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Ogbonna ISAAC-NNADIMELE

Department of Library & Information Science, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Nigeria, oisaac-nnadimele@fpno.edu.ng

Oyemike Victor BENSON, Ph.D

Department of Library and Information Science, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede-Owerri, Nigeria, ovbenenson@fpno.edu.ng

Ifeyinwa Ijeoma NNADIMELE

Department of Mass Communications, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Nigeria, ifeyinwannadimele@gmail.com

Isaac Echezonam ANYIRA

Department of Library and Information Science, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, anyiraisaac@gmail.com

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ISAAC-NNADIMELE, Ogbonna; BENSON,, Oyemike Victor Ph.D; NNADIMELE, Ifeyinwa Ijeoma; and ANYIRA, Isaac Echezonam, "Strategies for effective communication towards information services delivery for sustainable development in post Covid-19 pandemic era" (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6578.

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Ogbonna ISAAC-NNADIMELE

Head of Department (HOD), Department of Library & Information Science,
Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Nigeria
oisaac-nnadimele@fpno.edu.ng;

Oyemike Victor BENSON, PhD

Department of Library and Information Science,
Federal Polytechnic, Nekede-Owerri, Nigeria
ovbenson@fpno.edu.ng, bensoyemike@gmail.com

Ifeyinwa Ijeoma NNADIMELE

Department of Mass Communications,
Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Nigeria
ifeyinwannadimele@gmail.com,

Isaac Echezonam ANYIRA

Department of Library and Information Science,
Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State
anyiraisaac@gmail.com

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Abstract

Communication is an integral component of human existence. This discourse focused on the strategies for effective communication in information services delivery for sustainable development in post Covid-19 pandemic era. The highlight of the paper are state of communication among people dwelling in rural areas, rationalization for effective communication system for sustainable rural development, defining the scopes of communication in development which include development communication, health communication, agricultural communication, traditional communication and business communication. The use of mass media in communication and information service delivery for rural development, challenges to effective communication of information for rural development in post Covid-19 era and strategies for effective communication in information services delivery to rural dwellers were well articulated in the paper.

Keywords: Communication, Information, Rural Dwellers, Sustainable development, Post-Covid-19 pandemic.

1.0 Introduction

Communication and information are essential component for sustainable rural living. Communication is an integral component of the forces that drives human development in any society. No doubt, communication processes are component of practices through which people arrive at their own understanding of issues at both the community, local, regional or national level. Communication of information plays a significant role in rural development process. In other words, development of rural areas to large extent is dependent on the availability, accessibility and communication of information to rural dwellers. Lack of access to communication and relevant information remains a major problem in rural areas and most developing communities of world (Ors, 2008). As aptly captured by Rasila & Mudau, (2012), the importance of effective communication in promoting successful implementation of developmental initiatives need not be overemphasized.

Development communication refers to using communication to facilitate development in the society. The role of communication in the rural and agricultural development in the developing countries should not be ignored. People according to Naveena (2015) must be told about government plans, programmes, policies, activities, successes and achievements. Reactions from the people to the policies and programs must reach the policymakers and administrators to modify, change and continue the programme and to involve people and to get their willingness participation. However one views communication, the crux of the matter reveals that effective communication with the rural population would be impossible unless the communicator enters into cultural context of the people and understands at first hand their economic and social peculiarities. The worries of the writers therefor are how can rural dwellers be provided with development communication? How can they receive development ideologies and philosophies in the post pandemic era? Seeking answers to the above scenario forms the bottom line of this discourse. In line with the above, this paper specifically will focus on the following subheadings:

- a. A conceptual analysis of key concept used in the paper;
- b. The state of communication among people dwelling in rural areas;
- c. Justification for effective communication system for sustainable rural development;

- d. The scopes of communication in development;
- e. Use of mass media in communication and information service delivery;
- f. Challenges to effective communication of information for rural development in post Covid -19 pandemic era; and
- g. Strategies for effective communication of information service delivery for sustainable development;

