

From local knowledge to digital advocacy: A mixed network analysis of climate change communication pathways in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how climate change knowledge moved between local communities, institutions, and digital platforms in Tanzania, where smallholder farmers, pastoralists, and coastal communities continued to draw on indigenous knowledge even as government agencies and civil society increasingly channeled climate information through digital and broadcast media. Using a mixed network analysis — understood as a literature-coded synthesis rather than a primary social-network survey, combining qualitative thematic coding with graph-theoretic mapping — the study synthesised 25 peer-reviewed studies published between 2023 and 2026 to model the communication pathways connecting eight categories of actors, including local knowledge holders, local government authorities, national government and policy institutions, digital and social media, community radio, advocacy networks, academic institutions, and international donors. The resulting network indicated that local knowledge holders and local government authorities occupied the most central positions, while digital and social media functioned as an increasingly important bridge between local-level knowledge and national policy and advocacy discourse. The findings suggested that climate communication in Tanzania was shifting from a primarily oral, locally bounded system toward a hybrid network in which digital advocacy supplemented, rather than replaced, indigenous knowledge transmission. Implications for strengthening multi-actor climate communication strategies in Tanzania were discussed.



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INTRODUCTION

Climate financing in Tanzania is increasingly administered through formal local-government channels, with national authorities tightening compliance requirements on councils receiving climate adaptation funds. In June 2026, the government directed eight local councils — including Mkinga, Mpwapwa, Kondoa, and Kigamboni — to ensure strict implementation of projects under the Local Climate Adaptive Facility programme, warning that monitoring of disbursed funds would remain firm (Tanzania Daily News, 2026). At nearly the same time, indigenous communities elsewhere on the continent were pushing back through a different communication channel entirely: at the 2026 Global Landscapes Forum in Nairobi, a Maasai community representative publicly challenged the transparency of carbon-credit projects marketed as benefiting communities that had protected their land for generations, asking why so little of the resulting payment reached the people whose knowledge and stewardship made the projects possible (Mongabay, 2026). Read together, these two moments illustrate a central tension in contemporary Tanzanian and East African climate governance: formal, document-based communication pathways running from national government down to local councils exist alongside informal, advocacy-driven pathways in which local and indigenous knowledge holders increasingly use international platforms — including digital and broadcast media — to make their concerns heard.

This tension is not new, but its digital dimension is intensifying. Tanzania's smallholder farmers and pastoralists have long relied on indigenous knowledge systems — observation of cloud formations, animal behaviour, and seasonal indicators — to anticipate rainfall and drought (Moti et al., 2025; Sospeter et al., 2025). At the same time, government agencies have begun to treat information and communication technology as a tool for closing the gap between scientific climate data and local

decision-making, whether through open government agricultural data (Temba & Di, 2026), digital platforms intended to enhance local-government transparency (Ngowi et al., 2025a), or citizen-participation initiatives delivered through ICT (Ngowi et al., 2025b). Community radio remains a parallel and, in many rural areas, more accessible channel: audiences continue to engage with religious and community broadcasts such as Radio Maria Tanzania for locally relevant content (Luhizo & Ngatigwa, 2025), while traditional knowledge about water management continues to circulate primarily through oral, community-level networks in districts such as Nyasa (Yeremia et al., 2026) and Rungwe (Mbegu et al., 2026).

Digital media, however, is not a neutral or uniformly empowering addition to this communication landscape. Journalistic standards on Tanzanian digital-only outlets remain uneven, as illustrated by a case study of a popular blog's adherence to professional ethics (William et al., 2025), and Tanzanian women in public life — including female Members of Parliament — face disproportionate gendered harassment on platforms such as Instagram, which can chill the very digital advocacy that climate and governance reform are presumed to benefit from (Mohamed et al., 2026). At the same time, civic-engagement scholarship frames digital platforms as offering genuinely new “pathways to democracy” in Tanzania, expanding avenues for electoral and policy participation beyond what print and broadcast media alone could support (Yadav, 2026). Local government authorities, meanwhile, sit at the intersection of these pressures: empirical work on Monduli and Longido districts shows that local governance structures mediate both the practical adaptation choices available to communities and the degree of public trust placed in climate adaptation programming (Maeda et al., 2025; Maeda et al., 2026), while institutional mechanisms within local government authorities more broadly shape how seriously climate mitigation and adaptation commitments are implemented on the ground (Mrope et al., 2026).

