

The Impact of Communication on Community Development

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ABSTRACT This research work examined the impact of communication on community development. It examined why effective communication is needed for rural community development to be sustained. The study made use of descriptive survey research. The population consisted of both men and women in the rural community of Akinyele local government area of Oyo State. A sample of 133 men and women were used for the study. Data collected were subjected to percentage analysis. The study revealed that effective communication would lead to active participation of members in community development. It was also revealed that when community groups are closely involved in communication strategy, it helps them take ownership of the initiative of development rather than seeing themselves as beneficiaries of development. Based on the findings, it was recommended that community leaders as well as community development agents should engage in clear communication so as to enlist the participation of community members in development issues.

INTRODUCTION

Community development is the process of helping a community to strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential. Communication is a key component of sustainable development. Mobilizing community members for community development purpose is important but members of communities can only be mobilized when communication is effective. Adequate community communication leads to effective collaborative efforts in issue of development. Communication will help engage citizens in development. To bring about social change among the marginalized and vulnerable population groups, participation must be fostered through communication; as such will lead to the transformation of the community. This is to say that communication is a central or the mediating factor facilitating and contributing to collective change process (Sarvaes and Liu 2007). Effective communication will help in the move of people from individual centered deficit model of learning, behaviour development and change to a collective and community-focused model of participation, appreciation and equity.

Community is precipitated on the fact that daily interaction of citizens is essential to collective action and that effective communication serves to stimulate and direct such interactions (Communication and Community Development in <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/maziarticles.php?id=272>.)

When mention is made of communication in

relation to community/rural development, it means an interactive process in which information, knowledge and skills relevant for development are exchanged between community members and information providers either personally or through media such as radio, print, telephones and cybernetics. The aim of effective rural communication is to put rural people in a position to have the necessary information for decision making and the relevant skills to improve their livelihood.

In communication for development, rural people are at the centre of any given development initiative and so communication is used in this sense for people's participation and community mobilization, decision making and action, confidence building for raising awareness, sharing knowledge and changing attitudes, behaviour and lifestyles (FAO 2006).

Communication for development is defined as the planned and systematic use of communication through inter-personal channels, ICTs, audio-visuals and mass media.

- Communication is to be used to collect and exchange information among all those concerned in planning a development initiative with the aim of reaching an agreement on the problems facing development issue and seeking options for their solutions.
- To mobilize people for development action and to assist in solving problems and misunderstandings that may arise during development plan.
- To enhance the pedagogical and commu-

nication skills of development agents so as to have effective dialogue with their audience ([http://www/newchalinitiative.net](http://www.newchalinitiative.net)).

From the rural development perspective, communication is seen as a social process designed to bring together every community member in a two-way process where people are both senders and receivers of information and creators of knowledge.

Communication for development focuses on two areas namely: information dissemination and motivation training of field workers and rural members. Full potential for development can only be realized if knowledge and technologies are shared effectively and rural people involved in the process are motivated to achieve success. Communication is important for rural development in the face of various challenges facing rural development. Such challenges are characterized by

- (a) A dearth of information,
- (b) Conflicting messages (difficulty in knowing what is relevant/correct information),
- (c) A lack of well-developed Information and communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure and low levels of ICT skills. (www.fao.org/sk/knl_en.htm).

When talking of communication for rural development, it should be noted that in reality, the electronic media are largely available in institutions and companies, the contents of which are in languages that rural populace do not use or communicate in, such have little relevance to their needs and their use require training. However, it is assumed that the availability of new information technologies and media like the internet, rural radio, mobile phones and TV open more channels for communication and give the chance for wide access to information and to limited extent to interactive communication. For electronic communication to be effectively used in rural development, the issue of connectivity, content and context must be addressed and assured to realize the potential of information technologies (Thussu 2000).

Adedokun (2008) sees development as the power of people to solve their own problems with their own wisdom, experience and resources with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation. Akinpelu (2002) sees the target of development as being human beings and not the material accumulation surrounding them or of the economic growth of the nation. Akinpelu sees

development as the process of enhancing man's knowledge, skills, attitudes, boosting his self confidence, self-reliance, and self-pride to face the world. For all these to come about, there is need for effective communication.

