

## **A Dialogic Communication Perspective on Multi-stakeholder Collaboration: A Participatory Framework for Sustainable CSR**

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### **Abstract**

Achieving effective Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) requires a shift from passive assistance to participatory community development. This study analyzes how this principle led to the sustainable implementation of the Climate Village Program (Proklim) in Banguntapan. This project was realized through a multi-stakeholder collaboration involving PT AAF, GCI, and PUSPIK UII. The research specifically examines the role of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) model in ensuring local relevance. Using a qualitative, single case study design, the research applies Arnstein's Ladder to measure involvement levels. Crucially, it also utilizes the Dialogic Ladder to assess the quality of two-way communication. Primary data was gathered via Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews centered on decision-making processes. Findings indicate that PRA successfully identified an urgent, community-driven need: the mentoring of ten sub-villages for Proklim implementation. The partners responded by pivoting the program's focus to support this local priority. This shift confirmed the achievement of the highest communication standard "authentic dialogue" defined by high mutuality and shared power. Ultimately, this outcome demonstrates that sustainable CSR relies on multi-stakeholder collaboration that empowers the community as the primary subject of development, reaching the level of "delegated power" on Arnstein's Ladder.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility; CSR; Participatory Communication; PRA; Community Empowerment; Climate Village Program; Proklim

### **Introduction**

The foundational concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerged with the publication of Howard R. Bowen's 1953 book, *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, establishing the principle that businesses must account for the well-being and interests of their extended stakeholders, including employees, consumers, and the

communities where they operate (Bowen, 2013). Since then CSR has evolved into a strategic business approach aiming for shared value creation (Ali, 2008). Community participation is considered a crucial step for achieving environmental initiative management as success requires strong cohesion and collaboration among all stakeholders, including citizens, to deliver the programs efficiently and sustainably to cover the entire process, from developing the action plan to carrying it out (Garnett and Cooper, 2014; Kalra, 2020). A program that features active citizen participation and operates under a partnership structure is best positioned to succeed as this approach establishes the necessary groundwork for implementing enduring and large scale changes. However, achieving this is challenging, as studies analyzing corporate empowerment programs show that the level of community participation often requires significant improvement to accelerate the increase in engagement, with the ultimate goal being the achievement of citizen power (Asak and Santosa, 2024).

The literature consistently affirms that the success and sustainability of CSR initiatives depend directly on effective community centric methods. A key approach highlighted across different contexts is the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) model, which is specifically designed to integrate the knowledge and opinions of beneficiaries into every stage of a development project (Hussain et al., 2025). As argued by Hudayana, et al. (2019), the application of the PRA methodology constitutes an effective strategy for improving citizen involvement in local development planning. This method often facilitated by social work professionals, has been shown to be effective in empowering beneficiaries and ensuring the assessment of CSR programs truly reflects the community's perspective (Hussain et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, for instance, the use of PRA was integral to the success of an ecotourism initiative, leading to both environmental preservation and sustainable economic benefits (Trianto et al., 2022). To evaluate the extent of power within these initiatives, researchers typically use Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). This model helps assess the degree to which the community has power in the decision-making process, ranging from non-participation to citizen control, and provides a necessary standard for measuring participation levels (Asak and Santosa, 2024).

Despite the consensus on the importance of the PRA model and the use of Arnstein's Ladder to measure power, there remains an urgent need to move beyond simply quantifying participation to evaluating the quality and authenticity of the

communication itself (Lane, 2020). Previous research often focused on the presence of the PRA process or the final power level achieved, but lacked a rigorous framework to dissect the communicative interactions that either create genuine partnership or hide tokenistic interaction behind the broad label of "participation" (Arnstein, 1969). The methodological problem is rooted in a fundamental conceptual disagreement within communication studies where "dialogue" is often colloquially equated with simple two-way communication (Paquette et al., 2015). This conflation risks subsuming the highest forms of communication, characterized by attributes like mutuality and propinquity (Kent and Taylor, 2002) into a generic label.

This research provides a distinctive novelty by utilizing the Dialogic Ladder framework, which traces the path from simple surface-level interaction to deep, authentic dialogue, thereby exposing what is merely "dialogue-in-name-only" (Kent and Theunissen, 2016). This study applies the Dialogic Ladder framework to a particularly compelling case, the Proklim assistance program in Banguntapan, Bantul. This program is highly unique because its origin was community-driven, stemming from the urgent local need to assist 10 neighboring sub-villages in implementing sustainable environmental initiatives, thereby aligning the corporate action with the community's own existing strategic agenda. This specific community-initiated case is crucial because it allows for an in-depth analysis of high quality, participatory communication using the demanding standards of the Dialogic Ladder framework, makes a clear academic contribution by validating the framework as a methodological tool for empirically measuring the achievement of authentic dialogue and shared power in participatory CSR. Conceptually, it establishes a new link, showing how this high quality dialogue directly translates into the delegated power level on Arnstein's Ladder.

