final communication framework for CH9s to foster empowering relationships with CSOs. The framework will be developed in response to the overall aim of the study and guided by both theoretical constructs identified in Chapter 5 and empirical findings presented in Chapter 7.

This chapter will first answer the following specific research questions:

- *What theoretical concepts and constructs should be included in the conceptualisation of the communication framework for relationship building with CSOs towards mutual empowerment? (1.4.1.1)*
- *What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.4.1.2)*
- *What are the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework? (1.4.1.3)*

The answers to these questions will be integrated to answer the general research question:

- *What should a communication framework for CH9s include to contribute to relationship building with CSOs towards the mutual empowerment of both institutions? (1.4)*

In answering this question, the final communication framework will be discussed.

The next section will discuss how the first research question was answered.

## **8.2 Theoretical concepts and constructs of the communication framework**

The first specific research question asked: *What theoretical concepts and constructs should be included in the conceptualisation of the communication framework for relationship building with CSOs towards mutual empowerment?* (see 1.4.1.1)

One discipline of communication was not sufficient for the framework, as the communication framework aims to integrate multiple perspectives to facilitate a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs with the overall aim of mutual empowerment. Therefore, the framework draws on both corporate and development communication theoretical perspectives, recognising that each discipline offers unique insights and constructs essential to achieving synergistic relationships that foster mutual empowerment and societal change.

This research question was answered through a literature study on two different disciplines in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 introduced a corporate communication theoretical perspective focussing on mutually beneficial, long-term positive relationships. It was, however, argued that this discipline alone could not suffice as it does not balance out the power differentials between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment. Chapter 4 dealt with the critical meta-theoretical tradition from a development communication perspective that supports the mutual empowerment of both CH9s and CSOs. Theoretical statements were formulated for the concepts identified in these two chapters.

The theoretical statements formulated in Chapters 3 and 4 were integrated in Chapter 5 to answer specific research question 1 by identifying the theoretical concepts and constructs relevant to the conceptualisation of a communication framework for building relationships between CH9s and CSOs towards mutual empowerment.

**The following theoretical statements were formulated in Chapter 5:**

- **Theoretical statement 26: A synergistic relationship towards societal empowerment**

The rationale for the CH9-CSO communication framework is to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs through their interconnectedness that enables them to jointly fulfil their shared mandate of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback and reflection on the transformation of society (5.3.1).

- **Theoretical statement 27: Critical dialogue**

Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in free speech and open debate, where ideas are exchanged and criticised to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, authentic, understandable, and appropriate for the context (5.4.1).

- **Theoretical Statement 28: Transparency**

CH9s and CSOs must provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to sustain the relationship and fulfil their mandate. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are accessible and understandable to both parties to encourage critical dialogue (5.5.1).

- **Theoretical statement 29: Collaboration**

CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills and by dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal towards mutual benefit (5.5.2).

- **Theoretical statement 30: Affirmed mutuality**

CH9s and CSOs must affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing each other's concerns timeously, finding constructive and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and recognition of the other,

and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken into consideration (5.5.3).

- **Theoretical statement 31: Empowered participation**

CH9s and CSOs should actively participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts (5.5.4).

- **Theoretical statement 32: Organisational culture**

CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate organisational culture in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of their mandate (5.5.5).

- **Theoretical statement 33: Solidarity**

Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, both parties honouring their commitments, trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their mandate (5.6.1).

- **Theoretical Statement 34: Mutual understanding**

Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals and how that contributes to them fulfilling their mandate (5.6.2).

- **Theoretical Statement 35: Mutual empowerment**

CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, and resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large (5.6.3).

- **Theoretical Statement 40: Transformative change**

Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies a commitment across different parts of the organisations to integrate new thinking

on the issues affecting society. Transformative change includes being open to structural changes in the organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling their mandate (5.6.4).

In Chapter 5, theoretical statements from Chapters 3 and 4 were integrated into new ones. Based on these theoretical definitions, the following concepts and constructs were identified to answer this first research question:

**Table 8.1: Constructs of the CH9-CSO communication framework**

| Theoretical statements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Concepts                  | Constructs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 26: Synergistic relationships</b></p> <p>The rationale for the CH9-CSO communication framework is to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs through their interconnectedness that enables them to jointly fulfil their shared mandate of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback and reflection on the transformation of society (5.3.1).</p> | Synergistic relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared goals</li> <li>• Empowering and transformation</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 27: Critical dialogue</b></p> <p>Communication between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in free speech and open debate, where ideas are exchanged and criticised to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing</p>                                                                                                             | Critical dialogue         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal partners</li> <li>• Free speech</li> <li>• Open debate</li> <li>• Constructive criticism</li> <li>• Critical consciousness</li> <li>• Mutual learning and change</li> <li>• Truthful</li> <li>• Context appropriateness and respectful engagement</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, authentic, understandable, and appropriate for the context (5.4.1).                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Theoretical statement 28: Transparency</b><br><br>CH9s and CSOs must provide each other with full access to information, being open and disclosing whatever information is needed to sustain the relationship and fulfil their mandate. Specific platforms and communication channels should be created that are accessible and understandable to both parties to encourage critical dialogue (5.5.1) | Transparency       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Specific platforms and communication channels</li> </ul>                                                     |
| <b>Theoretical statement 29: Collaboration</b><br><br>CH9s and CSOs should collaborate by sharing networks, resources, knowledge, and skills and by dividing tasks and responsibilities they deem to be more suited for their strengths and resources at their disposal towards mutual benefit (5.5.2).                                                                                                  | Collaboration      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of networks, resources, knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Sharing tasks and responsibilities</li> </ul>                                                     |
| <b>Theoretical statement 30: Affirmed mutuality</b><br><br>CH9s and CSOs must affirm and strengthen their mutuality by being available to each other, addressing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Affirmed mutuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Timeously addressing concerns</li> <li>• Constructive and positive feedback</li> <li>• Care and recognition</li> <li>• Win-win</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                         |                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| each other's concerns timeously, finding constructive and positive ways of discussing matters, showing care and recognition of the other, and having a win-win approach to conflict where both parties' needs and constraints are taken into consideration (5.5.3).                              |                         |                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Theoretical statement 31: Empowered participation</b><br><br>CH9s and CSOs should actively participate as equal partners in all aspects of the communication and collaboration process, including decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative efforts (5.5.4). | Empowered participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation</li> <li>• Equal partnership in decision making</li> <li>• Equal participation in planning</li> </ul> |
| <b>Theoretical statement 32: Organisational culture</b><br><br>CH9s and CSOs should acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate different organisational cultures in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of their mandate (5.5.5).                                             | Organisational culture  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Understand</li> <li>• Embrace</li> <li>• Incorporate</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>Theoretical statement 33: Solidarity</b><br><br>Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, both parties honouring their commitments, trusting that the other party will reciprocate because both                                                                 | Solidarity              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reciprocating and honouring commitments</li> <li>• Mutual benefit</li> <li>• Mutual support</li> </ul>                     |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| parties benefit from the relationship in terms of fulfilling their mandate (5.6.1).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 34: Mutual understanding</b></p> <p>Mutual understanding refers to both CH9s and CSOs understanding each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, and how that contributes to them fulfilling their mandate (5.6.2).</p>                                                                                 | Mutual understanding  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding worldviews, realities, and goals</li> <li>• Understanding issues and needs</li> <li>• Understanding expectations and limitations</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 35: Mutual Empowerment</b></p> <p>CH9s and CSOs should both experience gaining collective agency, shared power and control, as well as the ability to access knowledge, skills, and resources, utilise opportunities, collaborate, and influence decisions to bring about meaningful change in their relationship and society at large (5.6.3).</p> | Mutual Empowerment    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal power in relationship.</li> <li>• Improved ability to fulfil mandate</li> </ul>                                                                     |
| <p><b>Theoretical statement 36: Transformative change</b></p> <p>Within the relationships between CH9s and CSOs, transformative change implies a commitment across different parts of the organisations to integrate new thinking on the issues affecting society. Transformative change includes being open to</p>                                                             | Transformative change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate new thinking</li> <li>• Open to change</li> </ul>                                                                                               |

|                                                                                                                     |  |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| structural changes in the organisations, should this be necessary for effectively fulfilling their mandate (5.6.4). |  |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|

These concepts and constructs were utilised to conceptualise a conceptual communication framework, which was then presented to CH9's communication managers and CSO directors.

### **8.3 How the theoretical statements informed the communication framework**

The concepts and constructs have been identified in the table above.

The framework emphasises the importance of a synergistic relationship, which is defined as a partnership where the combined efforts of CH9s and CSOs lead to a partnership where the combined efforts of CH9s and CSOs yield outcomes greater than if they worked independently. This interconnectedness requires a comprehensive understanding of communication that transcends a single discipline. Secondly, there are diverse communication philosophies. The framework incorporates various communication philosophies, such as critical dialogue from development communication and two-way symmetrical communication from corporate communication. This integration allows for a more nuanced approach to dialogue, which is crucial for addressing complex social issues. Third is empowerment and participation: The framework aims to empower both CH9s and CSOs by ensuring that they participate as equal partners in decision-making processes. This requires a blend of communication strategies that facilitate open dialogue, mutual respect, and shared understanding, which cannot be fully achieved through a single disciplinary lens. Finally, the framework seeks transformative change, which necessitates a commitment to integrating new thinking and practices from various communication disciplines. This approach allows for ongoing reflection and adaptation, essential for addressing the root causes of societal issues.

