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Impact of Communication in Community Engagement and Development of Asejere Community, Kelebe Area of Osogbo, Osun State

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ABSTRACT

Background: Communication is at the center stage of human existent, without which desired development may be difficult to achieve if not impossible. It is so central that every path to development of a people and their community is tied to effective communication in other to ensure understating and cooperation.
Objective: This study investigates the impact of communication in community engagement and development, and how communication can be used to promote citizen participation in the development of Asejere Community, Kelebe Area of Osogbo, Osun State.
Method: The study adopts descriptive survey research design. The people of Asejere Community, Osogbo, Osun State with 96 household membership formed the population of the study. Owing to the small number of the population, the study adopts census, a study of every unit. The data collected with the aid of questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics and simple percentage tables.
Results: Findings reveal that communication plays vital roles in community engagement in development process as face-to-face interaction in addition with the use of new media, prove to be effective medium of communication in development process.
Conclusion: The study concludes that participatory communication remains the most effective for community engagement in development process. Invariably, involving members of a community in activities and decision-making of issues that affect is essential to achieving the desired development that is acceptable to all.
Unique Contribution: This study beams searchlight on the impact of communication and how its application can bring about interaction and ultimately, unity of purpose while engaging the people in the quest for development of a community. Expectedly, policymakers, development agents and partners as well as communication scholars and experts will find the study valuable in future research and planning of development agenda especially, at the grassroots.
Key Recommendation: Drawing from the findings, the study recommends that community stakeholders can leverage the use of interpersonal (face-to-face interaction) communication and the new media (Cell phone – SMS, WhatsApp messaging) as the best form and medium of communication, for a productive citizen engagement in development process.

Key words: Communication, community, community development, community engagement, development.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of communication in promoting community engagement and development has received growing attention from scholars, experts and practitioners alike. It is believed that communication plays pivotal role in development process in any society. Communication is a fundamental tool of social interactions and a medium through which all relationships are established and sustained. It facilitates the transmission of common understanding through the use of signs and symbols (Kelvin-Iloafu, 2016). Human existent is tied to communication thus are inseparable as every step of human life depends on verbal and non-verbal communication to express thoughts, beliefs, opinions, ideas and emotions (Okoro, et al., 2014).

Simply put, a community is a collection of people in a geographical area while in some senses, may not have a physical location, but be demarcated by being a group of people with a common interest (Yakkaldevi, 2013). However, community engagement is the process of involving members of a community in activities and decision-making that affects their lives and their communities. Those activities, usually, are geared towards the development of the community. Hence, community development could be referred to as the process of improving the political, social, economic, and environmental conditions of communities. Communication as a tool for building relationships, sharing information, and fostering collaboration among community members, plays a vital role in both of these processes (Orji, et al., 2024).

More often than not, the main focus of several studies on development communication has been on national development in the area of security, economy and politics. While scholars (Ramsey-Soroghaye, 2021; Anyanwu, Okolichukwu & Okodogbe, 2019; Okoro, 2013) have made efforts and carried out studies on communication for national development, limited studies have been carried out on communication in community engagement and development. One of such is a conceptual study on the roles of communication in community development (Aruma, 2018) without recourse to data collection to find out its impacts. Also, studies have shown that most development efforts by government and development partners are usually concentrated in the urban areas, therefore putting the local communities at disadvantage. This study is therefore carried out in recognition of the need to focus more on impact of communication in community engagement, especially on the development of *Asejere*, a local community at *Kelebe* Area of Olorunda Local Government, Osogbo, Osun State.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Investigate the impact of communication in promoting participation and engagement in *Asejere* Community decision-making processes.
2. Identify effective media of communication in promoting citizens' engagement in *Asejere* Community development.
3. Evaluate the impact of different types of communication on *Asejere* Community engagement and development?

Theoretical Underpinning

The study is anchored on participatory communication theory. The theory was developed in 1970 by Paulo Freire to promote interactive communication as a technique of achieving compromise for long-term action in development operations. The notion is that stakeholder participation will make

decision-making processes more inclusive, resulting in ownership of development processes and, ultimately, more sustainable consequences. The approach highlights the active participation and engagement of participants in the communication process. It respects the value of people' opinions and experiences. It contends that when community people actively participate in communication, they are more likely to take ownership of development activities, resulting in more sustainable and fair outcomes. Furthermore, Prakash-Subedi and Karki (2022) claim that the theory highlights the importance of communication in strengthening marginalised or minority people and ensuring that their voices are heard. To them, the theory aids in determining strategic communication objectives among stakeholders and an action plan to achieve them. When community people are involved in decision-making processes, they have the opportunity to participate and contribute input.

According to Kamei (2019), participatory communication projects enable people to express their opinions, discover shared challenges, and seek answers from inside their community. Similarly, Prakash-Subedi et al. (2022) stated that participatory communication enables for the exchange of information, perspectives, and ideas among many actors, boosting empowerment among community members. This explains why Malikhao and Servaes (2005) argue that participation, which requires listening and, more importantly, trust, will help reduce the social distance between communicators and receivers, leaders and followers, and facilitate a more equitable exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature gave insights into scholarly views and positions on concept of communication, community, and development. It also considered various constructs such as, community engagement for development as well as communication in community engagement for development.

