

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG WATER AND SANITATION INTERVENTIONS IN FAKKOS, KUNET, AND YELWAN-NONO COMMUNITIES OF PLATEAU STATE

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Abstract

The communication strategies utilised in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 for water and sanitation in the communities of Fakkos, Kunet and Yelwan-Nono of Bokkos Local Government Area in the Plateau State of Nigeria were investigated in this study. The research was necessitated by the existing gap between the participatory communication approach described in the strategy of SDGs at the national level and its actual practice in the communities. Descriptive mixed-methods design was employed in the study. Questionnaire, focus group discussion, key informant interview and observation methods were used for data collection. The population of 8734 included community members, household heads, young people, community leaders and the officials of the Plateau State SDGs Project Support Unit. A total sample of 414 was taken, including 367 questionnaire respondents, 42 participants in 6 focus group discussions and 5 key informants interviewed. To ensure that representativeness is achieved, purposive, cluster, systematic sampling techniques and simple random sampling were used. Analysis of quantitative data was carried out using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. It was found that community leaders were the main sources of information, while SDGs officers were rarely involved in direct communication. Town announcers, round table discussion and town hall meeting were the most popular and reliable communication methods, while television, newspapers, social media, pamphlets and stickers were less preferred due to infrastructure challenges, illiteracy and low internet penetration. Lack of SDGs branding on projects and delayed information indicated a top-down communication approach. The findings indicated that despite their diversity, communication efforts have not yet been fully utilised to ensure a real dialogue and sense of community ownership. The paper calls for strengthening the capacity of the SDGs Project Support Unit, utilising credible local media, translating materials into local languages, branding at project sites, scheduling radio programmes properly, and putting in place monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Keywords: Communication Activities, SDG 6, Water and Sanitation, Community Participation.

Introduction

Achievement of universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) has become one of the primary concerns of contemporary development policy, public health and social governance. Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all is Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). The following specific targets are related to improved drinking water quality and access to sanitation and hygiene services: Target 6.1: Ensure universal access to drinking water and improve its quality; Target 6.2: Ensure universal access to sanitation and enhance its use and construction; and Target 6.b: Increase local community participation in water and sanitation management (United Nations, 2015). According to Florez, (2013) & United Nations, (2015), the commitments indicate that there is clearly more to sustainable water and sanitation than the delivery of water and sanitation infrastructure; it also demands good communication, behavioural change, institutional coordination, and meaningful community participation.

Water, sanitation and hygiene are closely associated with public health, human dignity, education, gender equality and socio-economic development. However, there are still widespread inequalities in the world. In 2024, approximately 2.2 billion people lacked safely managed drinking-water services, 3.4 billion lacked safely managed sanitation services and 1.7 billion lacked basic hygiene services at home (United Nations, 2025). These gaps indicate that investments in WASH infrastructure have not, so far, been able to spur universal and sustainable access. The problems are exacerbated in developing countries by poverty, high population growth rates, low institutional capacity, lack of investment and poor infrastructure. As a result,

the sustainability of WASH interventions increasingly relies on the degree of community understanding, participation and ownership of the interventions being introduced in their localities (WHO & UNICEF, 2022).

Communication has emerged as a key aspect of development and WASH programmes. Communication is not merely the transmission of information but also dialogue, consultation, social mobilization, interpersonal communication, community involvement and participatory decision making. WASH interventions can be communicated using community meetings, sensitisation of people at their houses, mass media, religious and traditional institutions, schools, health workers, community volunteers, and/or Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committees (WASHCOMs). These mechanisms can help raise awareness on sanitation and hygiene, stimulate behavioural changes, increase participation and foster local ownership. UNICEF's Communication for Development approach also reflects the use of dialogue and dialogue as an approach to community participation and as communication tools that are locally suitable for achieving the desired sustainable development outcomes (UNICEF Nigeria, n.d.).

The Nigerian context is illustrative of the significance of these issues. Despite the massive funding from the government, international organisations and development partners, Nigeria still faces high level of WASH deficiencies and inequalities. The Nigeria 2021 WASH National Outcome Routine Mapping (WASHNORM) report highlights continuing disparities in access to WASH services across geographical and socio-economic groups (Federal Ministry of Water Resources, National Bureau of Statistics, & UNICEF, 2022). The challenges suggest that WASH development in Nigeria is not just an infrastructure issue but also a matter of effective communication, community involvement, and institutional coordination and behavioral change.

African WASH interventions have shown evidence of how communication is related to community ownership. In Nigeria, there are interventions that have shown how communication is linked to ownership. Community Led Total Sanitation programmes, for example, have used community mapping, community discussion, community volunteers and community reflection to help communities identify issues and find locally-owned solutions to their sanitation problems (UNICEF, 2016). Likewise, WaterAid's Nigeria experience shows the need to engage communities and local governments in the planning and implementation of WASH (Yusuf, Murray, & Okereke, 2022). This type of evidence indicates that communication may support an external intervention to the community ownership. The presence of communication activities doesn't always mean that they are effective, however. They will be influenced by the credibility of the sources of information, the suitability of the communications channels, how often they communicate, how relevant the information is to them, how much feedback they can give and how much the community can give them (Nelson et al., 2021).