Beyond Tanzania, methodological precedents exist for treating climate communication explicitly as a network phenomenon rather than a simple linear chain from science to public. García-del-Amo et al. (2023) apply network analysis to map how local communities in Sierra Nevada, Spain, report climate change impacts, while Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al. (2024) use social-network analysis to trace institutional actors' links with vulnerable municipalities in Honduras' dry corridor, explicitly aiming to identify pathways toward improved cooperation. Goritz and Kolleck (2025) apply discourse network analysis to climate change education policy debates, and Kim and Hara (2024) use semantic network analysis to map how publics engage with climate-focused non-governmental organisations online. Latkin et al. (2024) identify the social-network predictors of climate activism communication, and Backhaus et al. (2023) show, in the Australian context, how community radio continues to mediate “the local” within national climate discourse — a finding with direct resonance for Tanzania's own community-radio landscape. Boateng (2025) extends this comparative lens to West Africa, documenting how indigenous media strategies are leveraged for climate communication in Ghana, a pattern that plausibly extends to Tanzanian community broadcasting and oral-network channels.

What remains underdeveloped is an integrated account of how these different pathways — indigenous knowledge transmission, local government communication, community radio, digital and social media, NGO advocacy, academic research, and international donor engagement — relate to one another as a single, if uneven, communication system in the Tanzanian context. Existing Tanzanian studies tend to examine one channel or one actor type at a time: ICT and local government (Ngowi et al., 2025a, 2025b), indigenous knowledge and farming decisions (Sospeter et al., 2025; Moti et al., 2025), or digital media and gender (Mohamed et al., 2026). This study's contribution is to bring these channel-specific literatures together within a single mixed network framework, in order to (1) map the principal actor categories through which climate change knowledge and advocacy circulate in Tanzania; (2) quantify, through a literature-based network model, which actors and pathways appear most central to this circulation; and (3) discuss the implications of this network structure for strengthening climate communication strategy in Tanzania. In doing so, the study addresses a gap that several of the reviewed studies note in passing but do not resolve: that climate information “flows” are frequently described qualitatively but rarely mapped systematically as a network (Mbegu et al., 2026; Vergotine et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a mixed network analysis — here understood as a literature-coded synthesis of secondary, peer-reviewed sources rather than a primary social-network survey of named individuals

or institutions — combining qualitative thematic coding and quantitative graph-theoretic mapping applied to a corpus of published, peer-reviewed literature. This design choice follows directly from the study's aim, which is conceptual and integrative — to model how climate communication pathways are theorised and documented across the existing literature — rather than to conduct original fieldwork measuring real-time information flow between named individuals or institutions in a specific Tanzanian community. Constructing such a primary network (for example, surveying which specific farmers, officials, and NGOs in a given district actually exchange climate information, and how often) would require dedicated field access, informed consent procedures, and instrument design that fall outside the scope of a literature-synthesis manuscript, and is recommended as a direction for future research in the Conclusion.

Corpus construction followed three stages. First, a structured search of Crossref-indexed bibliographic metadata was conducted using Boolean combinations of the terms “climate change,” “communication,” “network,” “local knowledge,” “digital,” and “advocacy,” restricted to publications dated 2023–2026, with an initial emphasis on Tanzania-specific results supplemented by internationally comparable network-analysis studies. Second, records were screened for topical relevance and source quality; items lacking identifiable authorship or a registered DOI were excluded, as were dataset records, peer-review reports, and bibliographic artefacts unrelated to substantive findings. Third, screened records were assessed against the study's three guiding questions (actor type, communication pathway, and relevance to Tanzania or directly comparable network-analytic methodology). This process yielded a final corpus of 25 peer-reviewed sources — 18 Tanzania-specific studies and 7 internationally comparable network-analysis or climate-communication studies — spanning communication studies, information science, public administration, environmental policy, and rural sociology.