Certain constructs were retained from each communication discipline in the communication framework based on their relevance and potential to facilitate mutual empowerment between CH9s and CSOs. The following constructs were specifically retained:

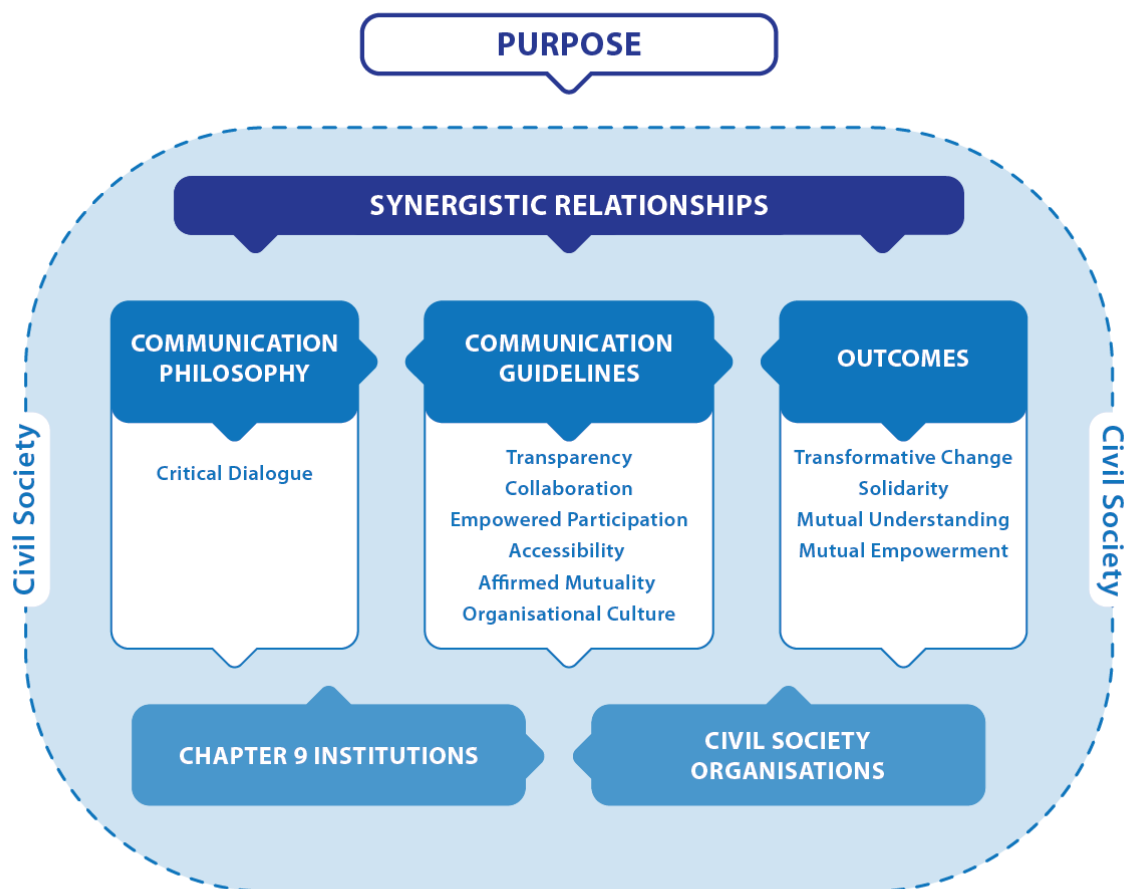
1. **Purpose:** The overarching purpose of the framework is to establish a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs aimed at societal empowerment. This purpose integrates the goals of both corporate communication and development communication.
2. **Communication philosophy:** The framework emphasises critical dialogue as the guiding communication philosophy. This construct was chosen because it fosters an environment of open exchange, mutual respect, and collaborative understanding, which are essential for achieving the framework's goals.
3. **Communication guidelines:** Several guidelines were retained to enhance communication effectiveness within the overall philosophy of critical dialogue:
  - **Transparency:** Ensures that both parties are open about their intentions and actions, fostering trust. This can be achieved if all parties have access to information in an environment that is open and enables disclosure.
  - **Collaboration:** Encourages joint efforts and shared responsibilities, which are vital for achieving mutual goals. Collaboration must include sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills as well as dividing tasks and responsibilities.
  - **Affirmed mutuality:** This construct emphasises the importance of recognising and nurturing the relationship between CH9s and CSOs. This means that all parties must be available timeously to address concerns and provide constructive and positive feedback in an atmosphere of care and recognition while fostering a win-win situation.
  - **Empowered participation:** Ensures that both parties actively participate and engage as equal partners in decision-making processes.
  - **Organisational culture:** Acknowledge, respect, understand, embrace, and incorporate different organisational cultures in the initiatives towards the fulfilment of CH9-CSO mandates.
4. **Outcomes:** The framework identifies specific outcomes that it is intended to facilitate by following the proposed communication philosophy and applying the identified guidelines:
  - **Solidarity:** Reflects the mutual support and commitment between CH9s and CSOs, who reciprocate each other's effort for mutual benefit.

- **Mutual understanding:** Ensures that both parties comprehend each other's worldviews and understand realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, which are crucial for effective collaboration.
- **Mutual empowerment:** Highlights the shared power dynamics in the relationship, allowing both parties to improve their ability to fulfil their mandates effectively.
- **Transformative change:** Focusses on the need for ongoing adaptation and structural changes to address societal issues, integrate new thinking, and be open to change.

These constructs were retained over others because they collectively support the framework's aim of fostering a collaborative, empowering relationship that can effectively address the needs of marginalised groups in society. The integration of these constructs from both corporate and development communication ensures a comprehensive approach to communication that is both strategic and participatory. It is important to note that mutual empowerment has been moved from an outcome to the aim in the final framework based on the inputs of the participants, as opposed to the previous conceptual framework based on the literature and theory.

The framework was conceptualised after extensive review of the literature, which informed this study. However, the conceptual framework was subjected to evaluation and scrutiny by the CH9's and CSO's participants so that it could be adapted to their context based on their views. The next section will discuss the perspectives of communication managers from CH9s in line with the proposed communication framework.

The following figure illustrates the communication framework that was presented to the participants.



**Figure 8.1: Proposed communication framework presented to participants**

#### **8.4 Communication managers in CH9s perspectives regarding the proposed communication framework**

The second specific research question was: *What are the perceptions of communication managers in CH9s regarding the proposed communication framework?*

This question was answered through semi-structured interviews conducted with the CH9, which included three senior communications managers, three communications managers and three senior communications officers from the identified CH9s. Below are the perceptions of CH9 participants regarding the proposed framework:

#### **8.4.1 Purpose: Synergistic relationships**

The primary concept emphasised by CH9 communication managers is the importance of creating synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs. This involves a joint mandate where both parties work together to empower marginalised groups and transform society. Participants highlighted the value of these relationships as a “win-win situation” (see 7.2.1). The current absence of such relationships was also noted, indicating a need for improvement in collaboration. Having a joint mandate is a crucial attribute for achieving the purpose of synergistic relationships. The construct of shared goals was understood by one participant as having like-minded ideas (see 7.2.1.1). Regarding the notion of continuous reflection, participants did not explicitly state it by name. However, they did allude to the importance of looking at successes and failures on an ongoing basis. Continuous reflection is also inherent in dialogue platforms where there is open communication and all differences in opinions and ideas are openly discussed (see 7.2.1.2).

#### **8.4.2 Communication philosophy: Critical dialogue**

Another key concept is the communication philosophy of critical dialogue, which entails engaging as equal partners in open debate and constructive criticism. This approach is aimed at enhancing mutual learning and change. Overall, the CH9s expressed strong support for critical dialogue as a guiding communication philosophy for strengthening relationships with CSOs. They viewed it as essential for fostering mutual understanding, accountability, and empowerment, while also serving as a practical tool for improving cooperation and achieving shared goals (see 7.2.2). CH9 participants believed that dialogue should take place on the basis of equality, where all parties participate as genuine partners with equal voice, responsibility, and respect.

They endorsed free speech, open debate, and constructive criticism as important elements of this dialogue, recognising that open and honest exchange leads to learning, improvement, and stronger partnerships. However, openness also came out strongly as one of the principles which must be accompanied by respect, integrity, and balance, ensuring that discussions remain productive and aligned with organisational values (see 7.2.2.1, 7.2.2.2, 7.2.2.2.1, and 7.2.2.2.2).

The CH9s supported the inclusion of critical consciousness as part of the framework, seeing it as necessary for maintaining awareness of power imbalances and ensuring that smaller or less-resourced organisations are not overshadowed. They saw change as both an outcome and a process of dialogue – a visible shift in communication practices, relationships, and societal transformation resulting from continuous engagement (see 7.2.2.3).

While participants affirmed the value of critical dialogue, they also recognised certain practical challenges. True equality was seen as difficult to achieve given CH9s' constitutional mandates, and some expressed concern that unmoderated free speech could create conflict or harm institutional reputation. Despite these reservations, there was consensus that respectful engagement, transparency, and access to information are vital to making critical dialogue effective.

Altogether, these results support critical dialogue as a constructive, respectful, and transformative process that enables learning, reflection, and social change. It is key to building more collaborative, transparent, and empowering relationships with CSOs, provided it is grounded in mutual respect and practical structures that promote equality and accountability.

#### **8.4.2.1 Equal partners**

The construct of equal partnership is vital for the success of critical dialogue. Participants stressed the importance of engaging as equals. This equality is seen as essential for fostering genuine dialogue and collaboration. CH9s broadly supported the principle of engaging with CSOs as equal partners in all communication and collaborative efforts. They saw equality in partnership as fundamental to establishing trust, mutual respect, and genuine cooperation. Equal partnership was understood as giving both parties an equal voice in dialogue, decision making, and the development of initiatives, ensuring that neither dominates the other (see 7.2.3.1.1).

Participants acknowledged that in practice, relationships between CH9s and CSOs have often been uneven, with CH9s sometimes perceived as holding greater authority due to their constitutional status. This imbalance was recognised as a barrier to authentic dialogue and joint action. The CH9s, therefore, viewed the proposed framework as a

valuable tool for helping to level the playing field and promote fairer engagement. They also noted that equal partnership enhances the quality of discussions, leading to more inclusive and informed outcomes that reflect diverse perspectives and experiences.

At the same time, some CH9s recognised the practical challenges of achieving full equality, given their formal mandates and accountability structures. Nonetheless, they emphasised that treating CSOs as respected and capable collaborators would improve cooperation, foster creativity, and strengthen the impact of their joint efforts.

Therefore, equal partnership is a core condition for critical dialogue and mutual empowerment. It has the potential to transform relationships from hierarchical to collaborative, allowing both CH9s and CSOs to contribute meaningfully toward shared goals of social justice, inclusion, and community empowerment.

#### **8.4.2.2 Free speech and open debate**

Free speech was recognised as a critical component of the communication framework, although some participants noted the challenges of balancing free speech with respect for organisational values (see 7.2.2.2). The importance of open debate was also highlighted, with participants acknowledging that it can lead to productive conversations and meaningful engagement. They expressed strong support for free speech and open debate as central elements of constructive engagement with CSOs. They recognised that genuine dialogue depends on the ability of all parties to express their views freely, share differing perspectives, and question one another openly. Such openness was seen as essential for promoting accountability, mutual understanding, and innovation in addressing social challenges.

However, CH9s also emphasised that free speech and open debate should occur within an atmosphere of respect, integrity, and balance. They acknowledged that unmoderated discussions could sometimes lead to conflict, misunderstandings, or communication that undermines organisational values. Therefore, while affirming the importance of open dialogue, they advocated for clear norms of respectful communication to ensure that debate remains constructive and focussed on collective improvement rather than criticism or division.