These are especially important in Plateau State where WASH interventions have been incorporated into broader public health and development programs. UNICEF-supported interventions have involved water infrastructure and sanitation education and community level WASH structures in the state. For instance, in Lylung, a borehole was provided, WASH committee was set up to promote hygiene, sanitation and collective maintenance of the borehole, while educating the population on safe sanitation (UNICEF Nigeria, 2017). More recently, Sustainable Urban and Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (SURWASH) has been interested in increasing access to WASH services and increasing institutional and community capacity for sustainable management (Plateau State SURWASH, n.d.).

However, there are studies that show that having WASH facilities does not guarantee appropriate sanitation and good hygiene. Evidence from Plateau State shows this. Accessibility, infrastructure sustainability and regular sanitation practices at various locations across the state have been reported to be a problem (Haruna, Bidas & Usani, 2025; Ukachukwu, Eze, Mbah, & Okpara, 2026). It is significant to differentiate between awareness and access and then between access and actual practice. Even when communities realize that poor sanitation has a negative impact on their health, there can be economic, infrastructural, cultural or communication barriers that make it difficult for them to adopt and sustain recommended practices.

Communication can be widespread in terms of the number of meetings, campaigns or messages sent, but have a low potential to engage in dialogue or community decision-making. On the other hand, small-scale, culturally appropriate and locally trusted communication tasks can be extremely impactful via interpersonal communication (Niederberger, Knight, & O'Reilly, 2019). Hence the key factors in measuring the effectiveness of communication should not only include the ability to disseminate messages but should also look at how much people in the community understand and participate in messages that lead to behavioural changes and ownership of WASH interventions (Ezenwaka *et al.*, 2026). Communication constraints can range from language and literacy barriers, lack of resources, poor institutional coordination, lack of follow up, limited feedback mechanisms, cultural practices and lack of involvement of local leaders.

While, significant studies have been conducted on WASH access, infrastructure, sanitation behaviour and community participation in Nigeria, few studies focus specifically on the communication processes used to introduce, implement and sustain the SDG water and sanitation interventions

at the community level. While national and state count-based WASH studies offer valuable information on WASH coverage and practices, they lack sufficient evidence of how the communication activities affect community participation and implementation of interventions at a local level. This gap is important to the communities of Fakkos, Kunet and Yelwan-Nono in Plateau State where there is need for systematic empirical study of communication activities and WASH implementation. This study therefore examines Communication Activities and the Implementation of SDG Water and Sanitation Interventions in Fakkos, Kunet, and Yelwan-Nono Communities of Plateau State.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study is not merely the possible absence of WASH messages. It is rather the limited local evidence about how SDG 6 communication is planned, delivered, received, understood, trusted and translated into participation and household practice in selected communities of Bokkos LGA. Without such evidence, programme managers may not know whether communication efforts are sufficiently inclusive, whether they should prioritize mass media or interpersonal channels, or how feedback from residents can be integrated into WASH planning. This study sought to fill this gap through an assessment of SDGs' communication channels, audience perceptions, participation and reported practices.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify SDGs water and sanitation activities in Fakkos, Kunet and Yelwan-nono communities of Bokkos LGA, Plateau state.
2. To examine the level of awareness of SDGs WASH among community members in the selected communities.

Research Questions

1. How are the SDGs being communicated in specific water and

sanitation interventions in the Plateau State communities of Fakkos, Kunet, and Yelwan-nono?

2. How do community members know about water and sanitation interventions in the selected communities?

Review of Related Literature

Communication in Sustainable Development and WASH Interventions

The concept of communication in development practice has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades from a linear communication of information to a more dialogic and participatory approach. Previous studies mostly treated communication as a means of information, technical knowledge and behavioral directives being delivered by development institutions to populations defined as development "beneficiaries" (Tufté, & Mefalopulos, 2009). In contemporary development communication, however, communities are increasingly acknowledged as being active agents; their knowledge, experience and perceptions are critical to both the design and sustainability of development interventions (Servaes, 2016). Communication is then not just the transmission of messages but a process through which people and communities share information, work out understandings, articulate their needs and engage in decision making that effect on their lives (Mefalopulos, 2008).

This conceptual change is applicable to WASH interventions. WASH programmes need more than material change, they need a change in social practices. Access to services may be enhanced by the provision of boreholes, latrines and handwashing facilities, but these have significant developmental potential if community members are aware of their purpose, using them appropriately and engaging in the maintenance. A realist review of 73 WASH interventions in 29 LMIC countries identified that community participation, communication, leadership, knowledge, ownership and accountability are associated with the availability, behavioural outcomes and sustainability of

WASH interventions (Pickering *et al.*, 2022). Communication is thus an important channel for bringing WASH infrastructure into the community's long-term reality.

Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) has expanded learning about communication in WASH. SBCC brings together communication and community engagement and behavioural strategies to target individual practices and social norms. UNICEF believes that successful SBCC is not only about sending messages, but also about listening to communities, understanding the situation, considering language, and channel of communication and, importantly, identifying trusted messengers (UNICEF, 2025). For WASH interventions, this is applicable to handwashing with soap, water storage, use of latrines, environmental sanitation and defecation.

This conceptualisation is especially vital in Nigeria as socioeconomic factors, cultural practices, institutional restrictions and infrastructure access issues can affect WASH challenges. UNICEF's Nigeria Communication for Development programme makes this connection between community dialogue, collective problem identification, decision-making and community-based implementation with behavioural and development outcomes explicit (UNICEF Nigeria, n.d.). Communication then serves as a conduit between the WASH interventions and the communities who are expected to use, manage and sustain the interventions.

Communication Activities in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Interventions

Communication activities are the mechanisms by which the WASH messages, knowledge and opportunities for participation are brought to communities. These can be community meetings, interpersonal communication, sensitisation via house-to-house visits, radio talk show programmes, posters, demonstrations, school-based activities, engagement

with religious and traditional leaders, and social mobilisation, using community volunteers. The choice of communication activities is important since communities have different levels of literacy, access to media, sociocultural preferences and trust levels in the information sources (Niederberger, 2018).

Participatory communication has a special focus on communication methods that enable communities to participate rather than simply be an audience. Community meetings and dialogue, for instance, can provide opportunities for members to recognize the WASH challenges, decide on priorities and negotiate possible solutions (World Health Organization, n.d.). In Plateau State, studies were conducted on participatory development communication, which revealed that participatory communication promotes two-way communication and knowledge exchange between the development agencies and the community members (Kigbu, 2019). This indicates that communication activities can be more effective when they involve two-way communication and are less likely to be one-way teaching.

There is also evidence from WASH programming that underscoring the need for community participation in conjunction with communication. UNICEF-supported interventions have integrated water infrastructure with sanitation education and WASH committees in Plateau State. A borehole was established in Lylung, and WASH education and WASH committee creation were implemented, where the committee members were tasked with educating the members of the community on hygiene and sanitation as well as motivating them to make contributions towards the maintenance of the borehole (UNICEF Nigeria, 2017). WASH communication has been done using participatory approaches in other settings in Nigeria. In a community in Ibadan, Kavulikirwa *et al.* (2024) looked at co-designing locally adapted WASH communication materials with the community and highlighted the need for shared understanding, community representation and suitable

communication channels. The approach showed that communication materials can be more relevant when communities are involved in problem identification and in the production of messages instead of receiving ready-made messages.

Effectiveness of Communication Activities and WASH Behavioural Outcomes

Scott-Moncrieff et al. (2025) explain that one of the key questions in the WASH communication literature is whether communication activities do indeed lead to change in knowledge, attitudes, participation and behaviour. The number of meetings held and messages sent is therefore not a measure of the effectiveness. It should also consider whether the community members understand what the messages are, believe in the information, are engaged in WASH activities and then practice the recommended activities.

Evidence has shown that WASH practices are influenced by communication and health education but not in all cases. This behaviour-change intervention aimed at promoting handwashing with soap was tested in a cluster-randomised trial in rural Nigeria. The intervention succeeded in some aspects but failed to achieve a statistically significant increase in handwashing with soap at critical moments, which can happen when households are unable to act on the messages due to structural factors like limited water access (Biran *et al.*, 2020). In a systematic review of 42 impact evaluations and 28 qualitative studies, sanitation messaging interventions generally showed more limited impacts and less durability compared to community-based interventions that incorporated sanitation components which showed a positive effect on handwashing, latrine use and safe faeces disposal (De Buck *et al.*, 2018). Evidence was evident that communication is more likely to work if supported with the right infrastructure, community involvement and supportive social conditions.

The Nigerian evidence also highlighted the need to have knowledge of WASH behaviour beyond awareness. Orivri and Ogwezzy-Ndisika (2023) used the Health Belief Model as a framework to study knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards WASH behaviour messages among mothers in Lagos urban slums. The study corroborates this idea that there is no direct link between exposure to information and adequate WASH practices as people's perceptions, perceived risks, social context and facilities influence their outcomes. Such is the case in Plateau State as well, where study also highlights a mismatch between awareness and access and sustained use of WASH. Haruna *et al.* (2025) assessed WASH sustainability in the Mangu Local Government Area, and concluded that infrastructural degradation, inadequate governance and limited community participation posed threats to sustainable WASH access. Results showed that community involvement is a key factor in maintaining interventions after they have been implemented.