Concept of Communication

The term "communis" (common) comes from the Latin word "communis." However, communication has been defined in a variety of ways, and there is no consensus among communication experts (Nwafor, et. al., 2017). Regardless of the diversity in their definitions, communication has been described as a process of sharing, understanding, and building relationships in all aspects of life. According to Goel (2014), the previous and most widely held definition of 'community' refers to people living in a location and having face-to-face contact with one another. Defining community in the context of community development necessitates a broader definition that includes place-based, interest-based, and other types of new and emerging communities, such as web communities, Facebook or other social media communities, and online groups that cross physical boundaries and interact with strangers in various locations (Goel, 2014).

According to Batra and Subeja (2020), communication is the use of symbols to transmit common understanding. They believe that a sufficient ability, as well as a better interpersonal interaction, lead to greater cooperative activity and are particularly effective in achieving a common goal. Kelvin-Iloafu (2016) defines communication as the art of transmitting information from one person to another so that it can be received in the manner it was intended. It is an essential tool for social interactions and the medium via which all relationships are formed and maintained. According to Batra et al. (2020) and Kelvin-Iloafu (2016), communication is more than just communicating ideas, facts, opinions, information, and understanding; it is also a process of

developing relationships and social engagement. In a broader sense, communication can be defined as the process of passing on information, viewpoints, thoughts, messages, facts, ideas, or emotions, as well as understanding, from one person to another, and ultimately establishing social interaction that leads to intended and guided action.

Community Engagement for Development

The term community has been employed in so many different settings that it cannot be assigned a clear meaning. Yakkaldevi (2013) observes that the term "community" is one of the most elusive and imprecise in sociology, with little definite definition. Yakkaldevi, on the other hand, defines a community as a group of individuals in a specific geographical area, including those who have a particular social structure. To gain a deeper understanding of the phrase, Yakkaldevi compiles a list of many elements, any of which may be present in a community. This encompasses territory, tight and informal relationships, mutuality, shared values and beliefs, structured contact, a strong sense of community, and cultural similarities. Community development has been described as a basic social work technique for working with disenfranchised, marginalised groups dealing with wide societal concerns caused by unfair policies and planning at the global, national, state, and local levels (Goel, 2014). As a result, people in small communities, particularly in recent years, have engaged in more community activities to improve their lives through work. Community involvement occurs when community members are invited to discuss and share views on problems that concern them.

According to Goel (2014), the primary goal of the community development method is to establish engagement procedures that enable communities to make autonomous decisions about meeting their needs and resolving issues that most influence their lives. Community participation in development processes encourages communal action rather than individualised approaches, distinguishing it from approaches that focus on individual well-being. According to Gilmore (2023), community engagement is the process of engaging with communities and stakeholders to work on issues in order to promote community health and well-being. Tootle (2019) defines Community Development as a planned and organised process in which people and communities learn how to help themselves while also acquiring the skills, attitudes, and capacities required for active involvement. Community interaction is synonymous with community participation; without it, there can be no community action. Tootle believes that without community action, there will be no community growth.

Communication in Community engagement for development

Understanding how communication works in community involvement is crucial to accomplishing the objective of community development. According to Gilmore et al. (2023), communication is essential for improving transparency and accountability, boosting knowledge, supporting behaviour change, and developing connections. The goal of encouraging community engagement to foster development is a function of successful communication. According to studies, it is nearly impossible to reform any community without communication, and the process is accelerated when residents of the particular community participate in decision-making (Ibuot, Majemu, & Nwantah, 2021). When communication is ineffective, decision-making becomes especially difficult. According to Kelvin-Iloafu (2016), ineffective communication in an organisation can lead to ambiguity, apprehension, and unhappiness. She argues that wastes and costly mistakes have been

made due to gaps in communication. According to Mahajan (2015), using the proper tools to transmit the correct messages at the right moment can save a crisis and inspire people to work hard for success. According to Aruma (2018), communication allows members of participating communities to identify problems in their communities and, to a large extent, deliberate on how to address them directly through collective action for improved people's living conditions. Invariably, in order to avoid the inherent dangers of bad communication, appropriate communication tactics must be implemented while engaging members of a community to achieve developmental goals.
Community engagement seeks to organise a collective service in response to the need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to communications and community engagement with affected people. Information is required on the various components of community development, including the feasibility of the developmental project under consideration, the funds involved, the labour required, and how members can contribute to reaching the established goal. Community members must be effectively and adequately informed from the start, as this is likely to motivate them. According to Goel (2014), communities are generally agreed to form based on people's common interests, mutual concerns, and identity forms, and may fade when needs are met or duties are completed. Therefore, Prakash-Subedi et al. (2022) maintain that engagement of all stakeholders from the beginning to the end of project helps to achieve a better result as they are empowered to fulfill their social function.