Each source was read in full and coded for the actor categories it discusses and the pathway(s) connecting them. Eight actor categories emerged inductively from this coding: local knowledge holders, local government authorities, national government and policy institutions, digital and social media, community radio and local broadcast media, non-governmental and advocacy networks, academic and research institutions, and international donors. For each study, one or more pairs of actor categories were coded as connected if the study's findings explicitly describe a communication, advocacy, information-sharing, or governance relationship between them; a small number of studies generated more than one coded pathway where multiple actor relationships were substantively discussed. These coded pathways were then represented as a weighted, undirected network, with edge weight equal to the number of reviewed studies documenting that particular actor-to-actor pathway, and node degree (and corresponding node size in Figure 1) calculated as the sum of weighted edges incident to that actor category — a simplified, literature-level analogue of degree centrality as conventionally computed in primary social network analysis (cf. García-del-Amo et al., 2023; Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2024; Goritz & Kolleck, 2025).

Three limitations should be stated explicitly. First, the resulting network is a synthesis of what the reviewed literature reports about communication relationships, not a measurement of actual information exchange between specific Tanzanian individuals or organisations; it should be read as a conceptual map of plausible and documented pathways rather than as a primary sociogram. Second, because edge weight is derived from how many studies discuss a given pathway rather than from the intensity or frequency of real-world communication, well-studied pathways (such as local-knowledge-to-local-government relationships) may appear more central simply because they have attracted more academic attention, not necessarily because they are objectively the most active channels of communication on the ground. Third, the corpus is bounded by Crossref-indexed, predominantly English-language, peer-reviewed scholarship from 2023–2026; Swahili-language grey literature, unindexed NGO reports, and informal WhatsApp- or SMS-based communication — channels known to be significant in rural Tanzania — are likely under-represented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The coded network comprises eight actor categories connected by twelve distinct pathways documented across the reviewed corpus (Table 1; Picture 1). Two actor categories — local knowledge holders and local government authorities — emerge as the most central nodes in the network, each

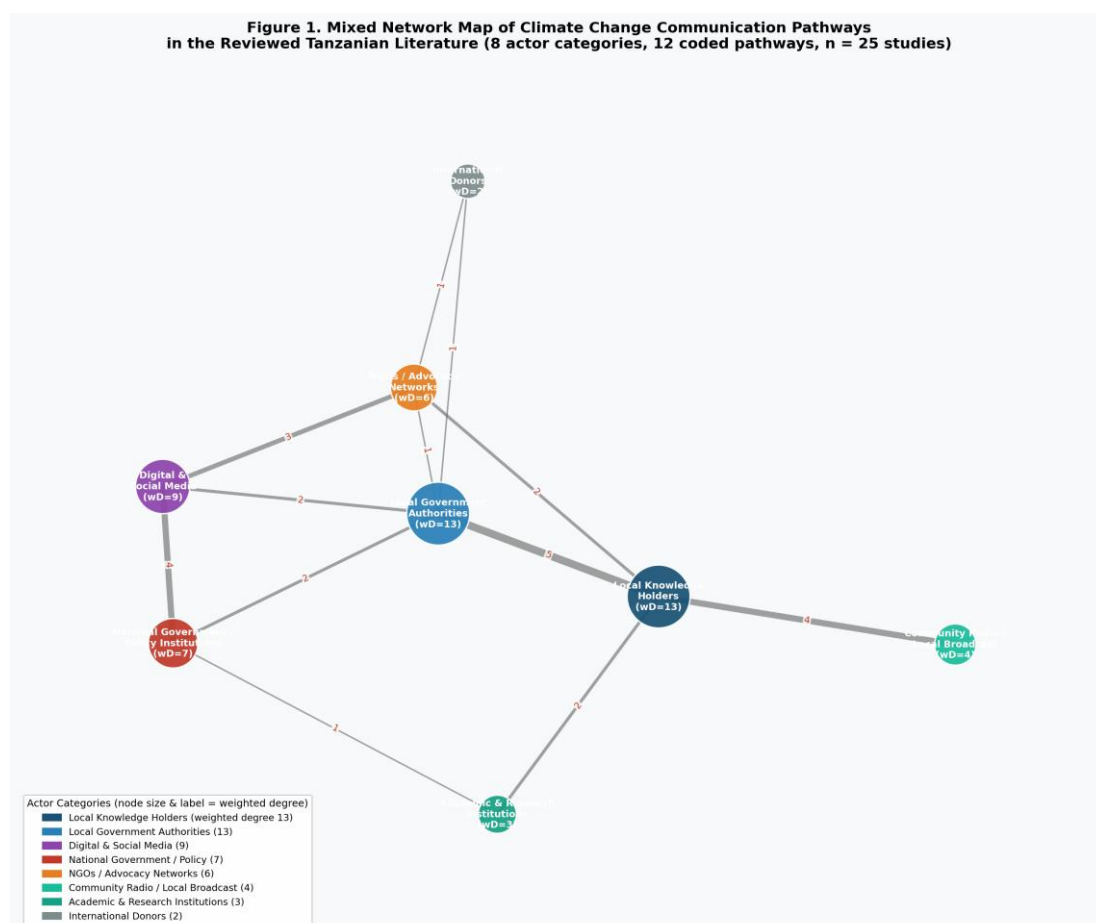
accumulating a weighted degree of 13 across their respective connections, followed by digital and social media (weighted degree 9).