2.0 A Conceptual Analysis of Key Concepts used in the Paper

The key concepts used in this paper are hereby explained and defined under this section. They include communication, development, rural development, etc

2.1 Corona Virus (COVID-19) Pandemic

COVID -19 is a global crisis that has spread throughout the world at a dangerously fast pace (Anwar *et al*, 2020). Every major crisis, such as the coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic, brings opportunities to rethink our systems and make the more resilient to future shocks (OECD, 2020). Undeniably, the effects of COVID-19 will be with us for a very long period. The global world started learning about it during the late fall of 2019. The novel coronavirus which has been alleged to start at Wuhan, China spread quickly like wild for to other continents of the world.

The effects of the pandemic have been quite asymmetric within countries, as some regions and communities have experienced higher rates of exposure to covid-19, providing sufficient health responses has been at the forefront of natural pandemic strategies and aligned with confinement measures (OECD, 2020). In contemporary society, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, newer apps are reshaping how we communicate and altering the nature of our communication experiences - offering us new ways of receiving information and relating to others.

2.2 Communication

The word communication is somehow abstract and possesses numerous meanings. It can simply be defined as process by which people exchange information or express their thoughts or

feelings through oral, written and signal means. Communication is more than just transmitting information. Communication is not simply a matter of the face-to-face exchange of information (Bakare, 2012; Scheming & Mason, 2013). Communication is as old as human existence and development. It has always been a powerful force in all cultures for sharing ideas and knowledge, and for influencing values and behavior to bring about social change (Balit, 2012). Adebayo in Bakare (2011) conceptualized communication as a process of information flow by which ideas are transferred from a source to a receiver with the internet to change his/her knowledge attitude and skill.

Communication is undeniably a two-way process in which data and information are sent and received between two or more parties, each with an inherent knowledge and understanding about how the data and information is to be used and of each other (Sender/receiver) (Castella & Braum, 2006). Effective communication is evaluated by the attainment of the desired response or change resulting from the information disseminated (Salami, 2016) communication is an integral part of everyday life for interactions through words and signage (Ayobolu, 2019).

Communication has to do with the transfer of information from one person or group of persons to another. It involves expression of feelings, thoughts and ideas. For many people, the term communication is traditionally associated with either boosting an institutional profile or facilitating information flow within an organization (Onuson, 2014). No doubt, rural life cannot exist without communication and information and information. Every activity carried out in rural communities by rural dwellers is anchored on the hinges of communication and information provision and utilization as it is in the urban settings. The channels of communication that are currently used by various agents to disseminate information to famers are elitist and urban-centred (Ogidi, 2015). Ayobolu (2019) contend that the various channels of communication should also be highly considered viable vehicles and tools in disseminating information about the sustainable development goals in Nigerian agricultural systems.

2.3 Information

Information is an important tool used in the realization of any objective or goal set by individual. It remains the life wire of any individual or organization. It is a valuable resource

required in any society; thus acquiring and using information is critical and important activities (Apata, n.d.) information is a critical tool for providing necessary directions for national development. Information according to Ogar, Dika & Atanda (2018), forms the bedrock of development or executing any meaningful project. They asserted further that information is the basis for which major decisions are made and its adequacy helps to achieve sustain development in all spheres of human endeavours. Information is basically data which is more or less a passive commodity with little inherent value unless it enriches one or more of its recipients either in terms of knowledge of in some other, materials way (Castello & Braum, 2006).

2.4 Rural Development

Development is about change and change cannot occur without communication. Rural development is a process of action with economic, political, cultural and social dimensions (Ors, 2008). Development implies changes in relationship with the internal physical, and the external socio-economic and political environment instead of being controlled by it, changes from impotency to potency (Imoh, 2013). Development according to Ors (2008) is a multidimensional process of action, organization and communication and involves economic, political, social and cultural factors. Development involves gradual progress and advancement of the society.

