

Creative Dissent, Community Radio and Social Movement Learning: a collaborative meaning-making panel on the Yihi Katsɛmɛ - the latest iteration of the Ada Songor Salt Movement (Ghana)

Background

For the past eight years there has been an ongoing participatory action research study of social movement learning with the movements in the Ada Songor focused on defending communal access to West Africa's largest salt yielding lagoon. This communal access is the basis of an artisanal salt winning practice that is over 400 years old, and is the foundation upon which over 60,000 people make their livelihood. The study has been moving with these movements as they have contended with challenges from forces internal and external to the area. Crucial to recent success of activism around the Songor is the emergence of a new iteration of the movement, the Yihi Katsɛmɛ (Brave Women) – a movement of women from salt winning communities around the Songor. Having struck out independently from previous movements that limited their leadership, Yihi Katsɛmɛ has been using a popular education approach that uses creativity to take questions of culture, history and livelihood concerning the Songor and engage with powerful local and national forces about the future of the lagoon . The panel will provide an opportunity for leaders from Yihi Katsɛmɛ, as well as their allied community radio station and national community radio network, and an academic ally from STFX University (Canada) to share their perspectives on this process, and the learning that has emerged from it.

Amongst other things, the panel will discuss the way song emerged organically as a way to mobilize at the community level – using old songs to remind community members of how the resource use to be; it will share how after years of marching in protest at the yearly Ada festival, this past year saw them accepted; it will discuss the collective development of a dance drama that was used at the festival and in Accra to bring the women's story of the Songor to a wider audience (excerpts of this drama can be shown, depending on time); it will describe the way a tapestry has been used for several years to lay the ground work for Yihi Katsɛmɛ's voice beginning to be heard; and finally, the panel will share the role of community radio not only in terms of programming but also as an ally in contributing to and democratizing the knowledge production of the movement.