Participants viewed open debate as a positive and productive process that encourages honest exchange, collaborative problem solving, and stronger partnerships. It was seen not as a sign of disagreement or instability but as an opportunity to refine ideas, reconcile differences, and arrive at more sustainable solutions.

Based on CH9 input, free speech and open debate are thus vital to the practice of critical dialogue, provided they are guided by mutual respect and shared purpose. Maintaining this balance can foster transparency, strengthen trust between CH9s and CSOs, and create an environment where diverse voices contribute meaningfully to transformation and social empowerment.

### **8.4.3 Communication guidelines**

CH9 representatives shared their views on the proposed communication guidelines.

#### **8.4.3.1 Transparency**

Transparency emerged as a significant construct, with participants advocating for full access to information and open communication channels (see 7.2.3.1). This transparency is seen as essential for building trust and accountability between organisations. The CH9s viewed transparency as a cornerstone of effective communication and trust-building with CSOs. They believed that open, honest, and accessible information sharing is essential for sustaining collaboration and ensuring accountability on both sides. Transparency was understood not only as disclosure of information but also as creating accessible platforms and communication channels through which both CH9s and CSOs can engage freely and stay informed about each other's activities.

Participants highlighted that a lack of transparency in the past, such as limited access to information, or unclear communication structures had contributed to misunderstandings and weak partnerships. They therefore emphasised the need for deliberate efforts to strengthen transparency through open dialogue, regular updates, and information exchange. Accessibility, openness, and availability were seen as practical expressions of transparency that help build confidence and foster inclusion.

Transparency is thus a practical and ethical commitment to openness, accountability, and inclusivity, which are essential for creating an environment where information flows freely,

collaboration is strengthened, and both CH9s and CSOs can operate from a shared understanding of their goals and responsibilities.

#### **8.4.3.2 Collaboration**

Collaboration was frequently mentioned as a core component of the framework, with participants expressing a desire for increased collaboration to achieve mutual benefits (see 7.2.3.2). This concept emphasises the need for sharing resources, knowledge, and dividing tasks and responsibilities as constructs of collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of both CH9s and CSOs. CH9s strongly endorsed collaboration as a guiding principle for building meaningful partnerships with CSOs. They viewed collaboration as the process through which both parties can share resources, knowledge, and skills to achieve common objectives that align with their respective strengths and mandates. Collaboration was seen as vital for avoiding duplication of efforts, maximising impact, and ensuring that both institutions contribute their unique capacities to shared social goals.

Participants acknowledged that current collaboration between CH9s and CSOs is often limited or fragmented, with missed opportunities for joint planning and execution. They believed that more structured and consistent collaboration would lead to stronger advocacy, better public outreach, and improved service delivery. Collaboration was also associated with shared responsibility and mutual benefit, creating space for joint problem solving and innovation.

Therefore, collaboration is a transformative and synergistic process that deepens partnerships, enhances efficiency, and amplifies social impact. It is not only a working arrangement but a long-term commitment to shared progress, grounded in communication, trust, and a collective vision for empowering communities and promoting social justice.

#### **8.4.3.3 Empowered participation**

Participants from both CH9s and CSOs stressed the importance of empowered participation because it transcends a box-ticking exercise, which has zero to little meaningful participation. They deemed active involvement a higher level of participation.

This means that it adds more depth to basic understandings of participation, which could also mean just being invited while making little significant contributions (7.2.2.3).

In addition, most respondents spoke to the constructs of the operational definition of empowered participation. They maintained that all constructs with empowered participations are important because they add value to the relationship between CH9s and CSOs.

#### **8.4.3.4 Affirmed mutuality**

Participants only commented on the importance of availability as a sub-construct of affirmed mutuality, where they argued that they need to be available for each other as organisations. This shows the dual nature of the availability that the participants expect. They cited that they would appreciate CSOs who avail themselves when they have programmes, revealing not only that some CSOs do avail themselves, but also that such availability is of significance to their programmatic efforts. However, participants did not comment directly on other sub-constructs such as timeously addressing concerns, constructive and positive feedback, care, and recognition, but they will be retained in the refined framework because the existing literature backs their importance. Other constructs, such as mutual accessibility, constructive feedback, cooperative relationships, and cooperation (see 7.2.1.1.1 and 7.2.2.2.2), also reinforce affirmed mutuality.

#### **8.4.3.5 Organisational culture**

Partnerships are enhanced by cultural diversity in organisational culture because it brings together a variety of viewpoints, values, and methods of operation that can result in more creative, inclusive, and contextually appropriate solutions. Not only is it polite, but it is also strategically important for CH9s and CSOs looking to collaborate to acknowledge and embrace organisational cultural differences because it prevents miscommunication. Cultural differences can cause misunderstandings, exclusion, or unintentional domination by one partner's norms if they are ignored. Most participants from CH9s agreed on the importance of cultural diversity (see 7.2.3.6).

However, no participants mentioned the importance of having an organisational culture of diversity in the framework. In cases where participants hinted at having an organisational culture of diversity, they did so through reference to understanding of roles, joint mandates or interests, or understanding what the other does, but not really focussing on understanding organisational culture as defined in this study. Organisational culture was framed in 3.6 as having an ubuntu stance. However, none of this came up in the interviews. In section 4.7.3, cultural diversity was assumed to be rooted in identity issues that were also deemed to have core importance in communication between organisations. However, there was no real uptake of this concept from participants. Against this backdrop, organisational culture will not be retained in the final communication framework.

The next section will discuss the outcomes of the framework.

#### **8.4.3.6 Solidarity**

Overall, participants from CH9s stressed the importance of solidarity. Mutual support emerges as a natural outcome when communication enables each organisation to feel heard, respected, and valued. However, more emphasis was placed on mutual support as an important aspect of solidarity by CH9 participants. Participants demonstrated the importance of mutual support as an outcome of their prior collaboration (see 7.2.4.1).

Although the participants did not all give their input on all the constructs of solidarity, it can be concluded that it is an overarching concept that will assist both CH9s and CSOs in a cooperative relationship where shared goals are aligned. Issues of solidarity were covered under joint mandate (see 7.2.1.1), cooperative relationships (see 7.2.1.1.1), collaboration (see 7.2.3.2), sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills (see 7.2.3.2.1) and sharing tasks and responsibilities (see 7.2.3.2.2).

#### **8.4.3.7 Mutual understanding**

Most participants from CH9s emphasised that achieving mutual understanding is a key outcome of applying the communication framework.

Indeed, when CH9s and CSOs engage in regular, respectful, and transparent dialogue, they gain deeper insights into one another's objectives, values, constraints, and

operational approaches. This understanding reduces miscommunication, dispels assumptions, clarifies expectations, and ultimately facilitates more equitable and productive collaboration (see 7.2.2.4.2).

This highlights the importance of implementing a communication framework to achieve mutual understanding. CH9-CSO relationships can quickly break down in the absence of mutual understanding because of misplaced expectations, misunderstandings, or inadvertent disrespect. CH9s and CSOs develop the empathy and mutual understanding necessary to negotiate differences, settle disputes amicably, and jointly develop solutions that are both realistic and considerate when they take the time to get to know one another. Thus, mutual understanding is a key outcome. CH9s were on board with mutual understanding as a key priority and outcome of the communication framework (see 7.2.2.4.2).

#### **8.4.3.8 Mutual empowerment**

In this study, most participants from CH9s were eager to see mutual empowerment emerge after applying all the aforementioned concepts and constructs. Mutual empowerment can be understood as a dynamic and reciprocal process through which CH9s and CSOs share equal power, engage collaboratively in decision making, and enhance each other's capacity to fulfil their respective and joint mandates. CH9's participants in the study consistently highlighted that mutual empowerment is achieved when power relations are neutralised, enabling both entities to act as equal partners who benefit equitably from collaboration. Participants' perspectives indicated that mutual empowerment should not merely be an outcome of collaboration but a continuous process that sustains equitable relationships between CH9s and CSOs. They highlighted mutual empowerment as the driving force of the framework. For this reason, mutual empowerment has evolved from an outcome within the framework to the framework's main aim.

This change reflects the participants' consensus that empowerment should be shared and reciprocal, neutralising power imbalances and fostering a partnership built on equality, inclusivity, and shared accountability. Positioning mutual empowerment as an ongoing aim reinforces its centrality to sustainable collaboration, ensuring that both CH9s

and CSOs are continually strengthened in their ability to achieve their shared goal (see 7.2.4.3 and 7.2.4.4).

#### **8.4.3.9 Transformative change**

Overall, participants affirmed the importance of transformative change, defining it as a collaborative process that requires CH9s to integrate new approaches to societal challenges and remain open to organisational change to achieve their shared goals.

Although detailed data on transformative change were limited, participants consistently linked its successful realisation to three key elements: collaboration (see 7.2.3.2), critical dialogue (see 7.2.2.9), and willingness to change (see 7.2.2.5). Participants described transformative change as a process grounded in ongoing, open dialogue and joint action, emphasising that a strong, engaged civil society is essential for driving meaningful change in collaboration with CH9s.

Participants from CH9s highlighted that for change to be truly transformative, it must be visible and tangible. For example, Participant D from CH9D stressed that change should be obvious and meaningful to all stakeholders, while Participant H from CH9B pointed out the crucial role of CSOs in effecting grassroots change – such as prompting government action to formalise informal settlements and restore dignity to communities.

From an implementation perspective, the feasibility of transformative change was tied to effective change management. Participant 5 from CH9 noted that the success of communication frameworks depends on how well change is managed and communicated, requiring training, buy-in, and clear strategies. This was echoed by Participant 8 from CH9, who emphasised that transparency and visible, meaningful outcomes are essential for collaborative efforts to be considered truly transformative.

In summary, participants agreed that transformative change between CH9s and CSOs is achieved through a collaborative, dialogical process that results in visible, impactful outcomes enabled by strong civil society engagement and effective change management.

These insights reveal the importance that CH9 communication managers place on synergistic relationships, critical dialogue, and collaborative efforts in achieving shared

goals through the proposed framework. Overall, CH9 communication managers perceived the framework as both practical and desirable. They viewed its constructs as integral to structuring communication that fosters mutual benefit, even as they acknowledged constitutional asymmetries. Their responses underscore a willingness to embrace the framework's ideals of transformation and empowerment, provided that its implementation respects institutional realities.

As important as the CH9s participants' input was, they represented only one half of the stakeholders in the framework. To create a workable framework, it was crucial to also include CSO perspectives. The next section will discuss how the third research question was answered.

## **8.5 CSO director's perspectives regarding the proposed communication framework**

The third specific question for this study was: *What are the perspectives of CSO directors regarding the proposed communication framework?*

This question was answered through semi-structured interviews conducted with the nine directors of the identified CSOs that shared the same goals as the CH9s selected for this study. Below are the perceptions of CSO directors regarding the proposed framework.

