

## PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: AN INSTRUMENT FOR CHANGING THE CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN NIGERIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Development projects in Nigeria are often carried in a kind top – down communication approach rather than the two- way and horizontal approach. Decision makers communicate with contractors who carry out project with no engagement of the beneficiaries in the planning and implementation process of the project. This result to decrees in the quality and improvement of project design, lack of enhancement of people interest and participation, poor perception of project objectives and lack of goals achievement. This paper examines the concept of participatory development communication, it facilitate in achieving sustainable developmental programs. It also justifies the need for target beneficiaries of development programs to be involved in the planning and execution of such programs. Moreover, the paper takes a look at poor current situation of developmental programs in Nigeria and suggested how such situation could be change.*

**Key words:** *Communication, Development, Developmental programs*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria like its counterpart developing nations faces a lot of challenges in its quest for development. Nevertheless, while some schools believed that the problem of development in African nations is as a result of external factors, other schools believed that it is the combination of both internal and external factors, while believed that the problem of development in African nations is purely internal. Whatever the cause of the problem might be, it is worrisome that Africa despite its rich resources, both natural and human resources yet could not secure ways to tackle these challenges and develops in order for its people to achieve a greater life fulfillment and potentials. According to Boafo (2006) regardless of the types of development challenges in African countries, their communication and information have role to play in order to address these challenges. Knowledge and information are essential for people to respond such challenges of socio-economic and technological changes. But this will not make any meaning except they are well communicated.

Development communication involves dialoging with people in order to motivate them to participate in the process of their development. It is premised on the believe that people are in the better position to know their problems and the appropriate solutions to the problems rather than an observer from outside. Dialogue is the cradle upon which trust is built, knowledge is shared and mutual understanding is established between development planners and program beneficiaries without which sustainable and successful development program cannot be achieved. When there is trust and mutual understanding, people easily appreciate the need to accept changes in their socio-economic, political and cultural life (Anaeto, 2010).

### **2. DEFINITION OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

Development communication is an act of using communication tools to engage in a purposive communication, not a talking-sake communication with a particular people to support them to be transformed from a state of poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth which enables social equality and greater fulfillment.(Mcphail, 2009, p. 3).

Also, development communication is defined as the provision of useful information, knowledge and skills via effective communication strategies to support the process of development.(Boafo, 2006 in Anaeto2010, p. 35)

Another definition of development communication says that development communication is the systematic and appropriate utilization of the media including the traditional media to not only inform but also train and motivate people mainly the less privilege to they themselves identify their problems and set appropriate measures for solving the problems according to their own context. (Quebral 2006 in Mcphail2009)

### **3. DEFINITION OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

Participatory development communication according to Bessette (2004) is the process of involving the local community in identifying their development problems, discovering its many dimensions, identifying potential solutions (or a set of action) and taking decision of a concrete set of actions to experiment or implement. Participatory development communication involves less or no interference of

a development planner into the process of identifying and implementing solutions to the problems of the target beneficiaries of development project.

In participatory development communication people identify and decide what they need, plan how to achieve their needs, obtain whatever assistance may come to them and implement with the communicator leading from behind (Anaeto, 2010). Therefore it could be said participatory development communication seeks the involvement of people in their own development process. Participatory development communication emphasizes the planning and implementation of development program with the people and not for them. Boafo (2006) in Anaeto (2010) posits that participatory development communication puts accent in the process of planning and using communication resources, channels, approaches and strategic in program design to bring about progress, change or development and on the involvement of people or community in the development efforts.

#### **4. ESSENCE OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

Development communication as an instrument in the development process concerns with the use of communication resources, strategies and methodologies to provide people with knowledge and information that change their behavior. However, In the context of developing nations, the term development communication means planned communication to eradicate or substantially reduce poverty, social inequality, illiteracy and others.

Development communication concerns with the dissemination of relevant information that increases peoples stock of knowledge and change their attitudes and values to enable them undertake and participate in the development process. It is a kind of communication that helps one to understand the needs and social realities of the people and mobilize them towards development goals. Development communication seeks to mobilize the rural people for development actions through sharing knowledge and skills, building trust, listening, building policies, and reconciliation towards a set development goals and objectives (Mapolupolus, 2006).

#### **5. THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

According to Maslog (1986) communication is like breathing is so much a part of human life that people take it for granted. Communication, like breathing cannot be taken for granted. People assume that they are automatically communicating when they speak or write, but that is not always the case.

A good and successful communication takes place only when there is listening, understanding and trust between the parties in communication. In participatory development communication, the development planner serves as a facilitator of the development process. He sees members of the target beneficiary community as partners in development. He listens to their opinions, beliefs and perceptions and brings them together using common ground approach and simple and relevant language.

Communication in participatory development communication is a two-way and horizontal form of communication. The development planner promotes dialogue and horizontal exchange of ideas, views and opinions. Mapalopulos (2006) says contacting communities involved in the project, listening to their concerns and suggestions, assessing risks and opportunities or taping into local language can be of crucial value to the success of a program.