## **Method**

This research employs a qualitative method with an integrated case study approach. This method is appropriate for a depth exploration of the complex social processes, power dynamics, and communication flows within a specific, real world context, the Proklim program in Banguntapan. The case study focus allows for a comprehensive understanding of how participatory communication principles and funding mechanisms interact in a sustainable CSR initiative.

The research site is Kalurahan Banguntapan, Bantul, Yogyakarta. The focus is the Program Kampung Iklim (Proklam) initiative, which involves a collaborative partnership.

Table 1. Program's Stakeholders

No	Actors	Roles
1.	Community Member: Proklam group member, community leader (Lurah), and Family Welfare and Empowerment (PKK)	The community, led by the Proklam group (initiators/technical core) and supported by the Lurah (formal validation/sustainability), is the central force. PKK groups (social agents/women) drive broad mobilization and behavioral change, ensuring household-level climate actions.
2.	PT Arthaasia Finance (AAF)	The corporate donor provides financial support through its CSR fund.
3.	Yayasan Generasi Cerdas Iklim (GCI) and Pusat Studi Perubahan Iklim dan Kebencanaan Universitas Islam Indonesia (PUSPIK UII)	These institutions act as the facilitator and technical implementer of the program, provide technical expertise, conduct participatory assessments (PRA), and serve as the communication bridge between the community's needs and the corporate resources.

Source: Research Findings

The data collection employed a triangulation of primary and secondary sources to ensure reliability and depth. Primary data was obtained from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews. These were conducted with 10 key stakeholders, consisting of 1 representative from local community leaders (Lurah), 4 members of Proklam group, 2 members of Family Welfare and Empowerment (PKK) who are actively involved in Proklam, and 3 representatives from GCI and PUSPIK UII.

The interviews were designed to capture nuanced data regarding roles, decision-making processes, resource allocation, and communication flow, specifically focusing on whether the communication was horizontal and dialogue-based. While the secondary included Program documents, program reports, and documentation of the Proklam activities provided contextual background and served as validation for the narratives gathered during the primary interviews.

The analysis phase of this research connects the methodological approach PRA with the Arnstein's Ladder, which is highly significant because it connects what happened in the program with who held the control. PRA explains how the program was planned, whether it involved real dialogue and used local knowledge. While Arnstein's Framework steps in to measure the quality of that involvement. Crucially, the Dialogic Ladder is used to assess the quality and mutuality of the participatory communication achieved through PRA. Integrating these elements moves the analysis past basic observation, allowing for a more thorough evaluation of stakeholder engagement. The findings provide clear evidence that community input was not just collected, but actually used to give local people control over the project. This is confirmed by the authentic nature of the discussions.

## **Discussion**

### **Community-Driven CSR**

While successful sustainability begins with a shift in mindset, it is the alignment with local needs that forms the foundation of this empowerment. The case study demonstrates a successful application of community-driven CSR, shifting from the traditional supply driven model. The program's core objective, assisting 10 other sub-villages, originated from the urgent need of the local community in Plumbon sub-village and was already an existing community agenda which is Proklim.

The role of GCI and PUSPIK UII as a facilitator was crucial in using participatory communication techniques based on PRA to validate local needs by confirming that the program was necessary and desired by the community and ensure ownership, since the program was already locally initiated, the PRA process simply helped strengthen and expand the program, ensuring high local ownership. This approach signifies effective participatory communication, where the communication flow starts from the community's voice and is then supported by external stakeholders.

Table 2. PRA Implementation

PRA Principle	Findings
1. Subject vs. Object status (Bottom-up approach)	The partners final program scope shifted from initial proposal to supporting the community's existing mandate (accompanying 10 sub-villages for Proklam), confirming the community as the subject of the development process.
2. Validity of local knowledge	Interview data from the expert partner (GCI and PUSPIK UII) confirmed a commitment "not only to provide knowledge, but also to learn from the existing local wisdom in the Banguntapan community," thereby establishing mutuality.
3. Comprehensive prior analysis	Project documentation included analysis of the local statistical reports of the existing Proklam.
4. Depth of qualitative input (FGD & key interviews)	FGD transcripts with community leaders and PKK representatives were used to finalize the program's focus on long term climate adaptation rather than short term material aid.
5. Community control in design (Participatory mapping)	Community members jointly used participatory mapping to identify underutilized resources which directly informed the social enterprise component of the program.
6. Commitment to continuity (Transect walk & timelines)	The NGO/Academic partner stressed the program will be "continuous community service" and the donor expressed the hope for "sustainable collaboration," mitigating the community's fear of abandonment.
7. Ethical awareness and measurability (Addressing PRA challenges)	The methodology included mandatory data validation sessions with community leaders post-analysis to verify that the research findings accurately reflected the community's perception (emic view).