Table 1 Coded Communication Pathways Between Actor Categories in the Reviewed Literature (n = 25 Studies)

Pathway (Actor A – Actor B)		Illustrative Studies	Edge Weight	Dominant Direction
Local Knowledge Holders – Local Government Authorities		Maeda et al. (2025, 2026); Mrope et al. (2026); Sospeter et al. (2025); Siyao & Sanga (2023, 2024); Yerima et al. (2026)	5	Bidirectional, uneven
Community Radio – Local Knowledge Holders		Luhizo & Ngatigwa (2025); Mbegu et al. (2026); Backhaus et al. (2023); Boateng (2025)	4	Radio to community
Digital & Social Media – National Government / Policy		Temba & Di (2026); Alphonse (2024); William et al. (2025); Mohamed et al. (2026)	4	Bidirectional
Digital & Social Media – NGOs / Advocacy Networks		Latkin et al. (2024); Kim & Hara (2024); Yadav (2026)	3	Advocacy outward
Local Knowledge Holders – NGOs / Advocacy Networks		Vergotine et al. (2025); Boateng (2025)	2	Co-production
Local Knowledge Holders – Academic & Research Institutions		Moti et al. (2025); García-del-Amo et al. (2023)	2	Knowledge documentation
Digital & Social Media – Local Government Authorities		Ngowi et al. (2025a, 2025b)	2	Transparency / participation
Local Government Authorities – National Government / Policy		Maeda et al. (2026); Mrope et al. (2026)	2	Top-down governance
Local Government Authorities – NGOs / Advocacy Networks		Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al. (2024)	1	Institutional
Academic & Research Institutions – National Government / Policy		Goritz & Kolleck (2025)	1	Institutional
Local Government Authorities – International Donors		Tanzania Daily News (2026)	1	Financial
NGOs / Advocacy Networks – International Donors		Tanzania Daily News (2026)	1	Financial

The most heavily documented single pathway in the corpus connects local knowledge holders directly to local government authorities (edge weight = 5), reflecting a substantial literature on how indigenous and farmer knowledge intersects with formal local governance. Local governance structures in Monduli and Longido districts have been shown to directly shape the adaptation options available to communities and the degree of public trust those communities place in adaptation programming (Maeda et al., 2025; Maeda et al., 2026), while institutional mechanisms within local government authorities more broadly determine how seriously climate commitments are implemented (Mrope et al., 2026). Several studies document this pathway from the knowledge-holder side: smallholder farmers'

indigenous knowledge of climate adaptation in Morogoro (Sospeter et al., 2025), barriers smallholder tomato growers face in accessing and using formally provided adaptation information in Iringa and Morogoro (Siyao & Sanga, 2023, 2024), and the persistence of traditional water-management knowledge in Nyasa district even as government agencies attempt to formalise water governance (Yeremia et al., 2026). The directionality implied across these studies is bidirectional but uneven: local government authorities are formally responsible for transmitting adaptation information downward, yet much of the documented traffic concerns local knowledge holders' difficulty in accessing, trusting, or acting on that information, or local government's own difficulty in recognising and incorporating indigenous knowledge upward into planning.