Effective communication engages people into an active participation in development program through contributing ideas, taking initiatives, and articulating their needs and problems while asserting their autonomy. Effective communication enhances dialogue and decision- making from the participants at every stage of development process. Development communicator therefore, initiates dialogue for reconciliation and achieving a common ground. Also Bahm (1996:7) in Mefalopulos (2006) says “everybody wins if anybody wins”. In this way, dialogue becomes instrumental in setting the groundwork for any successful development initiatives and dialogue is achieved through effective communication

#### **6. THE CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS**

In Nigeria development programs often fail. Programs have been known to fail in spite of all the efforts being put to ensure their success. It is not surprising, however, taking into considerations that in many parts of the world especially in developing countries Nigeria inclusive, communication which is very essential for program success has not been given the due consideration.

Development projects in Nigeria are often carried in a kind of top-down communication approach rather than the two-way and horizontal approach. Decision makers communicate with contractors who carry out the project with no engagement of the beneficiaries in the planning and

implementation process of the project. These results to decrease in the quality and improvement of project design, lack of enhancement of people interest and participation, poor perceived project objectives and lack of goals achievement. Amartya (1999) in Mapolupolus (2006) believed that dialogic communication is not only effective as a problem-solving tool but it also builds confidence, prevents conflict and addresses the issue of poverty by engaging the poorest marginal sectors in the process concerning issues of relevant to them. Communication in development project in Nigeria serves as a tool for information dissemination.

Decision maker and managers use communication as a tool of passing information rather than a means of dialoging. This results to communication intervention only at a halfway through the project circle rather than as part of the projects initial conception when it is more strategic and cost- effect.

In Nigeria, the highly needed and relevant development projects seldom found on the governments' priority list. Governments often decide what project to provide to people based on what they believe is good for the people, not what the people themselves believe is good for them. This non consensus and enforcement nature of development project in Nigeria turned the project beneficiaries into are passive recipients rather than active agents of development. Project beneficiaries have no control over the process of their own development.

This results to development of projects that are not in the interest of the people. In Nigeria it is common to see a community whose need is drinking water was instead provided with toilet facilities, a community whose need is a hospital was instead provided with a stadium, a community whose need is teaching staff in it school was instead provided with additional classrooms, a community whose need is additional classroom was instead provided with a mosque all as a result of the failure of the governments, NGOs, foundations and other donor agencies and organizations to understand and appreciate the need to dialogue with beneficiaries and reconcile with them in matters of disagreement and lack of interest.

Also in Nigeria, additional projects are known to be provided to communities where similar projects of the same purpose and function already exist in abundant or operate within limited resources and unlimited demands. Projects meant for a particular people were provided to the people without the people being contacted or involved in the planning, execution, evaluation and maintenance process of the project. For instance, It could be recall that many experts, educationalists and other stockholders came out through the media and challenged the decision of the immediate past government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathon then of providing federal universities in all the states of the federations who had no federal universities at the time when most of the existing federal and state universities in the country were apparently cracking down due to lack of good salaries and teaching facilities including classrooms, instructional materials and basic office facilities.

It could also be recall that from 1976 to date, governments at various levels in Nigeria introduced a number of programs most of which had failed to yield any significant results. For instance, Educational program like U. P. E. (Universal primary education), A.E (Adult Education), N.E (Nomadic Education), 6 – 3 –3- 4 system of education, U. B. E. (Universal Basic Education), F.G.C.E (Free Girl Child Education) F.E.W (Free Education for Woman) and in recent time the A.E (Almajiri Education) are some of the popular federal government educational programs which were introduced in the country with the view to achieve educational development goals and objectives. However, none of these programs was fully successful.

The “Nomadic Education program” For instance, is a program introduced by the Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida. The program was basically aimed at educating Fulani people through training and provision of free educational facilities and instructional materials with the view to bringing them closer to the society in line with the federal government effort to restore peace and respect for others among various groups in the country particularly between Fulani herdsmen and farmers.

However, to dismay of many Nigerians, the Fulani people and other relevant stockholders were not truly contacted or rather involved in the planning and execution of the program as a result of which even accessing the target beneficiaries which is very cardinal to the success of the program became a problem. This resulted to the total failure of the program. Some state governments in Nigeria often spend huge amount of their federal government allocations in carrying out programs that are less important and relevant to the socio – economic, cultural and political development of their people. Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, such types of projects could be seen abandoned in most of our cities and rural areas or being turned into a different purpose.

Some of these projects are however hundred percent completed but only remain a waste of resources as no one seems to appreciate their importance. For instance some of the airports built in some states in the country where there are no commercial activities could also be considered as a waste of public funds.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

One of the conclusions of the paper is that effective communication and participation is the major problem of development program in Nigeria. The study also concluded that effective communication leads to active participation of beneficiaries of a program and other stockholders and brings about trust, sharing of idea and listening between the development planners and the beneficiaries.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the vital role participatory development communication is playing in development programs, the paper proffered the following recommendations:

- Conceptualization of a program idea for a development program should be strongly based on the need, desire and believe of the beneficiaries in the value of the program in order to make it a success.
- Participation of even ordinary members of the beneficiary community of a development program in the program process must not be taken for granted as some members of the community may have potentials and good initiatives to better the realization of meaningful and effective programs.
- Reconciliation and dialoging with target beneficiaries of a development program through effective communication in matters of disagreement and variation of interest should be considered as a precursor for achieving any successful development program in Nigeria.

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