Community development involves the coming together of a group of people in a community planning and acting together to bring about the satisfaction of their needs with a view to bringing about desirable change in the lives of the people through their cooperative efforts and by actively taking part in measures designed to improve their conditions of living (Adedokun 2008).

The coming together of these people in a cooperative way presupposes that there must be effective communication between and among the people. Without effective communication, there would be misgiving and misunderstanding and this would always result in conflict, lack of co-operation and subsequently lead to underdevelopment.

To Braimoh (1988), effective communication is an essential tool for the establishment and maintenance of a good social and working relationship. It involves constant change of ideas and interactions among people for the solution of their problems and they see effective communication as essential prerequisite for every aspect of group functioning. With all these facts, effective communication cannot be brushed aside if rural development is to be accomplished because to Anyanwu (1999), community development depends on the effectiveness of communication as it helps in sharing of ideas and opinions and diffusion of good ideas while irrelevant ideas are thrown out. Effective communication enhances participation of every community member towards the achievement of the goals of community/rural development. It makes people participate actively in matters of development. Communication is a powerful trend to facilitate participating development. It is about encouraging community participation with development initiatives through a strategic utilization of various communication strategies.

Community development involves strengthening the capacity of individuals within the community to accomplish the community's set goals. Communication process brings together all stakeholders in community development in a dialogue of ideas on development needs, objectives and actions (Manyozo 2006). This is to say that as

an agent with a community or as a development practitioner or as a leader in the community, you are first a communication actor and so the way you approach the local community, the attitude you adopt in interacting with community members, the way you understand and discuss issues, the way you collect and share information, all involve ways of establishing communication with people. The way communication is established and nurtured will affect how involved people will feel about the issues raised and how they will participate or not in the development initiative (Quebral 1973).

Effective communication is a two-way communication, it should not be a one way dissemination of information, nor should it consist of telling people what they should or should not do. It should not be viewed as a way to motivate people to participate in activities in which they did not have input. Communication is expected to be used to facilitate community participation in a development initiative. When communication is used for community development purpose, it is based on the one hand on participating process and on the other hand on media and interpersonal communication which facilitates a dialogue among different stakeholders around a common development goal, with the objective of developing and implementing a set of activities to contribute to its solution, or its realization and which supports and accompanies this initiative.

Communication for community development means moving from a focus of informing and persuading people to changing their behaviour or attitudes to a focus of facilitating exchanges to solve a common identified problem. This in essence would lead to a common development initiative to experiment with people and to identify what is needed to support the initiative in terms of partnerships, knowledge and material conditions.

The above can be linked to communication as described by Udoakah (1998). To him, communication is a process through which needs, emotions, desires, goals and sentiments are expressed among human beings using codes, symbols and languages understood by the parties involved in the process.

In the process of community development therefore, communication is important as it involves the study of people relating to themselves and to one another in groups, societies, influenc-

ing one another and being influenced, informing one another and being informed, teaching and being taught, loving and being loved, entertaining and being entertained (Adepoju 2000). Communication from the above summary of what communication is about can be said to be an educative process and one which leads to effective community development process.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between communication and effective community development?
2. Will effective communication lead to citizen participation in community development?

METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey research method. The population for the study consisted of all men and women in Akinyele local government area of Oyo state. Random sampling technique was used to choose 133 men and women for the study.

A carefully prepared 10-item questionnaire was administered to the respondents to examine the impact of communication on community development.

To validate the questionnaire, experts in the area of communication were consulted while the questionnaire items were test retested on 40 men and women in Onidundu and Sango Bon communities in Akinyele local government two weeks before the actual administration of the instruments and a Crombach alpha of 0.68 was obtained which is an indication of good reliability.

RESULTS

Hypothesis: Is there any relationship between effective communication and community development?

Table 1 showed that people were aware of what community development is all about. Hence, there is 75.93% positive response to statement 1 as opposed to the negative response of 24.61%. From the table it was affirmed that with good communication, there would be collaborative efforts on issues of development; hence 121 subjects responded positively to that statement while only 10 subjects responded negatively.

