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The Millennium Development Goals in Plateau State: The Role of Communication and Community Participation

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ABSTRACT

Communication has proved itself worthy of mention at each point issues of development are discussed. Communication is agreed by scholars to have a positive effect in reducing poverty and hunger, enhancing education and gender equality, improve health and environmental sustainability, which are among others, actions and targets identified as development challenges in the Millennium Declaration and formally named Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This study draws theoretical inspiration from the Diffusion of Innovation theory. This work explores to what extent communication has been able to encourage community participation in the attainment of the MDG's in Plateau State. To achieve this objective, two-prong methodology was used namely Focus Group Discussion (for community members) and interviews (for MDGs staff). Findings from the study demonstrate that while discussants display high regard for interpersonal communication as a preferred channel of communication regarding MDGs activities, participants were not adequately informed in the process of MDGs project execution. As such, the study makes suggestion on how the MDGs communication component can be properly repackaged and deployed to engender greater involvement of benefiting communities.

Keywords: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Communication, Community Participation

INTRODUCTION

The Millennium development Goals (MDGs) has its origin in the Millennium declaration adopted in 2000 by a vote of 189 member nations of the United Nation which includes a statement of core values of freedom, equity, solidarity and commitment to peace, security and the rule of law. The declaration support a broad understanding of

poverty and goes well beyond the lack of income to include equity, human right and social justice which are essential to poverty reduction (Dorayi, 2009)[1]. Studies have shown however, that in today's climate of social change, a decisive role can be played by communication in promoting human development. In today's new climate of social change. As the world moves towards greater democracy, conditions are becoming more favourable for people to start steering their own course of change. As such, communication is central to this task.

This is because development programmes can only realize their full potentials if populations are motivated and committed to achieve success. Unless people themselves are the driving force of their own development, studies show that no amount of persuasion by government or project implementers will bring about any lasting improvement in their living standards. The MDGs document as studies have shown also reflects a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty as deprivation which extends beyond income to include access to healthcare, education, gender, equality and environmental sustainability based on human development framework.

Nigeria happens to be a developing nation and she shares her development problems such as poverty, inequality, prevalence of disease, hunger, corruption among others with the rest of other developing nation's of the world. A large chunk of the world's population of about six (6) billion people do not have access to clean water, food, education, health and other basic needs of man (Ibanga, 1989)[2]. The MDGs however, represent a major step towards improving the effectiveness of national and international development efforts. The MDGs framework is fashioned to thrive on the wheels of effective and adequate information service, at the same time, enhancing public dialogue about how development goals can contribute to their achievement.

Therefore, it is this concern that stimulated a lot of governments including Nigeria to adopt various development strategies to accelerate an efficient development agenda for

their people. In Nigeria for instance, successive administrations had adopted policies and programmes such as National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Vision 2010 among others. These efforts were directed towards the transformation of the nation, however, not much had been attained [3].

Reflecting on how Nigeria has missed these valuable opportunities, Kwanashie (2008)[4] explained that the foregoing situation triggered efforts by the government especially from the Obasanjo regime in 2005 to secure loan relieve through a process of negotiations with the London and Paris club. It is this relieve that engineered an MDGs implementation strategy from the debt funds known as the “Conditional Grant Scheme (CGS)”. This was developed as a framework that will guide the Federal and State Governments in the planning, execution and evaluation as well as funding of projects geared towards the achievement of the MDGs across the country.

MDGS IN PLATEAU STATE

The story of plateau state falling out with almost every donor agency and development partner before 2007 is no longer news because the state was adjudged as not having the requisite capacity to access and utilize donor funds. As a result of this verdict, the state had lost out on all donor funds including those of UBE, UNICEF, UNFPA, EU funded activities and the World Bank to mention but a few. MDGS Milestone on the Plateau (2008:i).

Just as different states adopted different strategies in other to propel the achievement of the MDGS in their domain, Plateau state married the MDGs into its four year strategic plan captured in the 10 point agenda of the Jang Administration. Water projects, health and youth empowerment were the three major priority areas identified to enhance the achievement of the MDGs in the state. A robust monitoring structure was also put in

place which makes provision for a supervisor each in the seventeen local government areas, monitoring and evaluation officers as well as team of experts.

The CGS commenced in 2006, however Plateau state did not benefit or access funds until 2008 when the state got about four hundred and seventy million naira (470,000,000) as counterpart funding for MDGs project. MDGs Milestone on the Plateau (2008:i). Explaining how the CGS Strategy operates, Dorayi (2009)[1] noted that “the state in consultation with the local governments and other stakeholders would identify priority projects that fall within the global MDG for which they also have evidence of commitment via their strategic plans, budgets and development agendas. If those projects are identified, the Federal Government releases 50% of the total cost while the states match such payment with the balance of 50% for the projects chosen”[5].

In view of the fact that Plateau State is faced with a myriad of development challenges like any other developing society, there is a compelling need to examine how communication can be deployed to ensure the participation of communities in the effective implementation of MDGs in the state. This is the driving force behind this study[6].