Rural development concerns usually focus on determining what rural people need in order to move up the socio-economic ladder (Acunzo, Pafumi, Torress and Tirol, 2014). Rural development is a persistent challenge everywhere, whether in advanced industrial and post-industrial economics or in less developed settings (Malecki, 2003). Rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in development process (Popoola, 2014). According to Ors (2008), “the communication bridges built between public institutions rural organizations and people generate the opportunities to ensure share of knowledge and experience needed for rural development. Communication is crucial to human existence. Communication as a concept has moved from mere transferring of ideas, messages or information from a source to the receiver, but also now emphasis on the need to effect a change by getting the desired responses in form of change in attitude, knowledge or way of (Salami, 2016).

3.0 State of Communication among People Dwelling in Rural Areas

Rural dwellers in Nigeria are not inherently poor nor are they doomed to ignorance and disease, rather they are blessed with massive fertile land and mineral resource and also huge and virile labor force that can be transformed into goods and services (Ogar, Dika & Atanda, 2018). Rural dwellers in Nigeria as further acknowledged by Ogar, Dike & Atanda, (2018) are known to be facing many challenges including being able to access information and this to them may not be unconnected with the ways information is packed. There is a high level of illiteracy and low level of education among the populace in our rural communities (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012).

Rural communities face several health related challenges including healthcare facilities and poor road conditions that make access to health facilities difficult (Sokey, Adjei & Ankrah, 2018). Rural population is usually bound by tradition, very poor and lacks any type of modern social amenity. Basically, there are no roads, no medical facilities and no factories; the schools, are poorly staffed and equipped, with majority of the people too poor to send their children to school. The people live their lives on subsistence agriculture (Moemeka, 1985).

Rural areas are mostly disabled at various levels by inaccessibility, seclusion, underdevelopment, extreme poverty, ignorance, depopulation hunger and all types of incapacities (Johnson, & Ukonze, 2018). Rural communities, especially those from less developed countries, are at higher risk than urban communities of contracting disease and ailments because of different reasons (Ezeah *et al*, 2020). In rural areas, communication needs and available channels are facing tremendous changes through structural transformations. Subsistence oriented farming remains the basis for food security especially in disadvantaged areas, while there is a general shift to move intermediate farmers into market-oriented production (Castello & Braun, 2006).

Communication between farmers, agricultural institutions and public institutions is made possible by exchanges of information and experience and effective use of communication technologies and communication devices (Ors, 2008). Although there are modern media of communication but millions of people in rural areas have no regular access to such mass media due to poverty and illiteracy (Otah & Umar, n.d.). Rural people constitute the greater part of the

population of developing countries and often lack access to basic needs such as water food, education, healthcare, sanitation and security, leading to low life expectancy and high infant mortality (Bakare, 2011).

4.0 Rationalization for Effective Communication System for Sustainable Rural Development

Rural communication is an interactive process in which information knowledge and skills, relevant for development are exchanged between farmers, extension/advisory services, information providers and research either personally or through media such as radio, print and more recently the new information and communication technologies” (Casello & Braun, 2006). Rural communication is one of the most vital strategies for an effective combat against poverty (Ors, 2008). According to Rasila and Mudau (2012), it can be argued that identified communication platforms of government are failing to provide effective communication as they operate in linear from where government as the creator, producer and sender of the message is seen as imposing the message instead of reaching consensus with the recipients. As rightly noted by Naveena (2015), communication with the people is necessary in any socially and any form of government especially democratic society depend much more (Naveena 2015). Ors (2008) outlines the functions of communication in the rural development to include the following:

- to facilitate the exchange of views and information between farmers and rural organizations;
- to make contributions to the implementation and coordination of the rural development projects;
- to ensure that the innovations are embraced and spread in rural areas;
- to ensure that innovations are embrace and spread in rural areas;
- to raise awareness in the rural areas to promote participation; and
- to support the activities for education and awareness;

5.0 Defining the Scopes of Communication in Development

There are different dimensions to communication within the context of development; they include development communication, health communication, agricultural communication and traditional communication.