Studies have shown that appropriate application of the communication tools and techniques along with the contextual environment and engagement of all the stakeholders are considerable factors while planning a development activity (Prakash-Subedi et al., 2022). Adoption of appropriate strategies is critical. Onah (2015) observes that group dynamics, co-ordination and change will not be achieved without communication in human organisations in the society. The ability to identify the optimal mode of communication is crucial to the effective design and implementation of any development program. Participatory communication can be implemented in either interpersonal or mediated settings (Thomas, 2003). This means that community members can participate in the development process either through media (mediated) or in person. The nature and complexity of the community members who will be involved play an important role in deciding the appropriate method of communication to use in order to receive the greatest outcomes from them.

METHOD

The study adopts the descriptive survey method, with the use of questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The people of *Asejere* Community, *Kelebe* Area of Olorunda Local Government, Osogbo, Osun State formed the population for the study. The community is composed of 96 households. According to the landlords' association of *Asejere* Community, participation in the community engagement is done based on a representative per household. The study adopts census, the study of every unit, owing to the small numbers of the households. Out of 96 questionnaire items administered to the respondents with the assistance of the landlords' association, 72 were filled and returned and they formed the basis for the analysis. A descriptive statistical method of analysis was adopted, using a simple percentage table to draw conclusion from the findings.

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Table 1: Role of communication in community engagement and development

Variables	No. of Responses	Percentage (%)
Not important at all	-	-
Slightly important	-	-
Moderately important	12	17
Very important	31	43
Extremely important	29	40
Total	72	100

. **Source, Field Survey 2024**

Table 1 shows that the role of communication is highly fundamental in community engagement and development processes.

Table 2: Most Effective medium of communication for promoting community engagement

Variables	No. of Responses	Percentage (%)
Face-to-face meetings	45	63
New media	26	36
Traditional media	1	1
Total	72	100

Source, Field Survey 2024

Table 2 shows that the most effective medium of communication for engaging the people of Asejere in community development is through interpersonal communication by way of face-to-face meeting. It also shows that the use new media (cell phone) has also proved effective in the recent time as development stakeholders share information with community members through SMS and *WhatsApp*.

Table 3: Impacts of communication on community engagement in development process

Variables	SD	D	N	SA	A
It builds trust	4 (6%)	7 (10%)	6 (8%)	37 (51%)	18 (25%)
It builds team spirit	2 (3%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	40 (56%)	26 (36%)
It motivates participation	4 (6%)	5 (7%)	3 (4%)	32 (44%)	28 (39%)
Members take responsibility of project	9 (13%)	4 (6%)	3 (4%)	32 (44%)	24 (33%)
High chances of project implementation	11 (15%)	12 (17%)	9 (13%)	26 (36%)	14 (19%)

Source, Field Survey 2024

Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondent agreed communication builds team spirit among community members; motivate participation take responsibility, as well as ensures high chances of project implementation.

DISCUSSION

The study found that communication plays a pivotal role in citizens' engagement in decision-making process for community development. Survey results indicated the majority of respondents considered communication as very important in community engagement. This finding is consistent with the summation of Kelvin-Iloafu (2016) that communication provides information and motivational functions in decision making process while ineffective communication or lack of it may result in uncertainty, apprehension and dissatisfaction which can impair development. In line with the above argument Batra and Suneja (2020) opine that communication within projects is a key element in the progress of a project while Gilmore et al. (2023) maintain that communication plays a central role in enhancing transparency and accountability, increasing knowledge, encouraging behavior change and building relationships.

The study affirmed Freire's assumption of participatory communication theory that participation of stakeholders will allow decision-making processes to be more inclusive and, therefore, prompt ownership over development processes, and ultimately engender sustainable impacts. On the effective medium of communication for engaging citizens in community development, the present study revealed interpersonal communication by way of face-to-face as the most effective. Additionally, data showed that apart from face-to-face communication revealed as the most effective, members of *Asejere* community prefer to interact more through the of use of Social Messaging App such as WhatsApp and also share information through SMS with the use of cell phone.

Findings also revealed that communication builds team spirit among community members; motivate participation take responsibility, as well as ensures high chances of project implementation. Data collected showed that members of *Asejere* community are motivated to take active part in development process and programmes that will transform their community when they are well informed and not left out in the scheme of things. This validated Malikhao and Servaes' (2005) position that participation brings about trust and helps to reduce the social distance between leaders and followers as well as facilitate a more equitable exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences.

CONCLUSION

Based on its findings, the study concludes that the communication remains the lifeblood of community engagement in decision-making process towards achieving a resounding success in emplacing and sustaining development in any community. It also concludes that interpersonal contacts with a blend of new media use are the best form of communication in engaging community people in development process as the people will have access to appropriate, adequate, timely, and well-coordinated information through participatory communication. Drawing from the conclusion, the study therefore recommends that Community stakeholders can, as revealed by the findings, leverage the best form and medium of communication particularly, interpersonal (face-to face interaction)

communication and the new media (Cell phone – SMS, *WhatsApp* messaging), for a productive citizen engagement in development projects and programme planning.

Ethical clearance
Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest
There is no conflict of interest

Authors' Contributions.
Abass Adeyinka Okandeji conceived the study fine-tuned Bayo Oloyede. Abass Okandeji conceived the design, collated, analysed and interpreted the data, and wrote the initial manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication in its current form.

Availability of data and materials
The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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