

## ROLES OF COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *The focus of the paper is on the roles of communication in community development. The paper highlighted the roles of communication in community development to include conscientization of members of participating communities, provision of relevant information, provision of opportunities for dialogue and discussion and provision of opportunities for sharing of information and ideas that will facilitate effective service delivery in community development. Based on the issues discussed, the paper recommended the followings: (1) Communication should be explored appropriately to reach various segments of the participating communities in community development (2) Dialogue and discussion in communication with relevant stake holders should be explored extensively in promoting meaningful community development. (3) There should be regular communication with community leadership in the participating communities. (4) There should equally be regular communication with the various segments and community based organizations (CBOs) to elicit collective action and participatory involvement of members of the participating communities in promoting sustainable people-oriented community development projects.*

**KEYWORDS:** Roles, Communication, Community and Development.

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### INTRODUCTION

Every community development initiative as a social development project requires effective communication among various groups of people who are involved in such development project in the participating communities. Aruma (1998) asserts that community development projects require effective communication in order to be very successful in the participating communities, It is, therefore, appropriate to keep communication channels open among project participants in order to keep them abreast of the community development projects. Pratt and Boyden (1985: 156) rightly note that:

*Every social development project involves communication: Communication between members of a community and a group; communication between development workers and the people among whom they work; communication between funding agencies and field workers and so on. Communication involves the sharing of ideas - information, of emotions, of hopes and fears - and is part of every human activity.*

The implication of this is that communication is very vital for the success of community development in order to provide adequate information to project participants in the

participating communities. In social environment, effective communication can be seen as a viable tool for a remarkable success in community development endeavours.

Communication in community development focuses on enhancing the interaction between the people promoting change that will impact positively on improving the living conditions of members of the participating communities and the people with whom they work to actualize their dream. It is imperative to keep communication channels open among all project participants and organizations involved in community development initiatives in the participating communities. In the views of Fasel (2000) communication is imperative to make ventures to be easy in order to ensure that all will participate in the society. Communication certainly elicits collective action of project participants in community development project in the participating communities.

Essentially, communication is the livewire of human culture which is characterized with many activities. Indeed, communication as the livewire of human culture as demonstrated in numerous human activities and organizations beginning from individuals to family as the basic social organization, villages, towns, communities, societies, countries including corporate organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), institutions, religious organizations notably churches among others in the social setting in the contemporary global environment can be likened to human heart as the organ which pumps blood in human body.

Fundamentally, a functional human heart pumps blood very well in the human body in order to keep it alive. Consequently, life is sustained when a functional human heart is at work in human body.

However, if human heart fails to pump blood in the human body, the life of such an individual is not only in serious danger, but it will eventually cease to exist as a mortal. Therefore, communication is very important to stimulate effective service delivery in every human being and organization in social settings in the contemporary global environment. In every human culture, communication sustains the efficient functionalities of the various social organizations and their numerous activities.

### **The Concept of Communication**

The concept of communication can simply be defined as a process by which people exchange information, express their thoughts, feelings, ideas and views in discussion with other people using verbal or nonverbal expressions, signs and writing to convey message among themselves in the society. Okwor (2009) simply defines communication as a process and the activity of passing information from an individual to another person in the society. Fasel (2000) defines communication as the ongoing interchange among people of thoughts, ideas, opinions, impressions, information and data by speech, writing or signs. Interestingly, communication is an ongoing interchange process which involves expression of thoughts, views, ideas, opinions, information and data in human environment in order to influence people's action for an improved living condition in the society. The concept of communication can also be viewed as an exchange of information between the sender and the receiver in the society. Communication is very critical to community development in the participating communities in the society. Schramm (1983) states that communication is a transaction where the communicator and

receiver are active and information is exchanged. The sharing of information is inevitable in communication for effective service delivery in community development.