### **8.5.1 Purpose: Synergistic relationships**

CSO directors emphasised the importance of creating synergistic relationships with CH9s, where both parties can achieve more collectively than independently (see 7.2.1). This highlights the mutual intention to collaborate effectively for the empowerment of marginalised groups. The participants indicated that synergistic relationships should be based on assessment of interconnectedness to identify joint mandates with other CSOs and the CH9s and based on the principles of respect, openness, and balance. They argued that each organisation should be allowed to retain their mandates but also be willing to work on joint programmes for better outcomes. The synergistic relationship reflects the win-win situation between the organisations and can also contribute to the empowerment of those who may not have the skills and resources to perform some tasks while providing access to their constituencies which may not be accessible to the other.

### **8.5.2 Communication philosophy: Critical dialogue**

The communication philosophy of critical dialogue was recognised as essential for fostering open and honest communication between CSOs and CH9s. Participants expressed that this dialogue should be characterised by equal partnership, free speech, and constructive criticism (see 7.2.2.1-7.2.2.9). CSOs endorsed critical dialogue as the most important communication philosophy for fostering genuine, transformative relationships with CH9s. They believed that such dialogue must be characterised by honesty, equality, and mutual learning, allowing both sides to exchange ideas freely and reflect critically on shared challenges. CSOs saw critical dialogue as a means of breaking hierarchical patterns and creating spaces for joint reflection, empowerment, and change.

Instead of being top-down or event-based, they preferred two-way, participatory, and ongoing dialogue. In addition to enhancing communication, critical discourse helps CSOs develop critical consciousness – the understanding of power relationships, social injustices, and institutional blind spots that frequently obstruct cooperation. They believed that in order to guarantee that marginalised voices are acknowledged and heard, this awareness is crucial.

CSOs also linked critical dialogue to mutual learning. They felt that CH9s could learn a lot from CSOs' grassroots experiences, and CSOs could learn a lot from CH9s' institutional and policy knowledge. They believed that learning was mutually beneficial, resulting in more intelligent tactics and more solid collaborations.

Thus, critical discourse can be a transformative engagement process that encourages respect for one another, introspection, and social change. Through the institutionalisation of critical discourse, CH9s and CSOs can transcend superficial collaboration to a true partnership based on equality, comprehension, and mutual empowerment.

### **8.5.3 Shared goals**

The construct of shared goals was frequently mentioned, where both CH9s and CSOs align their objectives to achieve common goals. This construct is crucial for fostering collaboration, solidarity (see 7.2.4.1), and ensuring that both parties feel equally invested in the relationship. CSOs supported the idea of developing shared goals with CH9s as

the foundation for sustainable collaboration and mutual empowerment. They viewed shared interests as a practical way to align efforts without expecting identical mandates. For CSOs, 'shared interest' captured the flexibility and responsiveness required in their work, allowing both sides to come together around common social goals such as human rights, equity, and community empowerment.

Numerous CSOs emphasised that prior engagement with CH9s was hampered by ambiguous or disjointed priorities, resulting in fragmented or uneven cooperation. As a result, they emphasised the significance of precisely defining and regularly reviewing shared interests through candid dialogue and introspection. They believed that despite their different institutional structures and mandates, this procedure would help both parties stay in sync.

Additionally, CSOs encouraged CH9s to stay flexible and sensitive to changing societal demands because they understood that their interests change in response to new community issues. They viewed 'shared goals' as a chance for both organisations to co-own social change projects while honouring their distinct roles and working toward a common goal (see 7.2.1.1).

In this sense, shared interest serves as a vibrant and inclusive basis for collaboration that overcomes institutional barriers, promotes collaboration, and aids in group transformation. It is a more practical and adaptable strategy than the idea of a 'joint mandate', enabling CH9s and CSOs to work well together within their respective spheres of influence.

#### **8.5.3.1 Equal partners**

The construct of equal partnership is vital for the success of critical dialogue (see 7.2.2.1). CSO directors stressed the importance of engaging as equals. They believed that equality is necessary to promote sincere communication and cooperation. They continuously emphasised the significance of interacting with CH9s as equal partners, viewing equality as essential to establishing sincere cooperation and trust. They voiced their displeasure with earlier exchanges in which CH9s were viewed as instructive or dominant, treating CSOs more like passive recipients than co-creators in the

collaboration. For CSOs, equality in dialogue meant having equal opportunities to lead initiatives and contribute ideas, as well as being respected and heard.

They clarified that equitable responsibilities during collaborative projects, balanced participation in meetings, and shared decision making are all indicators of true equality. They discovered that conversations yielded deeper insights and stronger results when they were given equal airtime and participation. Additionally, CSOs emphasised that receiving equal treatment validates their work and expertise, which raises morale and promotes sustained cooperation.

At the same time, they acknowledged that equality is difficult due to structural injustices like disparities in visibility, power, or resources. Because of this, CSOs viewed the proposed communication framework as a useful instrument for establishing equity in engagement procedures and levelling the playing field.

For genuine collaboration and long-lasting relationships, equal partnership is a requirement. In addition to improving communication, acknowledging CSO agency and expertise can guarantee that the results of collaborative projects accurately represent the needs and voices of the populations they both serve. To this end, the critical dialogical process is characterised by the participation of partners who treat each other as equals to achieve shared goals.

#### **8.5.4 Communication guidelines**

CSO representatives provided the following input on proposed communication guidelines:

##### **8.5.4.1 Transparency**

Transparency emerged as a significant construct, with participants advocating for full access to information and open communication channels (see 7.2.4.4.1). Building trust and accountability among organisations is thought to depend on this transparency. Transparency was strongly endorsed by CSOs as a prerequisite for developing trust and a true partnership with CH9s. They believed that open communication was essential to accountability, transparency, and credibility – not just between the two sides but also in their larger interactions with the public. For CSOs, transparency meant more than just

exchanging information because it necessitated constant data access, frequent communication, and open disclosure of programmes, objectives, and difficulties.

Many CSOs voiced dissatisfaction over past encounters with restricted information access and a perceived lack of transparency from CH9s, which they felt impeded cooperation and understanding. To facilitate continuous discussion and reduce misunderstandings, they advocated for the creation of uniform information-sharing mechanisms, such as dedicated platforms and organised communication channels. They contended that accessibility and language clarity are essential components of transparency, guaranteeing that information is clear and pertinent to all parties involved, particularly at the local level.

Additionally, CSOs emphasised that transparency increases mutual accountability and public trust, allowing both parties to respond more effectively to community needs. They appreciated the concept of establishing areas where information could move both ways, enabling CSOs to exchange institutional updates with CH9s and share grassroots insights.

Transparency is a practical and ethical imperative that promotes honesty, openness, and equity in partnerships. Genuine transparency can close the communication gap, enhance cooperation, and ensure that both CH9s and CSOs work from a shared understanding of purpose and responsibility. Transparency encourages honesty, openness, and equity in partnerships and is a practical and moral requirement. Sincere openness can improve collaboration, bridge the communication gap, and guarantee that CH9s and CSOs operate from a common sense of accountability and purpose.

#### **8.5.4.2 Collaboration**

Collaboration was frequently mentioned as a key aspect of the framework, with participants expressing a desire for increased collaboration to achieve mutual benefits (see 7.2.3.2). In order to improve the efficacy of both CH9s and CSOs, this construct highlights the necessity of sharing resources, expertise, and responsibilities. Collaboration was seen by CSOs as essential to a successful partnership with CH9s and a means of accomplishing significant social change. They held that genuine collaboration should entail cooperative planning, shared decision making, and fair role and

responsibility distribution in addition to symbolic involvement. Collaboration meant that rather than one side controlling the process, CSOs and CH9s work side by side while acknowledging each other's strengths and areas of expertise.

CSOs voiced concerns about the uneven or superficial nature of current collaboration with CH9s, as well as the lack of opportunities for shared initiative ownership or innovation. They demanded more inclusive and participatory methods in which CH9s recognise the importance of grassroots viewpoints and the real-world experiences that CSOs contribute to the collaboration. They contended that cooperation should allow for mutual creativity and problem solving so that both sides can co-design interventions that are more sensitive to the needs of the community.

Additionally, they emphasised that cooperation necessitates transparency, confidence, and constant participation. While CH9s could gain from CSOs' close ties to communities, many pointed out that effective collaboration would allow them to access institutional support and resources. It was believed that this mutually beneficial relationship was essential to bringing about long-term social change and guaranteeing that cooperative results have real effects.

Based on equality, respect, and a common goal, collaboration is a transformative partnership. Both CH9s and CSOs can increase their combined efficacy and develop long-term solutions to the problems they jointly address by combining resources, expertise, and networks.

#### **8.5.4.3 Empowered participation**

Participants from CSOs stressed the importance of empowered participation because it transcends a box-ticking exercise, which has zero to little meaningful participation. They deemed active involvement a higher level of participation. This means that it adds more depth to basic understandings of participation, which could also mean just being invited while making little significant contributions (see 7.2.2.3).

Furthermore, most participants addressed the operational definition of empowered participation. They insisted that since they improved the relationship between CH9s and

CSOs, all constructs, i.e., active participation and equal partnership with empowered participation, are significant.

#### **8.5.4.4 Affirmed mutuality**

Participants only commented on the importance of availability as a sub-construct of affirmed mutuality, where they argued that they need to be available for each other as organisations. This shows the dual nature of the availability that the participants expect. They stated that they would value CH9s who participate in their programmes. This indicates that not only do some CH9s participate in their programmes, but their programmatic efforts are significantly impacted by their availability. However, because the literature supports their significance, the other sub-constructs that the participants did not comment on – such as promptly addressing concerns, constructive and positive feedback, and care and recognition – will remain in the refined framework. Other concepts include cooperation, cooperative relationships, constructive criticism, and mutual accessibility (see 7.2.1.1.1 and 7.2.2.2.2), which also reinforce affirmed mutuality.

#### **8.5.4.5 Organisational culture**

Cultural diversity in organisational culture strengthens partnerships by bringing together a range of perspectives, values, and operational styles that can produce more innovative, inclusive, and contextually appropriate solutions. For CH9s and CSOs wishing to work together, acknowledging and embracing organisational cultural differences is not only courteous but also strategically significant because it avoids misunderstandings. Ignoring cultural differences can lead to miscommunication, exclusion, or unintentional dominance by one partner's norms. Cultural diversity is important, according to the majority of CSO participants (see 7.2.3.6)

However, none of the other participants brought up the significance of the framework's organisational culture of diversity. Participants did not really focus on understanding organisational culture as defined in this study when they alluded to having a diverse organisational culture. Instead, they did so by referring to roles, shared mandates and interests, or understanding what each other does. In 3.6, organisational culture was presented as having an ubuntu stance, but none of this was discussed during the interviews. In section 4.7.3, cultural diversity was thought to stem from identity concerns,

which were also thought to be crucial for interorganisational communication. Nevertheless, participants did not actually adopt this idea. In light of this, the final communication framework will not include organisational culture specifically.