Participatory Communication, Community Ownership and Sustainability

Participatory communication marks a major shift in theory and practice from top down communication for development. It is not a community as a recipient, but a community that is involved in dialogue, participation, knowledge sharing, and even in the identification, design, implementation, and evaluation of development interventions. WASH is especially dependent on participation since communities should not only use facilities but also be involved in their upkeep and sustainability (Niederberger, Knight, & O'Reilly, 2019)

There is literature showing that the participation can have an effect on behavioural and infrastructural outcomes. Pickering *et al.* (2022) found communication and ownership, accountability and community leadership as two of the contextual factors and mechanisms that impact outcomes of

WASH interventions. Therefore, having people from the community involved can enhance a sense of ownership, accountability and the spread of positive behaviors in social networks. A relationship exists that is supported by evidence from Plateau State. Nankpah, David and Danduaru (2026) reported that participatory communication in community development projects helped to involve community members in the process of identifying development needs, and to build a sense of ownership and sustainability. Even though their study was not directly focused on WASH, this is relevant, since water and sanitation projects also need continued community engagement once the external implementing organisations leave. Community ownership is also an element of the Plateau State WASH policy framework that is important for sustainable development of water resources. It highlights user community's ownership and management of water-resource development projects and encourages the public and private sector involvement in water and sanitation management (Government of Plateau State, n.d.). Therefore, participatory communication can be seen as a component of the institutional mechanism which secures ownership, accountability and sustainability.

Communication Constraints in WASH Interventions

Communication interventions take place in social, economic, institutional and cultural settings, and although communication has the potential to contribute to WASH outcomes, it does so within its constraints. They can be language and literacy barriers, inadequate communication resources, limited access to media, cultural beliefs, gender inequalities, lack of institutional coordination, lack of feedback mechanisms, lack of follow-up and lack of trust in the community. These limitations can limit the ability of WASH programmes to shift behaviours and institutions (De Buck et al, 2017).

Niederberger, (2018) aver that literature indicates that the use of one-way information transfer is a factor that constrains communication, especially when it is over-emphasized in interventions. Regional variations can go unaddressed in communications if communities do not have the opportunity to engage, voice their opinions, or adapt intervention strategies. Otto and Fourie (2022) posited that participation in development communication is conceptually complex and is dependent on how communication actually allows stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process and not merely information recipients. From Nigeria, the contextual factors are also highlighted. Pickering *et al.* (2022) conducted a realist review, which identified community leadership, communication, knowledge, resources, committee functioning and social cohesion as factors that can either help or hinder WASH outcomes. The study results indicate that the effectiveness of communication is not independent of the broader institutional and social context in which WASH programmes are rolled out.

Lacks of community involvement and poor governance have also been reported as issues affecting WASH sustainability in Plateau State (Haruna *et al.*, 2025). Additionally, studies on WASH projects in the state have highlighted issues related to poor involvement of end users in the process of project implementation, which could impact project sustainability (Ali, Giwa, Vivan, & Amba, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Participatory communication theory. Participatory communication is the planned and systematic use of communication processes, strategies, and media to encourage dialogue, knowledge sharing, social learning, and collective action among stakeholders for the accomplishment of agreed development goals. (Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2024). It emphasizes two-way, symmetrical interaction in which communities are acknowledged as co-creators of

information and solutions, in contrast to the linear "sender–message–receiver" model. Because it directly addresses the main research issue, which is the insufficient use of communication in SDGs WASH interventions in the Fakkos, Kunet, and Yelwan-Nono communities of Bokkos Local Government Area, this study finds this main theoretical framework as the main anchor of this work.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain data on WASH communication and community participation. The study population comprised community members, household heads, young people, community leaders and officials of the Plateau State SDGs Project Support Unit. Population estimates for the three communities were projected to 2025 using the population growth formula, producing a combined population of 8,734.

Purposive sampling was used to select the three communities because they hosted SDG water and sanitation interventions. A two-stage cluster sampling procedure was used to select wards or Angwas, followed by systematic household sampling for questionnaire administration. The study administered 367 questionnaires, conducted six focus group discussions involving 42 participants, and carried out five key informant interviews with SDG officials and community leaders. Data were collected through questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, participant observation and documentary sources. Questionnaires generated quantitative data, while interviews and discussions provided detailed community perspectives. Instrument validity was established through expert review by WASH specialists. Reliability was supported through clear questions and accurate transcription. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and SPSS, while qualitative data were examined

thematically and triangulated with observation and survey findings.

Results

The results of the field work obtained using the questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and observation are presented in this section. There were 367 questionnaires distributed across the three communities, of which 357 questionnaires were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 97.3 per cent. The findings are presented therein.

Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Fakkos (n=117)	Kunet (n=183)	Yelwan-Nono (n=57)
Gender			
Male	65 (55.6%)	168 (91.8%)	46 (80.7%)
Female	52 (44.4%)	15 (8.2%)	11 (19.3%)
Age			
Below 20 years	40 (34.2%)	70 (38.3%)	5 (8.7%)
21–30 years	19 (16.2%)	51 (27.9%)	49 (85.9%)
31–40 years	30 (25.6%)	30 (16.4%)	0 (0.0%)
41–50 years	18 (15.4%)	18 (9.8%)	3 (5.2%)
51–60 years	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
61 years and above	10 (8.5%)	10 (5.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Marital Status			
Never Married	19 (16.2%)	30 (16.4%)	9 (15.7%)
Married	20 (17.1%)	52 (28.4%)	45 (78.9%)
Widowed	24 (20.5%)	24 (13.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Divorced	29 (24.8%)	42 (23.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Separated	25 (21.4%)	35 (19.1%)	3 (5.2%)
Household Size			
1–3 persons	67 (57.3%)	87 (47.5%)	24 (42.1%)
4–6 persons	22 (18.8%)	49 (26.8%)	24 (42.1%)
7 persons and above	28 (23.9%)	47 (25.7%)	5 (8.7%)
Average Monthly Income			
N20,000 or less	40 (34.2%)	69 (37.7%)	16 (28.0%)
N21,000–N40,000	58 (49.6%)	74 (40.4%)	27 (47.3%)
N41,000–N60,000	18 (15.4%)	40 (21.9%)	14 (24.5%)

Occupation			
Farming	25 (21.4%)	33 (18.0%)	12 (21.0%)
Civil Service	38 (32.5%)	67 (36.6%)	16 (28.0%)
Trading	23 (19.7%)	30 (16.4%)	17 (29.8%)
Artisans	5 (4.3%)	8 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Others	24 (20.5%)	41 (22.4%)	8 (14.0%)
Highest Education Level			
Primary	20 (17.0%)	15 (8.1%)	5 (8.7%)
Quranic	28 (23.9%)	46 (25.1%)	12 (17.9%)
Secondary	44 (37.6%)	55 (30.1%)	17 (25.4%)
Tertiary	15 (12.8%)	26 (14.2%)	14 (20.9%)
None	30 (25.6%)	56 (30.6%)	24 (35.8%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 showed that the ratio of males and females in Fakkos was relatively equal, with 55.6 per cent being male and 44.4 per cent being female. In Kunet, however, the male population was 91.8 per cent while the female population was only 8.2 per cent, indicating extreme male predominance. Male dominance was also seen in Yelwan-Nono at 80.7 per cent, while the females were 19.3 per cent. These differences indicate pervasive socio-cultural norms and structural inequities, which persist in limiting women's representation and voice in community affairs and are echoed in UN Women's (2023) observation that gender inequality poses a threat to inclusive SDG implementation in Africa.

The age distribution shows that most of the respondents of the community of Fakkos (34.2 per cent) and Kunet (38.3 per cent) were below 20 years, while the majority of the community of Yelwan-Nono were from the age group 21 to 30 (85.9 per cent). This young population profile offers opportunities for youth-led development, as well as challenges in areas of employment, education and social services. The marital structure data show some different social patterns: Fakkos had a more fragmented marital structure, as only 17.1 per cent of the population were married, while Yelwan-Nono had a very stable marital structure, with 78.9 per cent married and no divorces or separations recorded.

Household size in the area varied from 1-3 persons to 4-6 persons, with the number of 1-3 persons comprising 57.3 per cent of households at Fakkos and 42.1 per cent at Yelwan-Nono. When asked about their income by the economic indicators, the majority of the respondents reported earning between N21,000 and N40,000 per month or N20,000 and below per month. The incomes are below the national poverty line as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), which states that 63 per cent of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor. Based on the results of the occupational data, the most common occupations in the localities of Fakkos (32.5 per cent) and Kunet (36.6 per cent) are civil service, while in Yelwan-Nono, it is trading (29.8 per cent). Educational profiles indicate that a large proportion of Yelwan-Nono (35.8 per cent) had no formal education, which is an important developmental bottleneck.

Communication Activities in SDG Water and Sanitation Interventions

Table 2: Awareness of SDG WASH Projects

Source of Awareness	Fakkos (n=117)	Kunet (n=183)	Yelwan-Nono (n=57)
Through SDGs Officials	36 (30.8%)	41 (22.4%)	16 (28.1%)
Community Leader	57 (48.7%)	98 (53.6%)	31 (54.4%)
Friend	13 (11.1%)	28 (15.3%)	5 (8.8%)
Religious Leader	9 (7.7%)	16 (8.7%)	5 (8.8%)
Total	117 (100.0%)	183 (100.0%)	57 (100.0%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From Table 2, it is observed that community leaders were the major source of awareness in all three communities, ranging from 48.7 per cent in Fakkos to 54.4 per cent in Yelwan-Nono. In Kunet, 22.4 per cent; in Yelwan-Nono, 28.1 per cent; and in Fakkos, 30.8 per cent of the respondents got the news directly from SDGs officials. Smaller percentages were for friends and religious leaders. The discovery suggests that there is a gap between formal communication strategy and its practice and that individuals within the community often are treated as passive receivers and not active participants in the communication. This result is confirmed by the qualitative results. A community leader of Yelwan-Nono said:

When the SDGs were coming to my community, I came to know about them and their work through them visiting my community and coming to my house, where they explained that they are from the government and they want to intervene in our community by providing us a source of water supply. We welcomed them and ensured that the community gave them maximum cooperation to do their work (KII, Community Leader, Yelwan-Nono). Likewise, a participant of the FGD in Fakkos noted “Community leaders shared information with us during a community meeting; the message was through our community leader, and he said the SDGs will come to deliver a project in our community” (FGD Participant, Fakkos)

Table 3: Knowledge of the Timeline of SDG WASH Interventions

Timeline	Fakkos (n=117)	Kunet (n=183)	Yelwan-Nono (n=57)
One year ago	26 (22.2%)	41 (22.4%)	11 (19.3%)
Two years ago	18 (15.4%)	27 (14.8%)	12 (21.1%)
Three years ago	35 (29.9%)	52 (28.4%)	30 (52.6%)
Four years ago	16 (13.7%)	48 (26.2%)	0 (0.0%)
More than four years ago	22 (18.8%)	15 (8.2%)	4 (7.0%)
Total	117 (100.0%)	183 (100.0%)	57 (100.0%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that the distribution of respondents by knowledge of the SDG WASH interventions in their community was distributed. In Fakkos, 18.8 per cent responded over four years ago, 13.7 per cent responded four years ago, 29.9 per cent responded three years ago, 15.4 per cent responded two years ago, and 22.2 per cent responded one year ago. In Kunet, 22.4 per cent responded 1 year ago, 14.8 per cent 2 years ago, 28.4 per cent 3 years ago, 26.2 per cent 4 years ago, and 8.2 per cent more than 4 years ago. In Yelwan-Nono, 19.3 per cent indicated one year ago, 21.1 per cent two years ago, and 52.6 per cent three years ago. The results show high variability in the recall of when interventions happened, suggesting a temporal dislocation that may be due to the lack of regular periodic communication reinforcing the ongoing nature of the intervention in the community.

Table 4: Channels through which Respondents Accessed Information on SDG WASH

Channel	Very Accessible	Partially Accessible	Not Accessible
Newspaper			
Fakkos	57 (48.7%)	60 (51.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Kunet	74 (40.4%)	108 (59.0%)	1 (0.5%)
Yelwan-Nono	27 (47.4%)	29 (50.9%)	1 (1.8%)
Television			
Fakkos	12 (10.3%)	57 (48.7%)	48 (41.0%)
Kunet	24 (13.1%)	129 (70.5%)	30 (16.4%)
Yelwan-Nono	3 (5.3%)	8 (14.0%)	46 (80.7%)
Radio			
Fakkos	40 (34.2%)	44 (37.6%)	33 (28.2%)
Kunet	71 (38.8%)	91 (49.7%)	21 (11.5%)
Yelwan-Nono	18 (31.6%)	8 (14.0%)	31 (54.4%)
Social Media			
Fakkos	32 (27.4%)	48 (41.0%)	37 (31.6%)
Kunet	56 (30.6%)	78 (42.6%)	49 (26.7%)
Yelwan-Nono	11 (19.3%)	25 (43.9%)	21 (36.8%)
Town Hall Meetings			
Fakkos	67 (57.3%)	32 (27.4%)	18 (15.4%)
Kunet	102 (55.7%)	45 (24.6%)	36 (19.7%)
Yelwan-Nono	17 (29.8%)	26 (45.6%)	14 (24.6%)
Round Table Discussions			
Fakkos	64 (54.7%)	42 (35.9%)	11 (9.4%)
Kunet	116 (63.4%)	40 (21.9%)	27 (14.8%)
Yelwan-Nono	30 (52.6%)	26 (45.6%)	1 (1.8%)
Town Announcers			
Fakkos	82 (70.1%)	28 (23.9%)	7 (5.9%)
Kunet	137 (74.9%)	37 (20.2%)	9 (4.9%)
Yelwan-Nono	27 (47.4%)	19 (33.3%)	11 (19.2%)
Street Rallies			
Fakkos	46 (39.3%)	33 (28.2%)	38 (32.5%)
Kunet	58 (31.7%)	61 (33.3%)	64 (35.0%)
Yelwan-Nono	21 (36.8%)	14 (24.6%)	22 (38.6%)
Pamphlets			
Fakkos	38 (32.5%)	32 (27.4%)	45 (38.5%)
Kunet	59 (32.2%)	61 (33.3%)	63 (34.4%)
Yelwan-Nono	20 (35.1%)	12 (21.1%)	25 (43.9%)
SDG App			
Fakkos	20 (17.1%)	49 (41.9%)	38 (31.6%)
Kunet	33 (18.0%)	71 (38.8%)	79 (43.2%)
Yelwan-Nono	6 (10.5%)	29 (50.9%)	22 (38.5%)
Stickers			
Fakkos	31 (26.5%)	1 (0.9%)	85 (72.6%)
Kunet	53 (29.0%)	2 (1.1%)	128 (69.9%)
Yelwan-Nono	15 (26.3%)	1 (1.8%)	41 (71.9%)