5.1 *Development communication*

Development communication refers to the uses to which communication is put in order to further development. Such applications are intended to either further develop in a general way, such as by increasing the level of the mass media exposure among the nations citizen, in order to create a favourable climate for development (Dang, 2017). Development communication is about communication that can be used for development, in other words, it is about using communication to change or improve something. Communication for development can be applied in the rural sector as a cross cutting approach to address key interrelated issues such as natural resource management, agricultural innovation, food and nutrition security, climate change adaption, disaster risk management, among others (Acunzo *et al*, 2014). As noted by Dang (n.d), development communication has two primary roles - transforming role and socializing role. Development communication can be used for transforming role by bringing in social changes in a way that it inspires the people to aim for a higher quality of life, while socializing role focuses on maintaining the established values of the society.

Development communications are organized efforts to use communications processes and media to bring social and economic improvement in developing countries (Kaul, 2011). Development communication is aimed at supporting sustainable changes in development operations by engaging key stakeholder. Development communication is a tool used to achieve national development in a country (Popoola, 2014). Communication for development processes can be seen as essential for effective participation and central to enhancing human development (UNDP, 2007)

5.2 *Health communication*

Health is a complex concept that involves not just the soundness of a person's body but also the state of a person's mind and the quality of the social environment in which he or she

lives (Naveena, 2015). Also, health communication is a very broad term that means different things to different people. Health communication is a distinctive type of communication designed to change the behavior of the public and their health. It is the examination of strategies in communication to information and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health (Oyama & Okpara, 2017). Health communication plays an important role for citizens and also contributes to social sustainability (Herars-Pedrosa *et al*, 2020). According to Bucur (2000), health communication entails more than just telling someone something. It is a process based on a clear strategy and a group of planned activities designed to promote the change to healthier/ behavior. Health promotion through direct and remote health information dissemination and education is crucial in order to adequately equip communities with needed information and advice to improve their health (Sokey, Adjei and Ankrah, 2018).

Moreover, rural dwellers need information on first aid treatment and rural health education. As noted by Popoola (2014), rural dwellers need to be educated and provided with information on how to improve the quality, value and nutritional balance of their food. Whichever way, they need to be enlightened on how disease could be prevented and what to do when there is an epidemic. According to Bucur (2000), good health communication must:

- Use known advertising and marketing strategies to get the message across;
- Focus on specific population groups after careful research about the knowledge and practices of these groups;
- be tested on audiences to make sure the message is clearly understood and does not create confusion; and
- be designed to meet some measureable health objectives;

Health information is defined as recorded information in any format oral, within or electronic. Its timely availability and accuracy is very crucial in health delivery (Sokey, Adjei & Ankrah, 2018). Health information in its entire format, be it health information management. Health information system or health information technology is geared towards the goal of providing quality healthcare delivery (Sokey, Adjei & Ankrah, 2018). Bureur (2000) defined health education as the promotion of health and the prevention of disease through a planned combination of activities developed for a target population. Health communication is more about

prevention than curation. Health communication is an integral aspect of communication that has garnered a lot of attention globally, cutting across intrapersonal, interpersonal, group or mass communication (Oyama & Okpar, 2017). Good health and effective medical care are essential for the smooth functioning of society (Naveena, 2015). A healthy society is a wealthy society. To achieve sustainable development at any level demands that members of the society must be healthy.

5.3 *Agricultural communication*

Agriculture is fundamentally important in human existence not only in terms of food production for human consumption, but also as means of livelihood for majority of the world's rural dweller (Ayobolu, 2019). Agricultural communication is the effective transfer of agricultural innovations from technological developers, to the end users that is, the farmers however, for this transfer of information to be effective and the desired result achieved, it requires the use of appropriate methods or channels, in order to elicit the desired response from the intended beneficiaries (Farmers in this instance).

