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COMMUNICATION AS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR AGRICULTURAL
EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

There has been growing concern on the crucial role of communication in the development process, sparked perhaps by its importance to the entire existence of man, its forms of use, strategies to be employed for success to be achieved and also new facilities which have emerged and are still emerging in the communication terrain. The advent of phones, audio-visual equipment and the Internet have opened new vistas and also focused adept attention on the properties of information and information transfer culminating to what is referred to as communication, which is the transfer of information and messages from one point to another and between people where meaning can be shared and participation enhanced. Development communication specialists and scholars have tried to see how best communication can be used to fast-track development especially in third world nations including Nigeria. And since information and knowledge give power to the recipient, it becomes imperative that agriculturists too gain that strength. It is against this backdrop that the paper seeks to examine communication as sine qua non to agricultural development in Nigeria. The paper is divided into introduction, conceptual framework, and theoretical framework. The discourse looks at forms/patterns of communication, strategies to be

employed, and principles of agricultural communication, agricultural communication barriers and conclusion /recommendations. The paper recommends that a combination of channels and strategies of communication can go a long way in diffusing innovations to farmers. Audience analysis and analysis of other factors like language, cultural norms and resistant traits inherent in man is crucial for change to take place. Finally, extension agents be provided with adequate funds and other resources timely to succeed in their responsibility of diffusing innovations to farmers so that development can be attained.

INTRODUCTION

The term communication is very crucial to man's existence and his activities. The import is that without it many believe that the world cease functioning. It is vital to every sphere of life – farming, governance, business, change effort, education, and development and so on. Communication scholars have always pointed out that it is a cardinal requirement of life without which every other activity will grind to a halt (Moemeka, 2000). The author explains further that when most people, including the very – well educated, hear the word communication, they usually turn their minds immediately to the mass media. For such people, Moemeka says communication is nothing more than what is heard, read and seen in the media of mass communication. Their view of communication does not extend beyond the boundaries of mass communication. Because of this narrow view of what communication is to this category of people, they fail to appreciate the earlier point of view that it is a cardinal requirement of life.

Communication, in its very essence, can be likened to “the foundation pillars of a bridge; the lubricants and the gas that make the functioning of the automobile possible and the central nervous system of the human body” Moemeka (2000):

With this background, the paper seeks to examine the role of communication viz -a- viz agricultural education development in Nigeria.

The paper is anchored on diffusion of innovations theory and two-way communication model.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: COMMUNICATION, AGRICULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT.

COMMUNICATION

The word communication is rooted in the latin word communis/communicare meaning to share, talk, confer, discuss, or consult with one another. And that is to say that, communication entails the sharing of information, opinions, feelings, thoughts, ideas or messages with others. Pearce (2000) sees communication as an effective tool for informing the masses like creating discontent with traditional agricultural methods and thus needs for modern farming implements and persuading agriculturists to adopt innovations. He therefore defines communication as the sum total of those activities in which we construct our social works. That is, the process by which we collectively construct the events and objects of the social world.

Whichever way one looks at communication, the bottom line is that, there is transfer of information which culminates to meaning sharing, persuasion, education, understanding and subsequently participation. Therefore, nothing exists outside communication; a difference could only arise from the patterns used.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the science, art and occupation of cultivating the soil, producing crops and raising livestock. Agriculture is the very basis of civilization. It is the food we eat, the clothing we wear, the material of our homes, the gardens around us, and many of our traditions and values.

The term also includes the financing, processing, marketing and distribution of agricultural products, farm production supply and service industries; health nutrition and food consumption; the use and conservation of land and water resources; development and maintenance of recreational

resources; and related economic, sociological, political, environmental and cultural characteristics of the food and fiber system. (www.google.com)

DEVELOPMENT

This is simply the occurrence of change from what used to be to a new state of affairs. Dissayanake (2000) defines development tentatively as *"The process of social change which has its goal the improvement in the quality of life of all or the majority of the people in a given Society without doing violence to the natural and cultural environment in which they exist and which seeks to involve the generality of the people as closely as possible in this enterprise, making them the masters of their destiny"*. According to Seers (1969) development is defined as "that not involving only economic growth, but also conditions in which people in a country have adequate food and jobs and income inequality among them is greatly reduced".

Theoretical framework

The paper is anchored on diffusion of innovations theory and two-way communication model.

Diffusion of innovations theory

This theory is otherwise referred to as the multi-step flow model which affords researchers new perspective of studying how innovations or new ideas spread among the people. The theory focuses on what individuals do with information received about new ideas. It is also concerned with whether the ideas are finally adopted or rejected. It equally looks at what social change the new ideas have caused.

Aina (2003) says that Rogers and Shoemaker's 1971 work on diffusion of innovations appear to be the best-known. They define social change as "the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system..." if for example, smokers are able to adhere to the warning regarding cigarettes and stop smoking, it may reduce the number of deaths as a result of long-term smoking leading to lungs-related diseases.