Table 4 shows the reach of different communication tools that respondents used to learn about SDG WASH. The most accessible media were town announcers (70.1 per cent in Fakkos, 74.9 per cent in Kunet and 47.4 per cent in Yelwan-Nono). Round table discussions were also well received, with 54.7 per cent of those in Fakkos, 63.4 per cent in Kunet and 52.6 per cent in Yelwan-Nono rating them as "very accessible. Positive ratings also were achieved for town hall meetings, especially in Fakkos (57.3 per cent) and Kunet (55.7 per cent). Central was radio with 34.2 per cent in Fakkos, 38.8 per cent in Kunet and 31.6 per cent in Yelwan-Nono, rating it as "very accessible", while other methods mostly garnered poor ratings—television 16.4 per cent, newspapers 14.9 per cent, social media 14.6 per cent, pamphlets 11.5 per cent, SDG app 13.6 per cent and stickers 12.8 per cent. 80.7 per cent of Yelwan-Nono said that television was not accessible because of infrastructural problems, including poor electricity access and areas with low TV reception. The overwhelming majority of the communities were rated "not accessible" for stickers (72.6 per cent in Fakkos, 69.9 per cent in Kunet, and 71.9 per cent in Yelwan-Nono).

The qualitative data obtained from FGDs and KIIs confirm these quantitative results. One FGD participant from Yelwan-Nono said:

The SDGs programme is usually aired in the mornings on Plateau Radio, where they discuss water, health and cleaning up the environment; sometimes the announcer spoke fast, and we lost some of the messages. (FGD Participant, Yelwan-Nono)

A community leader in Fakkos noted that:

"First, they communicated that they have a project they are bringing to us, in Hausa, and we understood them. We have no real discussions after that since they left our community when the project was completed." (KII, Community Leader, Fakkos)

Another FGD participant in Kunet commented:

"We had a community meeting, and through our discussions, it was at that

point that we heard about the name, SDGs." (FGD Participant, Kunet)

The qualitative responses confirm that community leaders and community meetings were the major community channels of information flow, with very little direct contact with SDGs officials.

Discussion of Findings

The results reflect the lack of coherence between the national-level communication strategy used to frame water and sanitation SDG interventions and the practical communication activities taking place at the community level in the SDG water and sanitation interventions in Fakkos, Kunet and Yelwan-Nono communities. The SDGs' National Communication Plan (Nigeria's Road to SDGs, 2015) proposes five main communication approaches: branding, leveraging science, technology and innovation, engaging stakeholders and messaging, civic engagement and education, and the amplification of media's role. However, the findings of this study indicate a lack of the translation of these aspirational frameworks to practice in the selected rural communities.

This heavy dependence on community leaders as the main channel of disseminating information on SDGs WASH interventions aligns with the underlying assumptions of Participatory Communication Theory, which suggests that the approach of development communication is more effective when it is based on existing social structures, trusted intermediaries and indigenous knowledge systems that help to create space for dialogue and collective action (Servaes, 2021; Mefalopulos & Tufte, 2024). In the context of a rural community in Nigeria, the community leader has a lot of power and is viewed as having a good moral standing, being the gatekeeper between external agents of change and the local people. The data indicate that SDGs' messaging has been effectively outsourced, as it seems to have been delegated to these traditional authorities. This can be a quick way to disseminate information, but it poses very important questions on the integrity of the information, the possibility of information distortion, and

whether community members have enough time to question, contextualise, and internalise the WASH messages.

These results are similar to those of Muchire (2008) in WASH in Nakuru, Kenya, which showed that although the CLTS project used participatory communication to a certain degree, it was not clearly understood among the project team members who were to facilitate discussions and dialogue. Similarly, Ali's (2017) study of participatory development communication in Ethiopia revealed that the dominant approach of development in the organisation studied was under the shade of traditional modernisation and dependency approaches, with much attention given to the economic dimension of development at the cost of basic ingredients of human development such as participation, empowerment, equality, freedom and equity. The results of the present study indicate a similar communication style, with community leaders as the main source of information, while there is relatively low participation with SDGs officials, which is a top-down approach and not a participative communication.

Many of the time frames for interventions indicated on the timeline are unclear. In Fakkos, the majority indicated that the intervention was one year ago, while in Yelwan-Nono, the majority indicated three years, and a significant proportion indicated two years. This temporal separation implies that the communication approach used in SDGs was not frequent enough, meaning that the interventions might not be sustainable in the longer term. Sustained periodic contact to keep the community aware of the continuing nature of the intervention is a major weakness that could result in low maintenance of facilities seen in the communities. This result aligns with the result obtained by Haruna *et al.* (2025), which suggested that infrastructural degradation, poor governance and limited community engagement are threats to sustainable WASH access in Plateau State.