Picture 1 Mixed Network Map of Climate Change Communication Pathways in the Reviewed Tanzanian Literature (8 Actor Categories, 12 Coded Pathways, N = 25 Studies)

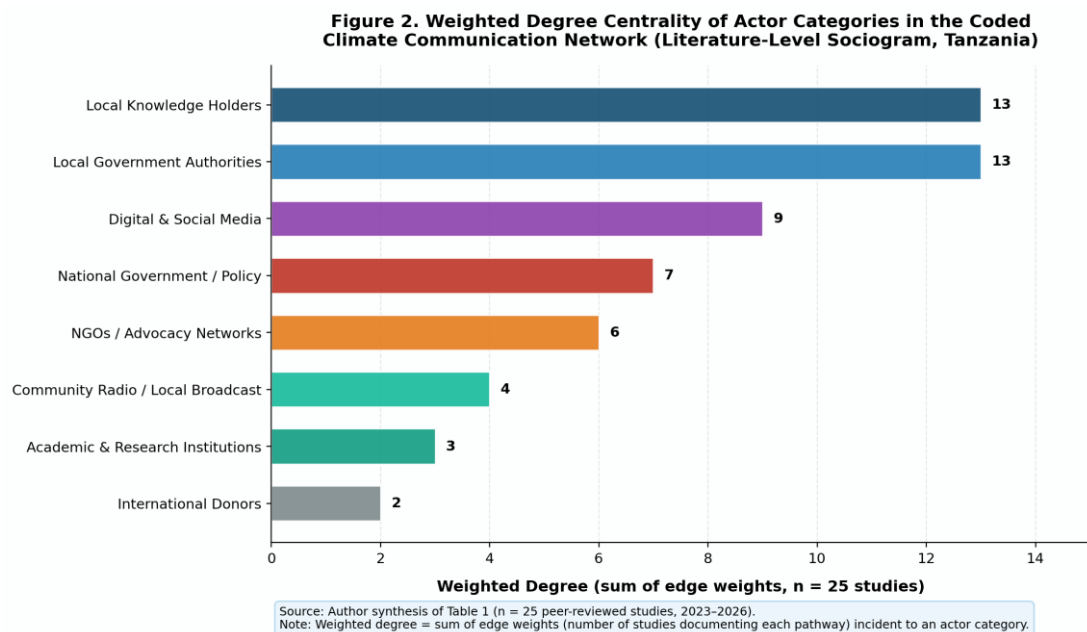
Note: Node size and the weighted degree (wD) label denote weighted degree (sum of edge weights incident to that actor category). Edge labels show edge weight (number of reviewed studies documenting that pathway). Source: Authors' construct, derived from Table 1 of this manuscript.

Community radio registers the second-most heavily weighted single pathway, connecting to local knowledge holders with an edge weight of 4. Tanzanian audiences continue to engage substantially with community and religious broadcasting such as Radio Maria Tanzania (Luhizo & Ngatigwa, 2025), and indigenous knowledge about climate adaptation in the Nyakyusa community of Rungwe circulates partly through enhanced information flows that include broadcast channels alongside oral transmission (Mbegu et al., 2026). This finding has a direct international parallel: Backhaus et al. (2023) document how Australian community radio continues to mediate “the local” within national climate discourse even as digital platforms expand, suggesting that radio's role as a trusted, geographically anchored, and often vernacular-language medium is not a residual or declining communication form but a durable complement to digital channels — a pattern Boateng (2025) extends to indigenous media strategies in the Ghanaian climate-communication context.

Digital and social media occupies a structurally important bridging position, with its strongest single connection running to national government and policy institutions (edge weight = 4) and a substantial secondary connection to NGOs and advocacy networks (edge weight = 3). On the government side, open government data is increasingly framed as a driver of climate resilience and digital transformation in Tanzanian agriculture (Temba & Di, 2026), while information and communication technology is explicitly discussed as a means of enhancing local-government transparency (Ngowi et al., 2025a) and citizen participation (Ngowi et al., 2025b). Leveraging information technology more broadly for climate mitigation and adaptation in Tanzania is framed as carrying real opportunities alongside persistent implementation challenges (Alphonse, 2024). On the advocacy side, the international comparative literature shows that climate activism communication in social networks follows identifiable predictors (Latkin et al., 2024), and that NGOs' public engagement can be mapped through the semantic structure of online discourse (Kim & Hara, 2024); Yadav (2026) frames Tanzanian digital platforms explicitly as “pathways to democracy” that expand civic and electoral engagement. Yet this bridging role is not unambiguously positive: adherence to journalism ethics on Tanzanian digital-only outlets remains uneven (William et al., 2025), and Tanzanian women in public life — including female Members of Parliament — face disproportionate gendered digital harassment on platforms such as Instagram (Mohamed et al., 2026), a dynamic that can suppress the very voices that digital advocacy pathways are assumed to amplify.