It is observed from table 2 that 130 subjects believed that when communication is effective,

Table 1: Relationship between effective communication and community development

S. No.	Items	Responses			
		Agreed		Disagreed	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Community development is a way of helping a community to strengthen itself and develop towards its full potentials	101	75.93	32	24.06
2.	Communication leads to effective collaborative efforts in issues of development	121	90.97	10	7.51

participation is enhanced while only 3 subjects believed otherwise. 131 subjects also believed that daily interaction of community members is essential for collective action while only 2 subjects believed otherwise.

Table 2: Effect of communication on effective participation in community development

S. No.	Items	Responses			
		Agreed		Disagreed	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Effective communication leads to good participation in community development	130	97.74	3	2.25
2.	Daily interaction of community members is essential for collective action	131	98.49	2	1.50

DISCUSSION

The tables above revealed that communication is of great importance in community development. It was also revealed that effective communication has a great impact on members' participation in community development and the effect of communication in the development of communities cannot be underestimated when one realizes that there is need for collaborative actions among community members. For this collaboration to be effective, there is need for effective communication. Because there is bound to be social interactions among community members and this calls for effective communication.

This view is supported by Adepoju (2000) that an organized society exists only as the flux of understanding maintained by communication between individuals and groups. He reiterates that every single act of social behaviour involves communication of ideas and emotions in either an explicit or an implicit manner.

The importance of communication in community development was also emphasized by Manyozo (2006) that when community groups are more closely involved in communication strategy, it helps them take ownership of the initiative of development rather than seeing themselves as beneficiaries of development. The study also revealed that communication tools such as video, posters and radio would aid in the process of community development. Planning of community development involves preparing and transmitting messages and this could only be made effective and suitably adapted to targeted group with effective communication. This is because community development is a social action process in which people of a community organise themselves for planning and action.

Communication is also an essential ingredient, which would go a long way in fostering community participation through the process of self-help.

Community development process provides the opportunity of involving and motivating people of the community to define, identify, analyze and solve problems that they feel are important. This is predicated on good communication. Alamgir (1989) is of the view that participation facilitates shared decision-making to find sound and feasible solutions to local problems and so there is need for effective communication in the community and among community members to bring the needed development to their community.

The study revealed that daily interaction among community members is a factor for development and this means in all the community members do to exchange ideas and opinions, there is need for use of words and so words must be put to use in such a way that everybody in the community would come to a proper understanding of what to do to bring about community development. Adepoju (2000) supporting the appropriate use of words in communication believes that words are the instruments and the tools of trade in community development hence the importance of choosing and arranging words in such a way as to bring out the idea being expressed as exactly as possible out of one mind and into another.

On the whole the study examined the impact of communication on community development. The study was carried out in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo state and the data collected were subjected to percentage analysis. The

study revealed that for communities to be developed, there is need for effective communication. With effective communication, people will have the power to solve their own problems. The study also revealed that with effective communication, mobilization of community members would be easy as they would have been made to understand the reasons for their being mobilized and this will subsequently lead to active citizen participation in the programmes of community development.

CONCLUSION

The research was carried out to find out the extent to which communication would help in the development of communities. The study made use of frequency counts and simple percentages to analyse the data collected. The study revealed that communication is essential in fostering community development; that with good communication strategies, community members would take ownership of development initiatives in their hands and that good and effective communication would foster community development.

The study concluded that communication is important in community development and that it must be fostered for people to participate actively in the process of community development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To this end, the following recommendations are made:

Members of each community should be made to realize the importance of communication in the process of community development. In realization of this, community members should be made to see the importance of choosing the right words for use in the right context so that ideas and opinions on community development, as expressed by each community member would be understood and eventually lead to collaborative efforts.

Community leaders should endeavour to engage in clear communication so as to enlist the participation of every body in the process of community development.

Community leaders or community development agents should ensure effective circulation of information among different participants by using communication tools and channels appropriate to the groups involved.

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