Communication is very critical to community development in the participating communities in the society. Communication is, indeed, central to every human activity in community development process. In the views of Okwor (2009) communication is very central, because the person involved must endeavour to share his or her experience with target audience to explain the entire exercise. Without communication no information will be provided to relevant stakeholders as a guide for effective promotion of community development. This is why Salomon (1981) rightly notes that communication in more elaborate terms is a process whereby people influence each other, create and maintain a basis of shared information and ideas which they use as a guide. Certainly, communication will always provide people with information, ideas, experiences and data that will guide them in their community development drive in the participating communities.

Communication is defined as the process of exchange of information, conversation, ideas or messages with other people using words, signs, writings, verbal or non-verbal means of communication. The information, idea or message in the communication process originates from the sender who encodes or sends the information to a receiver who decodes the message to understand it for appropriate interpretation and application. Onah (2015) states while quoting Wehrich and Koontz that communication is viewed as the transfer of information from a sender to a receiver who must understand the information being received. The implication of this is that information originates from somebody and it is received by another person who has to understand information being received in order to ensure that communication is complete in human environment.

Communication is viewed as the means through which people of a community are linked together in order to achieve a common purpose of improving their living conditions in the participating community. Communication is a very powerful tool for group dynamics and co-ordination of activities in social settings in human environment. Onah (2015) states that group dynamics, co-ordination and change will not be achieved without communication in human organisations in the society.

Communication can as well be defined as a process whereby information, ideas, opinions, feelings and messages among others are shared between two people or more people in human environment. Cole (1996) views communication as the process whereby ideas are created, transmitted and interpreted as well as facts, feelings and opinions are expressed by two or more people in the society. The implication of this definition is that communication can be a group concern in social settings in human environment. Communication in community development is a group concern if the members of the participating communities want to achieve their objective of improving people's living conditions in their communities in human environment. In this circumstance, therefore, communication goes beyond interpersonal concerns to be more of a group concern in various communities in human environment.

## **The Roles of Communication in Community Development**

The roles of communication in community development are very enormous in the participating communities. The roles of communication in community development are as follows:

### **1. Conscientisation of Members of Participating Communities.**

Communication has the potential to stimulate conscientisation of members of the participating communities in community development initiatives. Communication, indeed, has great potential to conscientise members of the participating communities to really understand that they have the capabilities to identify their problems, community needs and prioritise them appropriately. The encouragement of local community initiatives in identifying community problems and proffering appropriate possible solutions, and subsequent prioritization of community needs is based on using communication effectively to stimulate awareness creation among members of the participating communities. Understandably, the value of community based organizations (CBOs) and group solidarity as a means of promoting people-oriented community development projects can equally be attributed to general critical awareness of members of the participating communities to really understand their prevailing realities. This awareness creation among members of the participating communities in community development initiatives owes much to the work of the famous Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire who was the originator of the concept of conscientization in the society. Freire (1985) refers to awareness creation as conscientization in his critical thinking of stimulating consciousness among members of participating communities in order to enable people to understand and respond appropriately to prevailing situations in any social setting in the society. Freire (1985) further remarks that a person does not change his or her reality without first understanding it. In the views of Aruma (1998) it is not easy to develop a new consciousness in the society. This, indeed, requires a lot of commitment and sacrifice to imbibe a new culture of consciousness and conscientization in human environment.

Conscientisation, therefore, plays very important role to conscientise the people of various social settings to understand the reality of their lives in their local environment. Freire (1985) states that conscientisation plays an important role to conscientise the minds of silent majority in order understand the problems that confront the people in their various localities. Conscientization as communication process in community development, therefore, repositions human thinking to clearly understand that the people have problems in their various localities and that the power to address such problems lies in their own hands in their own immediate environment and not from outside their communities in the society. The power of conscientisation in communication process reminds members of the participating communities as target population or audience in community development that they have a duty - a duty to identify their own problems and a duty to address the identified community problems appropriately and subsequent prioritization of such community problems in order to improve people's poor living conditions in such human environment. Aruma (2009) rightly notes that conscientisation is employed to conscientise human minds in various communities to understand the urgent need to engage in meaningful community

development projects in the society. Nzeneri (2010) appropriately observes that conscientisation is a process which helps people to develop themselves, their consciousness and critical awareness of their problems and environment. The central focus of conscientisation in communication process is to reposition human thinking to realize that people have a duty to develop themselves in order to be conscious and aware of their problems in their various communities in the society.