When new ideas are introduced, the probability of adoption will highly be influenced by certain factors as follow;

- Relative advantage: this implies the perception of potential adopters about the advantage of the new innovation over the existing one it tends to replace.
- Compatibility: conformity of the new innovation or idea with existing beliefs, previous experiences and needs of potential adopters.
- complexity: this entails difficulty or ease in the use of the new idea or product.
- trialability: testing of the new idea for reliability.
- observability: how visible the results or change is or will be after adoption.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION MODEL

The Two-Way Communication Model is a modification of the Lasswell communication model propounded in 1948:

Who says what?

Through what channel?

To whom?

With what effect? by adding the sixth element (feed back).

The major elements of the two-way communication model are the **source** also referred to as the sender or encoder, the **message** which is the stimuli or idea that the source transmits to the receiver; the **channel** which is the means by which the message travels from the source to receiver, the **Receiver** also referred to as the target or the audience; the **effect** which is a change in attitude, knowledge and skill of the receiver and **feedback** which is the response from the receiver to the source. By the concept of feedback, the source becomes the receiver (Adebayo, 1997). This model is highly relevant to this work as it present a vivid picture of what should transpire between the Extension worker (change agent) and farmers (agents) in agricultural communication. The Extension worker who is the source introduces agricultural innovation using a well structured message

through a channel (oral speeches, radio or television) to the receiver who is the farmer and expects a change in behavior that which is the effect of adapting to the message. The Extension worker expects a response which is the feedback from the farmer (receiver). By this process communication has been completed and becomes cycle too.

The Discourse

As emphasized earlier, there is nothing on this earth that we can do without communication either verbal or non-verbal. This assertion is true to a very large extent as it is a primary and fundamental component of living. Communication is important except when the message is misconstrued and when it is not, it is quite constructive.

Through communication, a lot of success could be achieved because it is the bridge that connects those concerned with the activity set to be executed. The issue is simply effective interaction. This is capable of attaining set goals and objectives and agricultural development cannot be an exception.

Similarly, agriculture is the act of producing crops and animals either for consumption or for sale. As such, it is one of the several sectors that make up the Nigerian economy. Before now, agriculture was the bane of the nation's economy but currently attention is being diverted to oil and gas although, there are calls from federal, state and local quarters for the Nigerian populace to go back to agriculture so that the sector could be revived.

To this end, development in this area becomes imperative and one of the ways of achieving this goal is the extensive use of communication where information about agricultural inputs, improved species of crops and animals and newer trends of farming including disease control could be passed to those concerned. By so doing, it is hoped that the best can come out of agricultural productions while development can also be achieved.

Forms of Communication

There are two broad categories of communication as follow: verbal and non-verbal. All other modes of communication are discussed under these two headings.

Verbal communication is also referred to as oral communication. Kombol (2010) explains this as essentially language. He says, thought, feelings and words are the three important ingredients of language. Someone knows what he wants to say by thinking and feeling and must know and have symbols that is, words, to express the thoughts and feelings. With this, meaning can be shared. This pattern of communication may take other forms like spoken or sung communication, face to face, interpersonal communication. Jingles, announcements, adverts are a part.

Non – verbal communication is the direct opposite of the former. Here, speech is not actually involved but persons taking part in such conversation understand themselves adequately. Additionally, they must have a common object to which they attach a mutually accepted meaning. This according to kombol (2010) is referred to as "frame of reference" and for communication to be effective, both sender and receiver must have the same frame of reference. Examples of non-verbal communication include visuals (symbols, drawings, intra-personal communication, gestures, signs) and so on.

These are the forms of communication available to an agricultural extension worker/agent through which he can send messages to farmers. The channels or apparatus used to transfer information on farming activities are radio, television, drama, newspapers, magazines, posters, handbills, bill-boards, film cinema and the Internet. Any of the channels or a combination may suffice to achieve the desired result.

Communication-Based Strategies

As earlier stated, communication is central to the implementation of any kind of working relationship to help achieve set targets and goals. Moemeka (2000) opines that the communication strategy/ies is put in place

in order to determine who says what, to whom, through what channels, how much is to be said, how and when.

According to Moemeka (1989), three basic approaches suffice on the use of communication in development and social change endeavors. These are "the inter-personal strategies, mass media strategies and the integrated strategy". The inter-personal strategy is in two folds: extension and community development, ideological and mass mobilization; the mass media strategy is also of two types: the central and localized/decentralized while the integrated strategy also combines the interpersonal and mass media strategies in ratios appropriate to each social system, based on felt needs and socio-cultural realities.