Source: Research Findings

Based on the research findings above, the implementation of this CSR project demonstrated a strong commitment to the core principles of PRA (Chambers, 1992) which shows that it is fundamentally a bottom-up approach that empowers participants in problem identification. This philosophy was strictly upheld as the program's final scope shifted from the initial corporate proposal to supporting the community's existing mandate (accompanying 10 sub-villages for Proklam) definitively establishing the community as the subject of the development process.

Furthermore, this approach prioritizes the analytical capacities of local communities (Uduji et al., 2021). This was reflected when the expert partners (GCI and PUSPIK UII) explicitly guaranteed the validity of local knowledge by committing to

"learn from the existing local wisdom," thereby building authentic mutuality. In the data collection phase, an integrated PRA approach was used, which started with a comprehensive prior analysis by reviewing existing Proklam statistical reports and was then deepened through FGD and Key Interviews. The results from the FGD were crucial as they were used to finalize the program's focus on long-term climate adaptation, rather than short term material aid.

The commitment to participation went beyond simple data collection, focusing instead on building ownership and sustainability. PRA offers significant benefits as it is community-centric and aims at empowering marginalized groups (Hermansyah et al., 2021). Correspondingly, in the design phase, community members actively used participatory mapping to identify underutilized resources, which directly informed and gave the community control over the program's social enterprise component. To ensure the initiative was long-term and to mitigate the community's fear of abandonment, the commitment to continuity from the partners was clear. The NGO/Academic partner emphasized the program as continuous community service while the donor expressed hope for sustainable collaboration.

Finally, this project actively sought to address the known methodological weaknesses of PRA. The literature documents that PRA often encounters ethical challenges, risks of malpractice, and difficulties in producing structured, comparable, and measurable outcomes (Roque et al., 2022). To counter the challenges of structure and the risk of researcher bias, the research team implemented mandatory data validation sessions with community leaders post-analysis. This procedure effectively bridged the challenge of ethical awareness and measurability by verifying that the research findings accurately reflected the perception. This self correcting measure ensured that the program's reported outcomes maintained both validity and community trust.

### **Communication Strategies Drive Community Participation on Arnstein's Ladder**

Building on this community-driven foundation, specific communication strategies are required to elevate the role of the community from passive recipients to active decision makers.

Table 3. Three Main Levels of Two-way Communication

No	Concept	Indicators of Communication
1.	Simple two-way communication (Lowest level):	"When GCI first came, they did ask for suggestions using a quick survey. And they didn't stop there. They established interviews and FGD involving the stakeholders here." (Interview 1 participant 1, HE on Saturday, September 20, 2025).
2.	Conducted two-way communication	"We had to consistently respond to every community input, mapping resources, and debating priorities. This wasn't passive listening. But it was a two way communication where our team and community members continuously exchanged data and revised assumptions before making the final decision." (Interview participant 3, IM on Saturday, September 20, 2025).
3.	Authentic dialogue (Highest level):	"The real partnership came about because they respected what we had started. We explained that our most urgent need wasn't a new project, but growing our current, local Proklim work to include ten more sub-villages. AAF, GCI and PUSPIK UII agreed to completely change the entire program to support our main goal. We felt like we were the main people in charge of our own development, and they truly honored our choices because they worked with <b>mutuality</b> ." (Interview 1 participant 1, HE on Saturday, September 20, 2025).

Source: Research Findings

According to the findings the CSR initial phase started at the level of simple two way communication, where the implementing partners (AAF, GCI, and PUSPIK UII) gathered input. They began with basic methods like quick surveys and FGDs. Crucially, the program avoided becoming a tokenistic exercise because the partners refused to stop there. As one participant noted that the partners established interviews and FGD involving the stakeholders from community members. This immediate commitment to deeper interaction allowed the process to quickly elevate to conducted two way communication. This phase involved a sustained and active dialogic loop where information was continuously debated and exchanged (Kent and Taylor, 1998). A project representative confirmed this constant back and forth stating they continuously exchanged data and revised assumptions with the community members



before making the final decision of the program. This ensured the program was relevant and based on shared, debated data, rather than just corporate assumptions.