## **8.6 Perceptions of CSOs regarding relationship outcomes**

The outcomes of the framework, solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change based on the perceptions of the CSO participants will be discussed below.

### **8.6.1 Solidarity**

CSO participants interpreted solidarity in a more relational sense, emphasising structured mutual support, cooperation, and joint advocacy. They saw solidarity as evidence of partnership maturity where organisations work in concert, respect each other's mandates, and align their advocacy goals. Across both groups, solidarity was thus regarded as the cornerstone of sustained collaboration and as the relational glue enabling joint action toward democratic transformation (see 7.2.4.1.1).

### **8.6.2 Mutual understanding**

For CSOs, fostering mutual understanding centres on boosting recognition of each entity's distinct roles, limitations, and mandates. This approach aims to avoid confusion and duplicate work. CSOs regard this as a continuous journey of gaining insight into their partners' environments, helping to promote collaboration that is both effective and considerate.

CSOs, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of CH9s developing a deeper appreciation of the everyday experiences and challenges faced by local communities. From the CSO viewpoint, true mutual understanding is rooted in empathy, a willingness to embrace diverse perspectives, and clear, accessible communication. CSOs recognised that when understanding is lacking, it has often resulted in friction and a lack of alignment, making mutual understanding an essential foundation for building trust and working together successfully (see 7.2.4.2.1).

### **8.6.3 Transformative change**

CSO participants associated transformative change with demonstrable enhancements in social conditions and increased institutional responsiveness. They conceptualised transformation as a process inherently connected to transparency, the provision of feedback, and collaborative efforts, all of which culminate in a tangible positive impact on citizens' lives. CSOs regarded transformation as the definitive measure of the success of partnerships, expecting that effective communication and collaboration would result in observable social improvements rather than mere rhetorical assurances. For CSOs, transformative change entails both structural reforms and the empowerment of communities. From their perspective, transformation serves not only as a final objective but also as a key indicator of fruitful and reciprocal engagement (see 7.2.4.4.1).

### **8.6.4 Mutual empowerment**

Although mutual empowerment was first regarded as a relationship outcome, feedback from participants prompted its recognition as the central aim of the communication framework. Directors of CSOs perceived mutual empowerment as a way to boost institutional effectiveness, highlighting how working with CH9s improves outreach efforts, accountability, and engagement with citizens. For CSOs, empowerment meant balancing the power between the state and civil society to guarantee equal participation and collective decision making. They agreed that empowerment should be a two-way, rather than top-down, process. Shifting mutual empowerment from a mere outcome to an aim demonstrates the CSOs' conviction that empowerment is both the means and the end of communication between CH9s and CSOs (see 7.2.4.3.1).

Having answered the three specific questions, the chapter will show how the CSO and CH9 perspectives come together before moving to how the research questions are linked and turning to the general question in the section below.

## **8.7 Synthesis and discussion of CH9 and CSO perspectives**

The findings from both CH9s and CSOs reveal a shared commitment to building a more collaborative, transparent, and empowering relationship. Across all constructs, there is broad agreement that effective communication and mutual understanding form the

foundation for achieving the joint goal of societal transformation and empowerment. However, subtle differences emerge in how each group interprets and prioritises these constructs, largely shaped by their institutional positions and experiences of partnership.

Both CH9s and CSOs endorsed the concept of shared goals as a practical and flexible basis for collaboration. CH9s recognised that while they operate under constitutional mandates, their interests often converge with those of CSOs around human rights, equality, and social justice. CSOs welcomed the reframing from 'joint mandate' to 'joint interest', viewing it as more realistic and adaptive to changing community needs. Whereas CH9s emphasised the need for shared planning and alignment to achieve their statutory goals, CSOs highlighted the importance of ongoing reflection and adaptability, arguing that interests must be revisited continuously as social priorities evolve. This convergence reflects a move from rigid institutional alignment to a more dynamic partnership model, characterised by co-ownership and mutual responsiveness (see 7.3).

There was a strong consensus that equal partnership is vital for sustainable collaboration, though the two groups expressed this from different standpoints. CH9s acknowledged the need to dismantle perceptions of hierarchy and engage CSOs as equals but noted the practical challenges of doing so within constitutional boundaries. CSOs, on the other hand, were more critical of existing power imbalances and past experiences of being treated as secondary actors. They called for structural changes that ensure equal representation, decision making, and responsibility in joint initiatives. While CH9s viewed equal partnership as a moral and strategic ideal, CSOs saw it as a non-negotiable condition for genuine dialogue and meaningful participation. Both parties agreed, however, that equality would improve trust, ownership, and the quality of joint outcomes.

Both CH9s and CSOs valued free speech and open debate as central to critical dialogue, though their emphasis differed slightly. CH9s appreciated the importance of open expression but cautioned that it should be balanced with organisational values and respect to avoid divisiveness. CSOs, in contrast, viewed open debate as indispensable to accountability and authentic engagement. For them, being able to question, criticise, and challenge ideas freely is not confrontational but constructive – a means to strengthen institutions and improve service to the public. Both groups associated open debate with learning, innovation, and transparency, agreeing that respectful communication protocols

could help maintain balance. Collectively, their views suggest that freedom of expression, guided by respect, enhances the legitimacy and productivity of dialogue.

There was a unanimous endorsement of critical dialogue as the overarching communication philosophy guiding CH9-CSO relations. CH9s saw it as a mechanism for reflection, empowerment, and continuous learning, while CSOs regarded it as a transformative process that flattens hierarchies and nurtures mutual awareness. Both parties agreed that critical dialogue should be grounded in equality, free speech, constructive criticism, and truthfulness. However, CH9s tended to view dialogue as a means to achieve operational alignment and accountability, whereas CSOs placed more emphasis on mutual learning, empowerment, and inclusion of marginalised voices. Despite this difference in focus, both sides recognised that critical dialogue must lead to tangible change – in relationships, communication practices, and ultimately, in social outcomes.

Transparency emerged as another strong area of convergence, though again, with differing emphases. CH9s defined transparency primarily in terms of information sharing, openness, and accessibility, viewing it as a way to strengthen institutional credibility and coordination. They called for structured communication channels and regular reporting to support openness. CSOs also viewed transparency as essential but approached it from the standpoint of trust and accountability, highlighting frustrations with limited access to information in the past. They stressed that transparency must include clear, timely, and understandable communication, ensuring that information reaches all relevant stakeholders, including grassroots communities. Together, these perspectives portray transparency as both a moral commitment and a practical tool for sustaining mutual trust and ensuring inclusive participation.

Both CH9s and CSOs were united in viewing collaboration as the cornerstone of effective engagement. For CH9s, collaboration represented a strategic partnership through which networks, resources, and expertise could be shared for mutual benefit. They saw it as a way to enhance efficiency, prevent duplication, and amplify social impact. CSOs echoed this view but placed greater emphasis on equity and participation, stressing that collaboration should not be tokenistic but involve shared ownership and decision making. They also saw collaboration as a means to connect institutional authority with grassroots

realities, ensuring that initiatives are both informed by and beneficial to communities. Despite differing power dynamics, both groups envisioned collaboration as a transformative process that aligns their respective strengths toward shared social objectives.

Overall, CH9s and CSOs are aligned in principle across all constructs. Both groups supported the framework's focus on critical dialogue, equality, transparency, and collaboration as mechanisms for achieving mutual empowerment. However, CSOs placed stronger emphasis on inclusivity, participation, and accountability, while CH9s focussed more on structure, coordination, and institutional balance. These differences underscore the importance of ongoing reflection, adaptation, and co-learning within the framework to ensure that both sides remain responsive to each other's needs and contexts.

**Table 8.2: Comparative summary table: CH9s and CSOs perspectives**

| <b>Construct / Outcome</b>                | <b>CH9 Perspective</b>                                              | <b>CSO Perspective</b>                                                   | <b>Areas of Convergence / Divergence</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Synergistic relationship (Purpose)</b> | Viewed synergistic relationships as a blended kind of relationship. | Viewed synergistic relationships as a vehicle for social transformation. | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Importance of synergistic relationships in both organisations to achieve a common goal.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9 would like to see more synergistic relationships and CSOs complain about the absence of a lucrative relationship.</p> |
| <b>Shared goals (Purpose)</b>             | Saw shared goals as a practical replacement for joint mandate;      | Viewed shared goals as flexible and adaptive; emphasised                 | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Shared purpose and collaboration.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s prefer structure;</p>                                                                                                                                                      |

|                                                               |                                                                                                           |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                               | focused on alignment of institutional goals and empowerment of citizens.                                  | reflection, evolving priorities, and grassroots responsiveness.                              | CSOs prefer adaptability.                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Equal partners (communication philosophy)</b>              | Acknowledged the value of equality but noted constitutional constraints and differing mandates.           | Demanded genuine equality, citing past imbalances and limited inclusion.                     | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Both value equality.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CSOs call for structural reform; CH9s emphasise practical balance.</p> |
| <b>Free speech and open debate (communication philosophy)</b> | Supported open dialogue but stressed the need for respect and boundaries to protect institutional values. | Viewed open debate as vital for accountability and real engagement, even when uncomfortable. | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Both see it as essential.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s are cautious; CSOs more assertive about open criticism.</p>  |
| <b>Critical dialogue (communication philosophy)</b>           | Regarded as a reflective process promoting accountability and alignment of mandates.                      | Understood as transformative, fostering empowerment, mutual learning, and inclusion.         | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Agreement on its centrality.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s stress structure; CSOs stress empowerment.</p>            |
| <b>Transparency (communication guideline)</b>                 | Defined as openness, access to information, and structured communication channels.                        | Defined as trust, honesty, and accessible, understandable information sharing.               | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Strong agreement on openness and access.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s stress institutional</p>                      |

|                                                    |                                                                                                             |                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                    |                                                                                                             |                                                                                         | systems; CSOs stress accessibility.                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Collaboration<br/>(communication guideline)</b> | Viewed as a strategic partnership based on shared resources, networks, and efficiency.                      | Viewed as equitable participation and shared ownership for meaningful inclusion.        | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Collaboration seen as essential.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s emphasise strategy and efficiency; CSOs emphasise equality and co-ownership.</p>               |
| <b>Solidarity<br/>(outcome)</b>                    | Defined as institutional reliability, mutual trust, and honouring commitments in joint activities.          | Understood as mutual support and standing together in advocacy and accountability work. | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Shared belief in collective commitment.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s frame solidarity institutionally; CSOs view it relationally and community based.</p>    |
| <b>Mutual understanding<br/>(outcome)</b>          | Linked to improved awareness of CSO realities and clearer understanding of mandates to prevent duplication. | Focussed on empathy, contextual awareness, and recognition of grassroots challenges.    | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Both value understanding as basis for cooperation.</p> <p><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s prioritise operational clarity; CSOs stress empathy and lived realities.</p> |
| <b>Transformative change (outcome)</b>             | Seen as improved institutional responsiveness                                                               | Viewed as the tangible proof of partnership                                             | <p><b>Convergence:</b> Both view</p>                                                                                                                                                  |

|                                 |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                 | and societal transformation through collaboration.                                                                | success, leading to empowered communities and systemic change.                                  | transformation as the ultimate goal.<br><br><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s stress institutional reform; CSOs emphasise social justice and community empowerment.                                   |
| <b>Mutual empowerment (aim)</b> | Considered enhancement of institutional capability, visibility, and accountability through partnership with CSOs. | Defined as equal power relations, joint decision making, and shared agency to influence change. | <b>Convergence:</b> Agreement that empowerment must be reciprocal.<br><br><b>Divergence:</b> CH9s link empowerment to institutional strengthening; CSOs link it to redistribution of power. |