1. INTERPERSONAL STRATEGIES

- a. **Extension and community development:** by definition, these are self-help, traditional methods and efforts for development in Africa. It can be further explained as the use of communication to generate social change/development within social systems. It is aimed at disseminating ideas and generating dialogue and useful and practical information on any issue for which a development programme is to be launched. The issues range from agriculture, health, sanitation, self-help projects to social responsibility etc. the mode of communication employed is basically face-to face and interpersonal (letters, phone calls, handbills etc) communication and also group discussions. Through these, new information is provided and clarifications made while practical demonstrations take place to aid learning and for internalizing the new ways/methods introduced.
- b. **Ideological and mass mobilization:** It is another development communication strategy that employs interpersonal channels and modes extensively especially for a radical change in the political orientation of a people which later leads to community development. The main function of development communication is that of promoting and heightening political consciousness of the people. Political

consciousness is stressed because it is believed that such awareness would awaken the people to their social role and motivate them to participate in developmental activities.

2. **MASS MEDIA STRATEGIES**

a. **Centralized Mass Media**; emphasis here is on the centralized control of mass media personnel, infrastructure and content; direction and flow of media messages for development. This of course rests on two controversial principles according to Gunter and Theroux (1977) as cited in Moemeka (2000):

- that the authorities, that is, the government or development agencies know more about development priorities and therefore should have complete control over activities directed towards development in the social system;
- that a good and 'useful' message is capable of being accepted by the people whether or not they were part of the process of constructing the message and whether or not they were consulted.

Good as it seems, it is largely believed that not many development communication specialists subscribe to these principles. This is because there is no evidence to show that the principles can stand the test of scrutiny. It is also true that the government may know more about development priorities, but again, what is a priority for the government may not necessarily be a priority for communities. Also, the problems facing communities are not universal but peculiar to each community.

Secondly, the use of mass media apparatus without involving the people most times amount to an exercise in futility. It extends to what Moemeka refers to as 'talking at', or at best, 'talking to' the people, but not talking with them. Information dumped in that manner hardly ever wins the people's support

b. **Localized/Decentralized Mass Media**: this is a strategy which stems from the democratic-participant media theory. It is mass media inclined and emphasizes interaction with and among the people. As

the name implies, it holds sway to the establishment of local media channels which are a sure way of providing access for direct participation in mass media activities by the people.

To achieve this, problem(s) have to be identified; goals have to be clarified via personal calls, discussion groups and community meetings. This way, important information can be gotten; development agents mingle and understand the problems at first hand.

3. THE INTEGRATED STRATEGY

As the name implies, it is a combination of the interpersonal and mass media strategies in ratios appropriate to each social system, based on felt needs and socio-cultural realities. This integration is such that the limitations and problems of the other strategies are eliminated while their potentials and strengths are maximized. The use of integrated approach gains support in the findings of the research by Rogers and associates in 1977 on the use of radio for education and development. The researchers found that the combination of a mass medium with an interpersonal channel is generally more effective than using either alone.

PRINCIPLES OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

There exists relevant principles that must be considered in agricultural communication. Adebayo (1997) asserts that:

- Communication should start with the target audience expressing their needs and wishes. Hence, it is the duty of the initiator of communication (source) to find out the felt needs of the target audience before commencing the process of communications.
- To achieve effective communication and make positive contribution of agricultural development, the message content of communication must be suitable to farmer's farm situation and socio-cultural environment.
- A combination of channels should be used to impart knowledge, ideas and information. The advantage is that the target audience has

a greater opportunity to understand the message and achieve the communication objectives.

- Since target audiences are not usually homogeneous, their message content should differ.
- Agricultural practitioners need to be constantly informed about latest developments in agricultural practices.

AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

To excel in agricultural communications the initiators must have to be abreast with some of the barriers that impinge the realization of communication objectives. The barriers include:

- Information selectively:** This is the tendency to seek familiarity and reinforcement from communication messages that tend to agree with ones existing attitudes and beliefs while avoiding situations which do not agree with ones previous attitude.
- Cognitive Dissonance:** This is knowledge attitude. It refers to knowledge which is inconsistent with a person's interest, attitudes and beliefs, take for example no matter how profitable piggy business is it will not be accepted by Muslim farmers.
- Incorrect message content:** The communicator's message will lose credibility if it is found to be false.
- Information overload:** Information over load means an excess of information input that is beyond what the receiver is able to process, that is decode and utilize.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of communication in human existence and especially in the agricultural sector has long been recognized as an important tool in transferring information, creating awareness and educating farmers on specific farming aspects hence sine qua non to agricultural development. The effectiveness of communication on diffusion of agricultural innovations will be dependent on effective and efficient application of audio and visual materials. This has significant implications as this make learning relatively

permanent for both extension workers and farmers (Ofuoku and Agumagu, 2008; Agbamu, 2006). This is because audio-visual form of communication appeals to the senses of sight and hearing.

Extension workers must show empathy and they should be able to understand and appreciate their clientele (Age, Obinne and Demenongu, 2012). Empathy helps to establish more rapport with farmers and that is imperative for improving interpersonal communication with them.

There is also a great need for audience analysis and other factors which may stand in the way of a change endeavor such as language, cultural barriers like beliefs, values and norms and other resistant traits inherent in man.

Above all, extension agents should be provided with requisite and relevant resources including funds to be able to succeed in diffusing emerging innovations to farmers so that development can be attained.

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