The ultimate success of the program lies in reaching authentic dialogue (the highest level), which is defined by the high demonstration of principles like mutuality (Huesca, 2008). The most powerful evidence for this achievement is that the partners chose to support the community's existing self led efforts rather than forcing a new program upon them. As one community member explained that the partners respected what they already started. This fundamental shift changing the program's entire focus to align with a community defined priority is the clearest indicator of mutuality and shared power. It shows the partners truly honored the community's choices, making the local people feel like they were the main people in charge of our own development, which is the core goal of a sustainable participatory CSR model.

Viewed through a formal participatory form this practical outcome of shared power and self-led effort directly corresponds to the highest categories of citizen involvement. The evidence strongly indicates that the community's participation is placed at the Citizen Power end of Arnstein's Ladder (Rungs 6, 7, or 8).

Table 4. Assessment of Community Participation

<b>Arnstein's Participation Rung</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Evidence/Indication in the Case Study</b>	<b>Analysis Position</b>
8. Citizen Control	Full Power	Unclear if the community has majority control over external funding/partner selection.	Unlikely
7. Delegated Power	Full Power	The community delegated the technical assistance to GCI and PUSPIK UII but retained control over the goal which is to provide mentorship to 10 other sub-villages in realizing the Proklim initiative.	Likely

6. Partnership	Full Power	This multi-stakeholder program (AAF, GCI, PUSPIK UII, and the Community) is founded on the principle of community partnership, positioning the local population as equal decision makers in setting the program's strategic direction and local implementation. A core component involves establishing a framework where Plumbon sub-village commits to provide mentorship for 10 neighboring sub-villages to realize the Proklim initiative.	Most Likely
5. Placation	Tokenism	The program is community-initiated, moving far beyond mere appeasement.	Low
4. Consultation	Tokenism	The community did not just consult; they initiated the core program idea.	Low

Source: Research Findings

The Proklim case exhibits strong characteristics of Partnership (Rung 6), where power and responsibility are shared where PT AAF provides financial resources, GCI and PUSPIK UII provides technical facilitation, and the community provides the program initiative, sets the objectives, and drives local implementation. The community is a partner with genuine decision making authority regarding the substantive program agenda.

Furthermore, the structured FGD and in-depth interview conducted by GCI and PUSPIK UII to the community members confirmed that the Plumbon sub-village community articulated a self defined need for external support in operationalizing its commitment to a mentorship program for 10 other sub-villages within the Bangutapan district. This strategic initiative is intrinsically motivated by Plumbon's goal of achieving governmental recognition as a Desa Lestari (the highest institutional designation for villages demonstrating significant environmental commitment).

The community's proactive identification and definition of a necessity for external technical assistance to scale the Proklim initiative to neighboring sub-villages

signifies the attainment of Delegated Power (Rung 7) within Arnstein's participation typology (Arnstein, 1969).

Table 5. Qualitative Evidence of Community Proactivity

Factor	Evidence of Findings
Community-driven situational analysis	"This village has been recognized by the government as a top level environmental-friendly village. But to get the next step to become a sustainable village, we need to assist at least ten other sub-villages with their environmental programs" (Interview 2 participant 1, HE on Friday, May 9, 2025).
Community-driven situational analysis	"Our main problems right now are the program funding and finding people who are experts in the environmental field." (Interview participant 2, BI on Friday, May 9, 2025).
Community-driven needs assessment	"Our village needs to start guiding those ten other sub-villages to do environmental programs in order to get "desa lestari" recognition. We hope UII can help us make that happen." (FGD community members, on Friday, May 30, 2025).
Community-driven needs assessment	"We can work together later to provide mentorship for other sub-villages, and UII can be the ones who provide expertise." (FGD community members, on Friday, May 30, 2025).

Source: Research Findings

This level of participation which confirms the community's active management of the broader program vision, underscores the essential role of effective participatory communication as a core mechanism for ensuring the program's long-term sustainability.