## 8.8 Linking the research questions to the process of developing the proposed communication framework

The three research questions in the document are interconnected and collectively contribute to the development of a communication framework aimed at enhancing the relationship between CH9s and CSOs in South Africa. Below, the chapter will outline how these three questions link together and how participant input has influenced the adapted framework.

The first research question focusses on identifying the theoretical concepts and constructs necessary for the communication framework. This foundational understanding is crucial as it sets the stage for the subsequent questions by establishing the principles of mutual empowerment, equality, and transformative communication that guided the framework's development.

The second question explores the perceptions of communication managers within CH9s regarding the proposed framework. Their insights helped refine the framework by highlighting the importance of transparency, feedback loops, and the need for a shift from transactional to relational engagement with CSOs.

The third question examines the perspectives of CSO directors on the framework. Their feedback emphasises the necessity of addressing power imbalances and ensuring that communication is rooted in shared responsibility and mutual understanding. This input is vital for ensuring that the framework is not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable in real-world contexts.

Participant input has significantly shaped the adapted framework in several ways. Based on feedback, the framework replaced the concept of 'joint mandate' with 'joint interests' to better reflect the flexible, issue-driven agendas of CSOs alongside the constitutional roles of CH9s. The addition of 'respectful engagement' as a construct underlines the importance of dignity and civility in communication, addressing past experiences of marginalisation expressed by CSO directors. The framework was also adapted to reinforce feedback, transformation, and empowerment as core operational principles, ensuring that communication leads to tangible outcomes and the aim of mutual empowerment.

The final framework proposes a multi-layered approach structured around interdependent, reflecting the complexities of the relationships between CH9s and CSOs. This structure was informed by the participants' emphasis on the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

This shows that the research questions are interlinked, with each building upon the insights gained from the previous one. Participant input has been instrumental in refining the framework to ensure it is both theoretically robust and practically relevant, ultimately aiming to foster mutual empowerment and transformative change in the relationships between CH9s and CSOs.

## 8.9 A communication framework for CH9s and CSOs

The general question for the study was: *What should a communication framework for CH9s include to contribute to relationship building with CSOs towards the mutual empowerment of both institutions?*

This section expands on the attributes of the communication framework based on feedback from both CH9s and CSOs stated above. The refined communication framework proposes a multi-layered approach structured around three interdependent components. Drawing on the above feedback, the final communication framework is presented to reflect both theoretical soundness and practical feasibility. The most significant adaptations include the replacement of 'joint mandate' with 'joint interests' to acknowledge CSOs' flexible, issue-driven agendas. The second is to place emphasis on respectful engagement over equal power, given constitutional disparities. Third is the addition of new constructs such as 'availability', 'organisational culture' and 'respectful engagement'.

The final communication framework integrates these guidelines into a cohesive structure aimed at fostering synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs. The framework not only addresses the current gaps in communication but also sets the stage for ongoing reflection and adaptation to ensure that both CH9s and CSOs can work together effectively towards their shared goals of empowerment and social transformation.

The approach helps CH9s better connect their constitutional duties with grassroots mobilisation, which makes them more legitimate and gives them a wider reach. Through systematic engagement, CSOs can obtain institutional support, resources, and influence. The democratic fabric and civic participation in South Africa are strengthened when both institutions give each other power.

The empirical data necessitated key adaptations to the originally conceptualised framework in Chapter 5. These include replacing 'joint mandate' with 'joint interest' to accommodate CH9s' constitutional role versus CSOs' issue-based focus. It also included adding 'respectful engagement' as a new construct under critical dialogue, based on participant feedback. Lastly, the study recommended reinforcing feedback, transformation, and empowerment as the core operational values.

The framework consists of four integrated components: communication purpose, communication philosophy, communication guidelines, and communication outcomes. Below, each of these will be explained, noting that those constructs and concepts being detailed there will form part of the final proposed communication framework as per participants' recommendations.

Below is a table summarising all concepts and constructs:

**Table 8.3: Table summarising all concepts and constructs**

| Concepts                         | Constructs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Sub-constructs |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Purpose</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synergistic relationships</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                |
| <b>Synergistic relationships</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared goals</li> <li>• Empowering and transformation</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                |
| <b>Communication philosophy</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical dialogue and engagement</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                |
|                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal partners</li> <li>• Free speech</li> <li>• Open debate</li> <li>• Constructive criticism</li> <li>• Critical consciousness</li> <li>• Mutual learning and change</li> <li>• Truthfulness</li> <li>• Respectful engagement</li> <li>• Understandability</li> </ul> |                |

|                                 |                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Communication guidelines</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Openness and disclosure</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Availability</li> </ul>                                                                         |
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of networks, resources, knowledge, and skills</li> <li>• Sharing tasks and responsibilities</li> </ul>                                                                               |
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowered participation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation</li> <li>• Equal participation in decision making</li> <li>• Equal participation in planning</li> <li>• Equal participation in implementation and evaluation</li> </ul> |
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirmed mutuality</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                      |

|                 |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 |                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeously addressing concerns</li> <li>• Constructive and positive feedback</li> <li>• Care and recognition</li> <li>• Win-win</li> </ul> |
| <b>Outcomes</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Mutual understanding</li> <li>• Transformative change</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Aim</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual empowerment</li> </ul>                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                    |

### 8.9.1 Purpose: Synergistic relationships

The input by participants has significantly shaped the purpose and characteristics of the communication framework designed for enhancing relationships between CH9s and CSOs. The primary purpose of the communication framework is to foster **synergistic relationships** between CH9s and CSOs. This means that both parties aim to achieve more collectively than they could independently. The framework is intended to facilitate a cooperative relationship that allows the two institutions to better empower marginalised groups. This synergistic relationship is characterised by continuous feedback and reflection on societal transformation. Participants emphasised the importance of this synergistic relationship, with many expressing a desire for collaboration that leads to mutual benefits. This feedback highlights the mutual intention of the respondents to create a framework that supports collaborative efforts.

The proposed framework thus mainly shows how **CH9s** and **CSOs** should communicate in order to build **synergistic relationships** that drive meaningful change. A synergistic relationship is defined as a mutual collaboration where CH9s and CSOs jointly pursue the empowerment of marginalised communities through reflective practices. Shared

goals recognise that while CH9s have constitutional mandates, CSOs bring flexible, issue-based agendas that converge around shared goals such as social justice and rights realisation. Empowerment of society involves initiatives that lead to power shifts to any existing imbalances.

**Theoretical statement 37: Synergistic relationship:** From this discussion, the purpose of the communication framework is to create a synergistic relationship between CH9s and CSOs through an understanding of their individual mandates and interests, which enables them to jointly fulfil their shared interest of empowering marginalised groups through a continual process of feedback towards the transformation of society. The purpose is what the proposed framework sought to achieve, and the philosophy provided guidelines on how this can be achieved.

## **8.9.2 Communication philosophy**

The concept of communication philosophy is critical dialogue, consisting of concepts such as equal partners, free speech, open debate, constructive criticism, critical consciousness, mutual learning and change, truthfulness, respectful engagement, and understandability.

### **8.9.2.1 Critical dialogue**

Communication is grounded in critical dialogue, which acts as the overarching communication philosophy guiding all the communication in the framework. This means CH9 and CSOs should engage in deep, honest, constructive dialogue rather than superficial conversations. It emphasises listening, questioning, and reflecting to uncover real issues. In this study, critical dialogue is defined as a system of thought that involves a dialogical process between equal partners. This process is characterised by truthful, authentic, understandable, and context-appropriate engagements between CH9s and CSOs that are based on communication principles of free speech, open debate, and critical consciousness. The process includes mutual learning and changes taking place in both CH9s and CSOs, based on their collaborative process of engagement, resulting in the growth, change, and transformation of all participants. The communication framework retains the following constructs:

- *Equal partners*: While recognising institutional asymmetries, all voices must be valued and heard equally in dialogue.
- *Free speech*: Open and safe environments for expressing diverse opinions.
- *Open debate*: Constructive confrontation of ideas to generate innovative solutions.
- *Exchange and criticism*: Mutual feedback that is constructive, respectful, and oriented toward improvement.
- *Shared critical consciousness*: Awareness of social and institutional power dynamics.
- *Mutual learning and change*: Learning is a two-way action and leads to changes in thinking and practice.
- *Truthful, authentic, understandable communication*: Language and content must be context appropriate and clear.
- *Respectful engagement*: Respectful engagement reflects the need for dignity and civility in communication.

**Theoretical statement 38:** Critical dialogue between CH9s and CSOs should be a dialogical process where both parties engage as equal partners in engagement, free speech, and open debate where ideas are exchanged and constructive criticism is welcomed to enhance a shared critical consciousness informing mutual learning and change. This dialogical process should be characterised by speech that is truthful, context-appropriate, and respectful.

### **8.9.3 Communication guidelines**

Communication guidelines set the standard for how critical dialogue and collaboration should be practised between CH9 institutions and CSOs. In this study, communication guidelines refer to actions that enhance the effectiveness of interaction and partnership to achieve a shared purpose. The following guidelines are derived from both the empirical findings discussed in Chapter 7 and relevant theoretical insights.