## **2. Provision of Relevant Information**

The provision of relevant information is another role of communication in community development in the participating communities. Without provision of relevant information in communication, people will not be stimulated to take action in community development that will improve the living conditions of members of the participating communities in the society. Pratt and Boyden (1985) rightly assert that the purpose of providing information is, indeed, to enable people to take certain actions. However, such information that will usually stimulate people to take action in promoting community development initiatives as a process whereby the efforts of the people concerned are united with those of governmental authorities, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporate organizations, wealthy individuals among other stakeholders in community development drive must endeavour to be relevant to the target population. In the views of Pratt and Boyden (1985) the information has to be relevant in the sense that it must, of course, be precisely the information that people need if they are actually to take the intended action. Indeed, the information must be precise and relevant enough to enable people to take the intended action that will address their problems and impact positively on improving their poor living conditions in the participating communities.

## **3. Provision of Opportunities for Dialogue and Discussion**

Additionally, the provision of opportunities for dialogue and discussion with relevant stakeholders in community development is an important role of communication in community development process. It is obvious that people in various participating communities cannot be engaged in dialogue and discussion with a view to facilitating the resolution of community development issues without communication between members of the participating communities and groups working to stimulate community development in the communities, between corporate organizations' community development workers and members of the host communities of the concerned companies, between funding agencies and field workers who work with project participants in various participating communities. Communication can be used in community development in dialogue and discussion session, especially during community consultations, community engagements and meetings to conscientise members of participating communities to understand the realities of the problems in their localities. It is usually observed that communication in dialogue and discussion is guided by disposition of the audience in the meeting. Through the process of discussion, new ideas and opinions are, indeed, highlighted in order to entrench the new ideas and opinions or sometimes to change views and attitudes in the meeting (Okwor, 2009). The development partners, corporate organizations and funding agencies engaged in

community development process usually employ dialogue and discussions during community engagements as means of reaching the project participants at local community level to resolve issues which hinder community development in the concerned communities.

It is usually observed that communication in dialogue and discussions is through verbal expressions for the benefit of the audience and target population. Okwor (2009) states that this indicates that ideas and opinions are exchanged among the participants in speech and in the course of discussion, new ideas and opinions emerge. The emergence of new ideas and opinions in certain cases positively influence the views of target audience in the course of the discussion.

#### **4. Provision of Opportunities for Sharing Information and Ideas**

The provision of an opportunity for sharing information and ideas among people of various communities remains an important role of communication which people receive to facilitate people-oriented community development projects. Indeed, community development depends greatly on communication, especially in sharing relevant information and ideas necessary enough to enhance community development activities in the participating communities. Community development consists of a transaction between the community development practitioners or change agents and project participants in the participating communities. Peters in Garrison (1989) sees communication as a process of shared experience which is undertaken voluntarily. Communication provides people with opportunities to share information and experience relating to community development activities such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA), explanation of community development process, community needs identification and prioritization, community development planning, implementation, management and evaluation.

To guarantee the sustainability of community development projects, the project participants must be adequately involved at all the stages of the projects beginning from project identification and conception to implementation. The sharing of information, ideas and experience among various communities encourage other communities to address similar situations in their localities (Pratt and Boyden, 1985). The sharing of information, ideas, and experience is obviously part of human culture which must be used adequately to address prevailing similar problems in other social environment in the society.

#### **5. Communication as an Indispensable Tool in all Stages of Community Development**

Communication as an indispensable tool for human existence in human environment applies to all stages of community development starting from conscientisation for awareness creation to community needs assessment, identification of community needs and prioritization, community development planning, implementation of community development projects and programmes, management of community development projects and programmes, project monitoring and evaluation. Communication

therefore, provides a conducive environment for promotion of community development in human environment. Onah (2012) states that communication tries to create an enabling environment for a development programme and project in the society, communication is very critical for promotion of community development in the society. Communication is, indeed, an indispensable tool in community development in the society. There will be no community development without communication in various communities in human environment.