The channels used to access SDG information as identified by respondents indicate the power of different media used by SDGs. As for the most powerful channel, the overwhelming majority of respondents in the towns of Fakkos and Kunet rated town announcers as very accessible, and roughly half of the respondents in Yelwan-Nono rated town announcers as very accessible. Town announcers (TAs) are an indigenous mode of communication and are very much a part of the socio-cultural fabric of these communities, capable of disseminating information in the local languages of Ron, Kulere and Mushere. They are effective because they are close to the community, culturally credible, and can tailor messages to the linguistic and cognitive characteristics of the audience. This result aligns with that of Ezeaka and Bartholomew (2025) who stated that local, culturally appropriate use of multimedia communication strategies which involve community mobilisation and indigenous communication forms are crucial for increasing public awareness and sustaining their participation in sanitation practices in rural Nigeria.

Round table discussions and town hall meetings also were found to be valued participatory fora, with the majority of respondents in Kunet, Fakkos, and Yelwan-Nono rating round table discussions "very accessible. Town hall meetings also were given positive ratings, especially in Fakkos and Kunet. The results of this study highlight the need for participatory, face-to-face fora to build understanding and engagement with SDG water and sanitation goals. These platforms enable the participation of the community, problem-solving, and consensus building, all of which are essential for sustainable development. The data, then, indicate that community engagement and the retention of messages have been increased where the SDGs' communication approach has been effective in establishing opportunities for direct dialogue and collective deliberation.

Television, newspapers, social media, pamphlets, the SDG app and stickers were given mostly negative ratings, however. The vast majority in

Yelwan-Nono rated television "not accessible" due to infrastructure issues, including unreliable electricity supply, limited signal coverage and lack of local broadcast stations. In the case of newspaper engagement, the results were also quite low, and respondents indicated a mostly "moderate" level of engagement with the newspapers, which illustrates that newspaper is not a prominent or effective channel in these rural areas. Access to social media was generally restricted, with the biggest proportion of respondents stating it was partially accessible. This is partly in line with the overall study on digital development communication, which highlights the importance of the use of social media in conjunction with a face-to-face and community-based communication strategy.

The branding strategy of the SDGs, which also involves the use of logos on vehicles and stickers, also looks inadequate. In the preliminary visits to the research sites in the areas of Fakkos, Kunet and Yelwan-Nono it was found that none of the boreholes had the SDGs emblem affixed to facilitate easy identification. Such a finding indicates that the branding campaign has not been sufficiently extended onto the project sites, which hinders the community from relating the interventions to the brand of the SDGs. Lack of systematic review and adaptation is a key structural weakness in the communication strategy, since it does not allow the SDGs to meet changing communicative needs and constraints of communities.

Qualitative data from the FGDs and KIIs gives more insight into the dynamics of communication. A community leader in Yelwan-Nono said that he had been introduced to SDGs by their visit to his community when they approached him at his house and explained their mission to the community. The personal contact indicates that any contact was effective. Data do show, however, that in this case, community leaders acted as the intermediaries for broader communities, as there was less direct engagement. An FGD participant in Fakkos noted that information was passed on through the community leader, who explained that a project will be delivered. Another

one of the participants in Yelwan-Nono said that the message was received by the women leader, who informed them of the arrival of a borehole to assist them. The stories validate the trust in traditional authority systems to access information.

Conclusion

The study analysed the communication activities that were used by the SDGs Project Support Unit in the following water and sanitation interventions in the three communities of Fakkos, Kunet, and Yelwan-Nono of the Bokkos Local Government Area in Plateau State. The findings indicate that various activities were used to promote the SDGs such as the community engagement with community leaders, town hall meeting, round table discussion, town announcer, radio/television broadcast, newspaper, social media, street rally, pamphlet, SDG application, and project branding. However, there was a greater dissemination of awareness through community leaders compared to direct communication from SDGs officials. The most accessible and trusted were the town announcers, followed by round table discussions and town halls, while television, newspapers, social media, pamphlets and stickers received low ratings due to infrastructural barriers, low literacy levels and limited digital access. There was no evidence of SDGs branding being implemented at project sites, and the time lag in community awareness shows that the communication strategy is significantly top-down.

Recommendations

In view of this, the paper recommends that:

- i. The government and other stakeholders should strengthen the institutional capacities of the SDGs Project Support Unit by providing adequate and modern communication equipment and adequate financial resources.
- ii. The Unit should incorporate the most accessible and reputable methods of communication, such as town announcers, round table

discussions and town hall meetings, systematically into its communication strategy.

- iii. Communication materials should be created in the indigenous languages of Ron, Kulere and Mushere, as well as simplified Hausa. The branding should be expanded to all project areas, and radio programmes should be broadcast at times which are suitable for the routine of the communities.
- iv. Establishment and maintenance of an institutional framework of continuous monitoring, evaluation and periodic communication audits should be encouraged to ensure that communication activities are responsive to changing needs of the target communities.

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