#### **8.9.3.1 Transparency**

To promote transparency, CH9s and CSOs should:

1. Ensure full access to information: Both parties must proactively share relevant information required to sustain collaboration and fulfil joint objectives (see 7.3.2.1).
2. Foster openness in engagement: Create an environment that allows free and honest exchange of views, supported by regular communication updates and mutual disclosure.
3. Establish specific and accessible communication platforms: Use clear, inclusive, and user-friendly communication channels that facilitate dialogue and accountability between institutions.
4. Maintain presence and responsiveness: Demonstrate availability and commitment by responding timeously to inquiries, invitations, and issues raised by partners.

Transparency thus functions as a foundation for trust and mutual understanding, ensuring that both CH9s and CSOs operate in a climate of openness and integrity.

#### **8.9.3.2 Collaboration**

To strengthen collaboration, CH9s and CSOs should:

1. Share resources and expertise: Exchange networks, knowledge, and skills to maximise efficiency and impact in joint initiatives.
2. Allocate tasks equitably: Divide roles and responsibilities according to each party's strengths, capacities, and mandates to ensure effective execution (see 7.4.1).
3. Promote mutual benefit: Design and implement joint activities that yield reciprocal value, reinforcing interdependence and sustainability of the partnership.

Collaboration should therefore be seen as a strategic and equitable process in which both parties contribute meaningfully to shared goals.

#### **8.9.3.3 Empowered participation**

To promote empowered participation, CH9s and CSOs should:

1. Actively engage in all stages of partnership: Participate equally in planning, decision making, implementation, and evaluation of joint communication and advocacy initiatives.

2. Foster inclusive decision making: Create participatory mechanisms that recognise and value the contributions of all partners, ensuring shared ownership of outcomes (see 7.4).

Empowered participation ensures that both parties act not as implementers of separate agendas but as equal agents shaping communication and transformation processes together.

#### **8.9.3.4 Affirmed mutuality**

To affirm mutuality, CH9s and CSOs should:

1. Be available and responsive: Maintain open lines of communication and address one another's concerns promptly and respectfully.
2. Provide constructive feedback: Engage in positive, solution-oriented discussions that acknowledge the challenges and contributions of each partner.
3. Recognise one another's roles and efforts: Demonstrate care and appreciation for each other's institutional and emotional labour in sustaining partnerships.
4. Adopt win-win approaches to conflict resolution: Address disagreements through dialogue that seeks outcomes beneficial to both parties (see 7.4.2).

Affirmed mutuality reinforces relationships of respect and reciprocity, supporting the long-term sustainability of the partnership.

#### **8.9.3.5 Organisational culture**

Organisational culture should be seen as a strategic construct where both CH9s and CSOs embrace, understand, respect, and acknowledge each other's organisational cultures and incorporate this in their communication activities. By integrating organisational culture into their communication practices, they can foster more effective collaboration and mutual success within their respective organisations.

## **8.10 Communication outcomes**

In this framework, it is argued that following a communication philosophy of critical dialogue and applying some communication guidelines in the communication between CH9s and CSOs should contribute to some positive outcomes, which in turn can help realise the purpose of the framework. The desired outcomes include solidarity, mutual understanding, mutual empowerment, and transformative change.

Below is a detailed description of each outcome:

### **8.10.1 Solidarity**

Solidarity refers to CH9s and CSOs standing together in mutual support, where both parties honour their commitments and trust that the other will reciprocate, benefiting from the relationship in fulfilling shared interests. It is characterised by mutual support, which participants emphasised as a natural outcome of effective communication where organisations feel heard and valued. Trust and commitment are just as crucial for fostering solidarity. Reciprocation also becomes important with the expectation that support will be returned, enhancing collaborative efforts. When all is said and done, both parties should derive benefits from their relationship, reinforcing their commitment to shared goals.

### **8.10.2 Mutual understanding**

Mutual understanding involves both CH9s and CSOs comprehending each other's worldviews, realities, issues, needs, limitations, expectations, and goals, which contributes to fulfilling their mandates. Its key constructs include engaging in respectful dialogue to allow for deeper insights into each other's perspectives; clear communication to help dispel assumptions and align goals; and a shared understanding, which reduces miscommunication and fosters equitable collaboration.

### **8.10.3 Transformative change**

Transformative change occurs when CH9s and CSOs commit to integrating new thinking on societal issues and remain open to necessary changes within their organisations to effectively fulfil their mandates. Its key constructs are as follows. There must be a visible

and measurable change, which participants stressed should be tangible and evident in the community. Civil society organisations play a crucial role in driving change, often influencing governmental policies and practices. This process should be manageable as the successful implementation of the framework requires effective communication strategies and training.

### **8.11 Aim: Mutual empowerment**

Mutual empowerment is achieved when CH9s and CSOs experience equal power in their relationship and engage as equal partners in decision making, enhancing their ability to fulfil their respective mandates. Mutual empowerment is both a guiding aim and a desired outcome of the proposed communication framework between CH9s and CSOs. It represents the culmination of effective collaboration and communication processes where both entities transcend traditional, one-directional forms of engagement and instead enter into relationships characterised by balance, reciprocity, and shared agency. In this sense, mutual empowerment is not an isolated construct but an expression of what can be achieved when synergistic relationships and critical dialogue are fully realised.

Mutual empowerment is a process that enables both parties to grow in capacity and confidence while maintaining equality in their interaction. For CH9 practitioners, mutual empowerment is an attainable state in which both institutions benefit from the framework's application, with each becoming stronger and more effective in fulfilling their respective mandates. CSO directors similarly see empowerment as something that should not flow in a single direction but should be shared, ensuring that both partners learn from and support one another within the relationship.

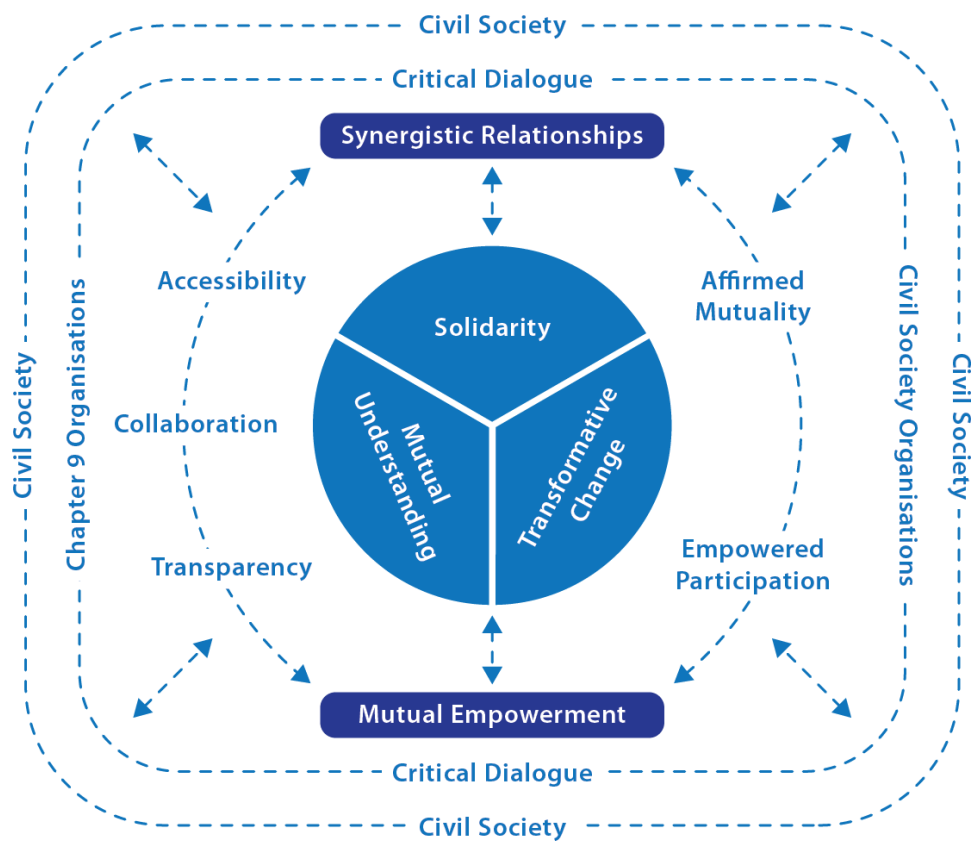
While the term 'empowerment', in conventional use can imply that one party grants power to another, thereby reinforcing hierarchy, here mutual empowerment should be understood as a balanced process in which both CH9s and CSOs engage as equals in decision making and capacity building. In this sense, empowerment is achieved through a continuous exchange of knowledge, resources, and influence, rather than through the transfer of authority from one to the other.

Mutual empowerment fosters a sense of equality and shared ownership, which neutralises existing power differentials. It ensures that both CH9s and CSOs are equally

positioned to contribute to the transformation of society and to advance democratic participation through their complementary roles. Mutual empowerment, therefore, serves as both a relational and a functional ideal where empowerment is no longer viewed as a charitable act but as a collective state achieved through cooperation and mutual respect.

Overall, mutual empowerment becomes an aim of the communication framework, signifying the ultimate point of convergence for its underlying constructs. It integrates the preceding constructs such as synergistic relationships, critical dialogue, and collaboration into a unified goal that embodies the spirit of partnership between CH9s and CSOs. As such, it not only represents the framework's purpose but also serves as the benchmark for assessing its success in practice when achieved; it demonstrates that CH9s and CSOs have established relationships grounded in equality, transparency, and mutual learning. This result ensures that both institutions are strengthened in their capacity to empower marginalised communities and collectively drive societal transformation.

Figure 8.2 below provides a visual illustration of the final proposed communication framework.



**Figure 8.2: Visual illustration of the final conceptual communication framework**

In conclusion, if CH9s and CSOs can adopt the communication philosophy of critical dialogue and embrace the accompanying principles of transparency, collaboration, empowered participation, affirmed mutuality, and cultural diversity, it should go a long way towards achieving the intended aim of mutual empowerment. These ultimately contribute to realising the overarching purpose of the proposed communication framework: to establish sustainable, synergistic relationships between CH9s and CSOs that empower both parties to fulfil their shared commitment to the advancement of democracy, human rights, and the empowerment of society at large. The next section will look at the contributions of the study.

## 8.12 Contributions of the study

This study offers a distinctive contribution by creating an innovative communication framework specifically designed for South Africa's socio-political and institutional environment. This framework, in contrast to generalised international models, was crafted with acute awareness of the historical, political, and relational dynamics that define the interaction between CH9s and CSOs. Its significance is anchored in the South African democratic initiative, wherein institutions are legally obligated to safeguard human rights and civil society organisations function as essential allies in ensuring accountability and advocating for marginalised populations. The study adopted both the cybernetic tradition and the critical tradition to account for a more comprehensive approach to mutually beneficial relationships and mutual empowerment. The inclusion of the perspectives from the two traditions offers scholars a renewed theoretical approach to study and theorise mutually beneficial relationships and mutual empowerment. Additionally, the study also integrates the ubuntu philosophy to satisfy the context-specific communication guidelines, which theories, such as stakeholder relationship management theory, do not account for in the African context, such as that of this study.