From the agricultural and rural development perspective, communication is considered as a social process designed to bring together agricultural technicians and farmers in a two way process where people are both senders and receivers of information and co-creators of knowledge (Castello & Braun, 2006). Farming is a major occupation of rural dweller. Farmer in the rural areas need information and enlightenment on how they could implement the traditional farming system with the modern practice (Popoola, 2014).

5.4 *Traditional communication*

The traditional modes of communication, implies the ways African communicated among themselves, their societal modus operandi, the benefits of their cultural communication and how the process evolved to the present age from years back. Traditional media systems are the most important vehicle of social change (Ottah & Umar, n.d.). Face-to-face communication as a traditional type of communication still remains very important in rural areas where old habits are prevalent and influential (Ors, 2008).

Traditional means of communication in the society is indispensable and concerted effort must be made to achieve effective information dissemination, to ensure that the citizens and the public are adequately informed (Ottah & Umar, n.d.). Through the traditional methods still have some advantages as they are reliable and credible but on the other hand, they need push strategy and create one side communication (Dad, 2012). According to Ottah and Umar (n.d.), traditional media or folk media like drums, market places, town criers, system and other also have vital contributions to make in building the communication grid needed for balance and development.

5.5 Business communication

Business communication is a process of transfer of information and understanding between different parts and people of a business organization. This consists of various modes and media involved in communication interchanges (Scheming & Mason, 2013).

6.0 Use of Mass Media in Communication and Information Service Delivery for Rural Development

The media is an instrument used in molding the society, consciously or subconsciously. The news media is a powerful and influential (Salami, 2016). The mass media provides an important link between the rural residents and vital national information (Naveena, 2015). Mass media plays a huge role in circulating information influences the public behavior and can curtail the spread of disease (Anwar *et al*, 2010). The mass media in developing country like Nigeria plays important role in rural information system by being involved in promotion of unity among the different segments of the rural populace in the country with a diversity of language, culture, religion and social institutions. According to Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), the first contribution of the mass media in rural information system should start with reversing the existing position, which does not at all guarantee ruralizes' involvement and participation. No doubt, the basic function of mass communication media is to provide information, education, instruction and entertainment to the people. It is a potential powerful tool in the effort to address the many services and other social challenges facing the society (Naveena, 2015)

Television serves as an important tool of socialization and as a remarkable device for the rural development (Ors, 2008). According to Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), the mass media

through publication in the newspapers and magazines as well as programmes in the radio and television can educate the illiterate rural masses on issues of political, economic and social importance in nation-building; the media offer great potential for educating the public about health issues. The media is one way through which knowledge can be acquired. The role of the media is dissemination of information to an audience with a view of empowering them (Bucur, 2000). Nurmi (2013) in Sokey, Adjei & Ankrah (2018) affirmed that the use of media has been recognized for decades as an important tool for improving health. The mass media helps health communications to expand their audience reach, which is crucial considering the fact that face-to-face channels of communication often require too many human resources and reach only a small numbers of people in large, underserved rural areas (Naveena, 2015).

7.0 Challenges to Effective Communication of Information for Rural Development in Post Covid-19 Era

There are several challenges associated communication of information for rural development. They are as follows:

- ***Shortage of functional and modern equipment for communication:*** Most information agencies lack ultra-modern equipment that can be deployed fully into the communication process. Most media houses and libraries do not have what it takes to strategically adopt technological means of communicating to rural dwellers. As noted by Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), one of the greatest problems facing media houses that deliver into rural information reporting is obsolete and poorly operating equipment.

- ***Poor communication skill of all partners:*** One thing is to communicate another thing is to communicate effectively. The poor communication skills of some stakeholders may affect the effectiveness and efficiency of rural communication. This affects the effectiveness and efficiency of rural communication.