## **6. Communication as a Unifying Factor in Community Development Activities.**

Communication is an important unifying factor in community development activities in various communities in human environment. Communication is a unifier of community development activities in various communities in the society. While commenting on a similar subject, Onah (2015) views the function of communication as a unifier of organizational activities. Indeed, communication as a unifier of community development, activities must be clearly understood by the project participants and relevant stakeholders in various communities in human environment. There is no community development without communication in human environment.

Onah (2015) asserts that, through communication the followings are achieved in community development in various communities:

- (i) Conscientisation of members of various participating communities.
- (ii) Attitudinal change
- (iii) Re-orientation
- (iv) Social mobilization for promotion of community development
- (v) Ideas are communicated or made available for promotion of community development
- (vi) Information is made available to people for use
- (vii) Promotion of achievement of community development objectives and goals.

In the view of Onah (2015), through communication, the social inputs are provided into the social systems, change of behaviour is apparent, information appears to be more productive and effective, change is achieved, objectives and goals of organizations are achieved as well as total quality management or total quality assurance is also achieved.

## **7. Communication as an Important Factor for Successful Community Development Projects**

Good communication is very vital for successful community development projects in various participating communities in human environment. Without good communication in community development, it will be difficult to achieve good results in such human development initiatives to improve people's living conditions in the society. Batchelor (2010) asserts that effective communication as a basis for promotion

of good working relationships and resolving conflicts is very important for stimulating productive team working in the society. The implication of this is that communication provides an opportunity for people to resolve conflicts amicably and engage in promotion of good relationships that stimulate group action which usually leads to productive community development initiatives that help to improve people's living conditions.

Good communication provides an opportunity for people to listen to each other in human environment. Batchelor (2010) states that the importance of good communication is listening to other people in the society. Successful community development project is about good communication in human environment. Onah (2012) notes that objectives of communication help to create an enabling environment for a development programme in the society. An important objective of communication is, therefore, to provide an enabling or conducive environment for promotion of community development in various communities in the society.

#### **8. Communication Motivates the Target Audience to Promote Community Development**

The objectives of communication help to generate ideas, information, suggestions, or solutions that will enable people to address specific human concerns in order to improve people's living conditions in human environment. Onah (2012) further notes that the objective of communication help to create demands for specific services in the society. A good objectives of communication must, indeed, motivate the target audience to identify, assess, prioritize, accept, act and choose a desired approach to address prevailing issues of common concern for the ultimate purpose of improving people's living conditions in various participating communities in human environment. Communication, indeed, applies to all areas of human interaction in development process. The Industrial Society (1993) clearly states that communication promotes common undertakings and group commitment. Communication applies to all areas of human understandings or endeavour in human environment. Essentially, the function of communication is highly indispensable in human environment.

### **CONCLUSION**

Communication affords members of participating communities an opportunity to really understand the problems confronting their communities and to a certain extent on how to address them through collective action for improved living conditions of people of the various communities. Communication helps communities to break out of the culture of silence and address the problems and issues of concern in their various communities.

In community development, the project participants must build confidence and trust in themselves. Effective communication empowers members of participating communities through provision of relevant information to be able to address prevailing community development challenges in their various communities.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the discussions on the roles of communication in community development in participating communities in the society:

1. Communication should be explored appropriately to reach the various segments of participating communities in community development. This will lead to emergence of new ideas, opinions and information that will ultimately stimulate promotion of people-oriented community development projects in the participating communities.
2. Dialogue and discussions in communication with relevant stakeholders should be explored extensively in promoting meaningful community development. This will afford the relevant stakeholders an opportunity to exchange relevant information, opinions, ideas and data that will stimulate effective service delivery in community development in the participating communities.
3. There should be regular communication with the community leadership in the participating communities. This will also afford the funding agencies and development workers a good opportunity to brief the community leadership on the progress recorded and challenges being experienced in the course of community development work in the participating communities.
4. There should equally be regular communication with the various segments and community based organizations (CBOs) in the participating communities. This will stimulate collective action and participatory involvement of members of the participating communities in promoting sustainable people-oriented community development projects.

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