Local knowledge holders' connections to NGOs and advocacy networks and to academic and research institutions (edge weight = 2 each) point to a smaller but conceptually important set of pathways through which indigenous knowledge is co-produced with, rather than simply transmitted to, outside actors. Vergotine et al. (2025) document informal networks of local innovation and knowledge co-creation supporting ecosystem restoration in coastal Tanzania, explicitly framing local communities as co-producers of climate knowledge rather than passive recipients of scientific information. The international comparative literature offers a methodological model for taking this pathway seriously on its own terms: García-del-Amo et al. (2023) apply network analysis directly to local communities' own reports of climate change impacts in Sierra Nevada, treating community knowledge as the primary data source rather than as a variable to be explained by external factors. Moti et al. (2025) similarly document how Maasai agro-pastoralists' indigenous seasonal-forecasting knowledge in Northern Tanzania functions as a parallel, and in places more locally trusted, system alongside formal meteorological services.

Finally, national government and policy institutions, international donors, and academic and research institutions occupy comparatively peripheral positions in the network (weighted degrees of 7, 2, and 3 respectively), each connected mainly through a small number of governance- or research-oriented pathways. Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al. (2024) demonstrate, in the Honduran case, how social-network analysis can explicitly trace institutional actors' links with vulnerable municipalities to identify pathways toward improved cooperation — a methodological strategy that this study's network synthesis adapts at the literature level rather than the primary-fieldwork level. Goritz and Kolleck (2025) similarly show how discourse network analysis can reveal which institutional actors most shape climate change education policy. Within the Tanzanian corpus specifically, the relative peripherality of international donors in the coded network (connecting only to local government and NGOs, both with weight 1) is notable: it suggests that, at least within the literature reviewed here, donor influence is documented mainly as flowing through formal government and NGO channels rather than directly engaging local knowledge holders or digital and community media — a structural gap with implications for how donor-funded climate programmes are designed and communicated.



Picture 2 Weighted Degree Centrality of Actor Categories in the Coded Climate Communication Network

Source: Author synthesis of Table 1 (n = 25 peer-reviewed studies, 2023–2026). Weighted degree = sum of edge weights (number of studies documenting each pathway) incident to an actor category.

Read together, the network suggests that climate change communication in Tanzania is best understood not as a single pipeline running from international science to local farmers, but as a multi-actor system in which local knowledge holders and local government authorities form the structural core, community radio remains a durable and locally trusted secondary channel, and digital and social media increasingly serves as the bridge connecting this local core to national policy debate and international advocacy — a bridge that carries real democratic and informational benefits (Yadav, 2026) alongside real risks of ethical inconsistency and gendered harm (Mohamed et al., 2026; William et al., 2025). For Tanzanian climate communication strategy, this implies that strengthening the bridge — through digital and media literacy support, gender-sensitive platform governance, and continued investment in community radio alongside digital expansion — may do more to improve the overall flow of climate knowledge than focusing on any single channel in isolation.

CONCLUSION

This study has synthesised 25 peer-reviewed studies published between 2023 and 2026 to construct a mixed network model of how climate change communication pathways operate in Tanzania, combining qualitative thematic coding of actor relationships with a literature-level graph-theoretic mapping of those relationships. The resulting network indicates that local knowledge holders and local government authorities form the structural core of Tanzanian climate communication, that community radio remains a durable secondary channel particularly suited to rural and vernacular-language audiences, and that digital and social media increasingly function as a bridge connecting local-level knowledge to national policy debate and international advocacy, albeit a bridge that carries documented risks of uneven journalistic standards and gendered digital harassment alongside its informational and democratic benefits. These findings should be read as a conceptual scaffold rather than a definitive empirical account of communication behaviour in any specific Tanzanian community: the network is constructed from secondary literature rather than from original network surveys, and its structure is shaped by which pathways scholars have chosen to study rather than necessarily by which pathways carry the most real-world communicative traffic. Future research should pursue primary mixed-methods social network analysis within specific Tanzanian regions — surveying named farmers, local officials, radio producers, and digital advocates directly to map who actually communicates climate information to whom, how often, and through which channel — in order to test, refine, or challenge the literature-

derived structure proposed here, and to generate evidence that can more precisely guide investment in Tanzania's climate communication infrastructure.

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