### The Strategic Partnership as a Catalyst for Authentic Dialogue

The sustainability of these communicative strategies depends on their integration within a collaborative structure that balances power among all actors. In this framework a multi-stakeholder model where the NGO (GCI) and academic institution (PUSPIK UII) serve as facilitators functions as a structural catalyst for authentic participation. Theoretically, corporations often leverage NGOs to access specialized social resources and established local networks (Kotler & Lee, 2005; Faroque et al.,

2022). This partnership is strategically significant because NGOs can bridge the gap between corporate objectives and beneficiary needs by navigating local social complexities (Cho & Sultana, 2015). In the Banguntapan case, the NGO and academic partners functioned as co-learners rather than traditional top-down experts:

*"PUSPIK UII sees that collaboration between the academic world, the community, and corporations is an important model for addressing the challenges of climate change. The presence of our team is not only to provide knowledge but also to learn from the existing local wisdom in the Banguntapan community. We thank PT. Arthaasia Finance and the Generasi Cerdas Iklim Foundation for opening up this space for collaboration. We hope what we do today will provide sustainable benefits for the Banguntapan community."* (Interview participant 4, DW on Saturday, September 20, 2025)

This positioning reflects the principle of mutuality, a core requirement for authentic dialogue. By validating local knowledge the facilitators ensure that community input is considered equally against technical expertise. Furthermore, GCI's focus on the long-term nature of the intervention suggests a move away from project-based "event" communication toward a continuous service model.

*"This activity does not stop solely at the two days of implementation. The Proklim mentorship program that we are running with our partners will become part of our continuous community service. Academics, practitioners, and the community must continue to be present in guiding the public not only to understand concepts but also to be able to implement climate change adaptation and mitigation steps in their own environments. We believe that this cross-sectoral collaboration will strengthen the capacity of villages in facing the challenges of climate change."* (Interview participant 3, IM on Saturday, September 20, 2025).

Analytically, this emphasis on continuity addresses the risk of tokenism. It provides the sustained engagement necessary for the "Delegated Power" level on Arnstein's Ladder, aligning with the NGO's role in supporting marginalized or overlooked social interests (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

However, the role of NGOs in CSR is often constrained by the tension between social missions and the financial requirements of corporate partnerships (Bertels et al., 2014; Sanders, 2012). In this instance the potential for conflict was managed through the donor's long-term commitment to shared value. The financial and programmatic

backing provided a stable foundation for the facilitators to maintain their roles without compromising the participative process.

*"We are very proud to be a part of Kalurahan Banguntapan's journey toward Sustainable Proklam. Through this CSR initiative we want to demonstrate that the private sector can make a real contribution to climate action at the community level. Seeing the enthusiasm of the village leaders, environmental cadres, and PKK women, we are even more confident that this program will yield a long-term impact. We hope this cooperation will be the starting point for sustainable collaboration with the community and the academic world."*  
(Interview participant 5 TN on Saturday, September 20, 2025).

The donor's framing of the initiative suggests an alignment between corporate social objectives and local environmental action. From a communication perspective, this commitment to continuity reduces the community's fear of abandonment as a common barrier to high-level participation. By securing the program's future, the partnership structure allows the community to invest social capital into co-managing the initiative. This multi-stakeholder framework acts as a governance strategy where the NGO and academic facilitators manage the dynamics of power-sharing while the donor provides the resource stability required for sustainable empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

This study asserts that the sustainability of CSR initiatives is fundamentally determined by the integration of Lane's Dialogic Ladder and Arnstein's Ladder of Participation. By applying Lane's (2020) framework to the Proklam program in Banguntapan, this study demonstrates that stakeholder collaboration successfully transcended mere consultation to achieve "authentic dialogue". This communicative evolution is critical as Nugraha (2010) argues, communication must function as a catalyst for active participation rather than a tool for persuasion to mitigate the misunderstandings and conflicts that frequently jeopardize development outcomes.

The realization of this high level dialogue was empirically evidenced by the collaborator's decision to pivot the program's objectives to align with the community's pre-existing strategic agenda which is assisting the implementation of environmental initiatives across 10 sub-villages. Such a shift signifies a high degree of mutuality and shared authority which when mapped onto Arnstein's Ladder, elevates community involvement to the level of Delegated Power (Rung 7). This trajectory was facilitated by a strategic partnership wherein academic and NGO actors utilized PRA to validate

local knowledge while corporate backing provided the long term stability necessary for such high quality participation.

While this study provides a strong analysis of communication quality, it is limited by its focus on a single case. This study is constrained by its focus on a singular community-driven case. Consequently further research is required to test these findings within corporate-driven CSR contexts. Moreover as the current data relies on stakeholder perceptions gathered through interviews and FGDs, future communication studies should adopt longitudinal mixed-methods designs. Integrating discourse analysis of real time transcripts with quantitative measures of trust and empathy would more comprehensively verify if self correction mechanisms, such as data validation sessions, consistently neutralize the risks of tokenism and ethical lapses in participatory empowerment.

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