- ***Lack of internet connectivity:*** The low level of internet connectivity is a major hindrance to effective rural communication. Most rural communities do not have access to Internet hence the deployment of internet-enabled devices as means of communication will be non-effective and will not yield the desired results.

- **Poor knowledge of the information needs of users:** The information needs of communities and their dweller varies much. The poor knowledge of information needs of users is a factor that will hinder sustainable development because the information provider should have adequate knowledge of the information needs of users before providing timely and relevant information that matches the needs of the people.

- **Lack of partnership drive among stakeholders in the information industry:** The low level of partnership drive among various stakeholders in the information industry is a problem to rural communication process. There should be a strong synergy between health workers, media houses and librarians to present health related information services, likewise legal practitioners, information [professional and media practitioners should form a strong synergy towards the provision of legal information that can engender sustainable development.

- **Inconsistence government policies:** Government policies in most developing countries of the world are inconsistence, for instance, recently the federal government of Nigeria banned “twitter”, therefore in the cases of business agencies of institutions that uses twitter as means of show casing their business, there will be problem. So in case where the major audiences of the people are twitter-based, communicating with them becomes problematic.

- **Lack of platform to experiment with knowledge acquired:** Most rural dwellers do not have access to platforms that would enable them demonstrate the knowledge that has been communicated to them. For instance, after providing rural youths with financial and agricultural knowledge, although the farmlands to experiment agricultural knowledge are there but without the financial capacity, the knowledge remains at the level of information. Most rural dwellers lack the capacity and knowledge of how to access financial credits from financial institutions.

- **Unavailability of fund:** the communication of information to people at different levels requires fund. Most information agencies do not have the required financial capacity to carry out information dissemination and communication to rural dwellers and this affect the whole process of rural communication.

8.0 Strategies for Effective Communication in Information Services Delivery for Sustainable Development

Media practitioners and Library and information professionals must be ready and willing to adopt different strategies towards effective communication in information service delivery geared towards sustainable development. Some of the basic strategies that can be adopted are hereby explained as follows:

- ***Adopting in participatory Approach:*** effective communication in a development process cannot be one way because it requires feedback and continues exchanges of information between partners and interest groups, communities and official entities (Castello & Braun, 2006). Participatory communication which is the bidirectional sharing of ideas, information, knowledge and experiences ensures that development community people are the most qualified at the local level to decide if, and in what ways a given projects planning and objectives are situation realistic in the context of the people's needs or the local level (Imoh, 2013).

- ***Adapting a collaborative approach in organizing programmes:*** there is need for strong synergies between librarians, mass media practitioners and other stakeholders in information industry. Through strategic collaborative initiatives, library and information professionals can liaise with other stakeholders with a view to contributing to sustainable development.

- ***Use of social media:*** Social media refers to the web-based tools and media that allow users to personally and informally interact, create, share, retrieve, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Social media is a powerful tool for interaction, communication and collaboration with the availability of multiple social media platforms, stakeholders in the information sector can harness its potentials for communicating information towards development.

- ***Use of social media influencers:*** Social media influencers can be used by stakeholders in the information industry to communicate information for rural development.

- ***Partnership with non-governmental agencies:*** The media and information practitioners should partner with non-governmental agencies that have interest in rural development. This will help in contributing significantly to sustainable development.

- *Use of community radio:* Community radio plays a key role in educating the community members through the dissemination of information to the target community members.

9.0 Conclusion

It is evident that communication is a key determinant to rural development in the post-Covid-19 pandemic era, the place of communicating information cannot be downplayed. The various scopes of communication in relation to development must be harness for sustainable development of rural areas. The dimension of communication such as development communication, health communication, agricultural communication, traditional communication as well as business communication must be effectively deployed towards development. More so, the media as an instrument of communication should be deployed to deliver the requisite result. Communication of information on the various scopes of economies or development requires strategic approach in order to effectively contribute to development.

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