This study also makes an essential addition by introducing 'mutual empowerment' as a theoretical and practical aim of communication across institutions. This study does not see empowerment as a one-way process. Instead, it sees it as a two-way process in which both CH9s and CSOs improve their ability to carry out their duties through dialogic, inclusive, and transformative communication. Mutual empowerment changes the way we think about communication so that it becomes a tool for both partners to reflect, learn, and make changes. This puts both partners in charge of building democratic accountability and social justice.

Finally, this study connects theory and practice by merging academic research with practical, real-world knowledge. The study uses the experiences of professional communicators embedded in CH9s and CSOs to create and change the framework by talking to CH9 communication managers and CSO directors. This method of co-construction adds practical suggestions to the theoretical model, making it not only sound in theory but also useful for practitioners. The study adds to both the academic literature on participatory communication and the practical ways that institutions in South Africa

might work together better. From a practice perspective, the study of this nature emphasises the critical role of CH9s and CSOs in South Africa and how they can benefit society if they have synergetic relationships aimed at empowering each other.

### **8.13 Limitations of the study**

This study has some limitations that must be recognised. The research's scope had a very specific focus – organisations focussing on empowerment of society – and therefore only three CH9s and 9 CSOs were included. Although participants were chosen to represent diverse viewpoints, the findings cannot be extrapolated to all institutions within the industry.

The study primarily concentrated on national-level CH9s and CSOs, thereby restricting its relevance at the local or grassroots level. Localised variations, such as community-driven practices or region-specific institutional dynamics, may not have been comprehensively documented. Consequently, forthcoming versions of the framework must be evaluated in both provincial and community settings to determine scalability and responsiveness.

The geographic scope of the study predominantly favoured urban-based CSOs, potentially marginalising rural or community-based entities. Consequently, the problems and communication dynamics unique to rural locations may not be sufficiently represented in this paradigm.

Temporal limitations influenced the extent of involvement. This study, done over a defined timeframe, encapsulates a snapshot of perceptions and connections between CH9s and CSOs. Relationship building is a dynamic, long-term process that develops over time. A longitudinal study would yield a deeper understanding of how these interactions evolve, adjust, or encounter stress.

Owing to constraints in time and resources, the study was unable to do a longitudinal follow-up to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed communication architecture in a real-time application. The study offers a theoretically robust and empirically grounded model; however, its practical efficacy requires validation through systematic pilot programmes and case analyses over time.

Ultimately, although the framework presents numerous unique constructions, certain concepts, including mutual learning, may still necessitate additional operationalisation and refining. Future research should focus on creating quantifiable indicators and practical instruments to evaluate reciprocal learning in CH9-CSO relationships, hence improving the framework's empirical rigour and applicability.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the study offers a significant basis for subsequent research and the actual implementation of a communication structure designed to foster reciprocal empowerment between CH9s and CSOs.

#### **8.14 Recommendations for future research**

Future research should explore the implementation of the suggested communication structure via pilot projects in various provinces. This will enable the examination of contextual changes and assist in assessing the framework's adaptability and efficacy across various institutional and geographic contexts, especially in underrepresented rural regions. Future studies should emphasise more testing and piloting of the framework within designated CH9-CSO partnerships. Applying the framework in actual institutional settings would yield significant insights into its practical advantages and drawbacks. Pilot studies may be designed to evaluate their influence on communication quality, trust development, and reciprocal empowerment. These case studies will not only enhance the framework but also foster institutional support for its implementation.

Moreover, researchers ought to investigate digital tools and platforms that can be used to facilitate continuous conversation and feedback between CH9s and CSOs. Technology-mediated communication, including mobile applications, online collaboration platforms, and digital feedback dashboards, may improve the accessibility, efficiency, and transparency of stakeholder participation, especially in regions facing logistical challenges. It is essential to investigate the capabilities of digital tools and platforms that may facilitate the execution of the communication framework. Technologies like online consultation platforms, participatory mapping applications, and real-time feedback tools could improve the accessibility and inclusivity of communication between CH9s and CSOs. Future studies may assess the efficacy of these technologies in promoting discourse, enhancing transparency, and amplifying relationship-building initiatives,

especially in situations where geographic or resource limitations hinder in-person interactions.

Future research may broaden the framework's applicability to additional partnership types beyond CH9-CSO interactions. This entails examining the application of dialogical communication, mutual empowerment, and collaborative principles in the partnerships between CH9s and the commercial sector, faith-based organisations, or academic institutions. This cross-sectoral analysis could enhance the framework and promote more democratic participation and accountability.

Comparative analyses with other constitutional entities or regional human rights commissioners would enhance comprehension of the framework's wider significance. By analysing the interactions between various public accountability institutions and CSOs, researchers may discern patterns, deficiencies, and context-specific modifications that could enhance the framework's relevance across numerous governance contexts. Such comparisons would enhance global understanding of state-civil society communication. The future studies can also conduct studies using rural-based, grassroots and informal community-based organisations whose perspectives are not featured in this study, as it favoured urban-based organisation whose communication needs and dynamics are different. Scholars can explore a study focussing on civil society organisations at the grassroots level.

## **8.15 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the proposed communication framework for the CH9-CSO relationship development. Feedback from communication managers within CH9s and directors from CSOs indicated broad support for the framework, recognising its potential to redefine engagement, build trust, and foster collaborative relationships. CH9 managers valued the emphasis on mutuality and transparency, while CSO directors highlighted concerns over past marginalisation and the framework's focus on shared responsibility and ownership of processes.

In conclusion, the proposed framework not only offers a practical tool for enhancing the democratic and participatory engagement between oversight institutions and civil society in South Africa but also serves as a theoretical model that can evolve through its

application and responsive practices. The proposed communication framework should be regarded not as a fixed design but as a dynamic instrument that develops through application. The final success hinges on the readiness of both CH9s and CSOs to adopt polite, critical, and powerful communication as a collective obligation. This study's CH9-CSO communication framework establishes a multi-layered, structured, and adaptive model for strengthening engagement between oversight institutions and civil society in South Africa. By replacing rigid notions of 'joint mandate' with 'shared interests', and emphasising respectful engagement over abstract equality of power, the framework recognises both the constitutional authority of CH9 institutions and the flexible, issue-driven nature of CSOs.

Anchored in a philosophy of critical dialogue, the framework advances communication as a transformative process built on free speech, open debate, mutual learning, and shared critical consciousness. Operationally, it promotes transparency, collaboration, empowered participation, and affirmed mutuality as essential guidelines for sustaining meaningful interaction. The framework ultimately envisions outcomes of solidarity, mutual understanding, and transformative change, which can be used to achieve mutual empowerment as an aim rather than an outcome. Together, these outcomes ensure that CH9s and CSOs not only strengthen their own capacities but also contribute to the broader goal of social justice and democratic deepening. By embedding both theoretical integrity and practical feasibility, the proposed communication framework positions CH9-CSO relationships as catalysts for empowering marginalised communities and fostering a more participatory, accountable, and responsive democracy in South Africa. This thesis has offered a thorough synthesis of theoretical and empirical ideas to establish a communication framework for CH9 institutions and CSOs. Grounded in participative and relational ideas, the framework promotes mutual empowerment as both a normative objective and a communicative reality created by practice.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Fax: 018 299-4910  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics  
Tel: 016 103 4446  
Email: [Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za)

28 August 2023

#### ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) on 23/08/2023, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|--|--|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|------|--|--------|--|--|
| <b>Study title:</b> A communication Framework for Chapter 9 Institutions to contribute to relationship building with Civil Society Organisations towards mutual empowerment.                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| <b>Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher:</b> Dr. E. Kloppers & Dr. L. Bezuidenhout                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| <b>Student/Research Team:</b> J. Malatji (36288950)                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| <b>Ethics number:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td colspan="6">Study Number</td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="3">Status</td></tr></table> <p>Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</p> | N        | W            | U | - | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1    | 5 | -      | 2 | 3 | - | A | 7 | Institution |  |  | Study Number |  |  |  |  |  | Year |  | Status |  |  |
| N                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | W                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | U        | -            | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | -    | 2 | 3      | - | A | 7 |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| Institution                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          | Study Number |   |   |   |   |   | Year |   | Status |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| <b>Application Type:</b> Single study                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| <b>Commencement date:</b> 23/08/2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Risk:</b> <table border="1"><tr><td>Low risk</td></tr></table>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Low risk |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| Low risk                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| <b>Expiry date:</b> 23/08/2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |
| Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |              |   |   |   |   |   |      |   |        |   |   |   |   |   |             |  |  |              |  |  |  |  |  |      |  |        |  |  |

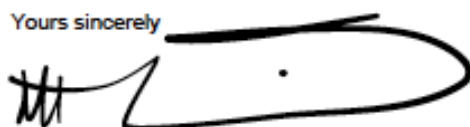
#### Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>General conditions:</b></p> <p>While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and</li><li>- without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.</li></ul></li><li>• The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.</li></ul> |
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- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
  - *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
  - *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and BaSSREC reserves the right to:*
    - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
    - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
    - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
      - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
      - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
      - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
      - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
  - *BaSSREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via [BaSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za](mailto:BaSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za).*

The BaSSREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the BaSSREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof E. Idemudia

Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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8 November 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

## APPENDIX B: LANGUAGE EDITOR'S DECLARATION



- ◆ BGS LANGUAGE MATTERS LANGUAGE AND MEDIA SERVICES PTY LTD
- ◆ INFO@LANGUAGEMATTERS.CO.ZA
- ◆ 0829202991
- ◆ WWW.LANGUAGEMATTERS.CO.ZA

### Language Editor's Declaration

To whom it may concern,

This document certifies that the manuscript/title listed below has been edited by one or more qualified language practitioners at Language Matters. The editing was conducted within reasonable, ethical, and professional limits, focussing on syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and specific stylistic requirements of the English language.

The editor's revisions and comments are provided as recommendations. The client/author retains full responsibility for the quality and content of the final manuscript. The language editor is not responsible for any changes made to the manuscript after this declaration is issued.

**Manuscript title:** A communication framework for Chapter 9 institutions to contribute to relationship building with civil society organisations towards mutual

**Author(s):** J. Malatji

**Date Issued:** 18 March 2026

**Issued by:** Simone Barroso

Language practitioner (accredited member of the South African Translators' Institute)

BA Hons Language Practice (NWU, 2011)

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