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the major challenges of social development in Plateau State and indeed Nigeria is traceable to insufficient involvement of benefiting communities in terms of project execution. Communities are hardly involved in the process of project implementation and as such, this trend ushers in apathy, non involvement and increasing perception in the populace that the MDGs is just like any other government handout dished to the people. Perhaps MDGs milestone on the Plateau (2008:21) re-enforces this perception:

Uppermost among this is the concern for the sustainability, it meant that the ownership of the projects by benefiting communities as well as local authorities... sustainability will also imply security and safeguarding the

facility against theft and vandalism. This last dimension is of critical importance because an unprotected facility can be removed, destroyed or spoilt by the singular action of an individual or group of people thereby jeopardizing the entire project, community and indeed the state. Cases of this have already been reported.

Also, despite the fact that the MDGs represent an opportunity for Nigeria to tackle some of its socio-economic problems that have been deterring growth, Millennium Declaration Report (2005)[7] expressly states that based on research, the message is not going across. Only 40% of Nigerians have heard of the Millennium Development Goals... Most respondents who had the knowledge of the MDGs did not see themselves as participants in their achievement and were not willing to work towards their success. The problems therefore this study is hinged is whether the MDGs office in Jos has effectively deployed communication strategies to ensure community involvement in project implementation as well as assess problems to effective communication. These therefore suggest that MDGs message is barely reaching the people in Plateau state such that the necessary awareness that will trigger positive action is missing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The diffusion of innovation theory has historically focused on the spread of an idea, procedure or implement with a social system or between multiple groups. For the most part, scholars of this tradition define diffusion as the process through which some innovations are communicated within a social system.

Although the roots of innovation diffusion theory are seen to be largely in rural sociology, recently, the field has become more distinct interdisciplinary with major advancements made especially in the discipline of communication. Rogers (1995)[8] defines diffusion as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system”.

As such, an innovation is an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual or other units of adoption. The diffusion of innovations involves both mass media and interpersonal channels. That is, by sharing communication channels such as interpersonal communication or mass media, people can get information of an innovation and perceive its innovation as useful. For example, Millennium Development Goals Nigeria (2008)[9] presented a well-known model of communication that is analysed as five parts (e.g. sender - message - channel - receiver - effect). Rogers (1995)[8] agrees that this S-M-C-R-E communication model corresponds closely to the elements of diffusion.

At the process of innovation decision, the stages include knowledge, attitude, adoption, implementation and confirmation. Rogers (1995)[8] introduced perceived characteristics of innovations to consist of relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability. Based on these five criteria, individuals perceive an innovation as new and or useful and decide to adopt it.

Communities have a number of opinion moulders (religious, traditional, youth, women and community based leaders) which is in line with the principles of diffusion of innovation referred to as innovation, these critical stakeholders have the capacity to influence community members to participate in community projects. This theory therefore blends smoothly into this work because if the communication component of the MDGs is tailored towards carrying communities along in project implementation, using effective interpersonal communication channel, then communities will take the initiatives and participate in project implementation as well as take ownership after delivering of projects.

As a community based development intervention, adopting the diffusion of innovation theory is apt as Rahnema (1992)[10]. contends that “all communities have some people who are innovators. These innovators then influence others in the social network to adopt the innovation. Eventually, a threshold of behaviour adoption at the network level is reached that sustains the widespread uptake of a behaviour”.

In particular, diffusion of innovation predicts that by enticing opinion leaders early onto adopt an innovation behavior deemed to be adaptive; the spread of uptake of the new behaviour is facilitated. Green, Wimmer and Dominick (2000)[11] note that:

Diffusion theory does not lead to conclusion that one must wait for the diffusion of a new product or practice to reach the poorest poor... In fact, one can accelerate the rate of adoption in any segment of the population through more intensive and more appropriate communication and outreach.

Rogers (1997)[12] points out that “mass media channels are more effective in creating knowledge of innovations, whereas interpersonal channels are more effective in forming and changing attitudes towards a new idea, and thus in influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of this study:

1. To examine the communication strategies in attaining the MDGs in Plateau state.
2. To assess the level of community participation as it applies to the MDGs in Plateau state.
3. Lastly, to determine the communication challenges in the implementation of the MDGs in Plateau state.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objectives stated above, the study posed three questions upon which investigations were conducted.

1. How effective are communication strategies in the attainment of the MDGs in Plateau State?
2. To what extent do communities participate in the implementation of the MDGs?

3. What are the challenges affecting communication in the implementation of the MDGs in Plateau state.

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology calls to mind the underpinning philosophical assumptions of the study. This section therefore deals with description and procedure used in obtaining and gathering data for the study as well as steps taken. The variables in this study are “communication” and “community participation” which were measured by seeking information from the participants and interview on implementation of the MDGs in Plateau State.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

It was apt that the research population for the FGD comprise youths between the ages of 18 and 35 years living in Dong, located in Jos North local government and Rawuru in Barkin Ladi local government area. In the same vein, women of marital status between the ages of 18 and 50 years of the same communities also took part in the FGD session. Dong and Rawuru communities were purposively selected because they host MDGs projects: MDGs projects; The youths are generally believed to be the vanguards of any society while women play a key role in community development. Also, the State Coordinator of the MDGs in Plateau State and its head of information and communication were interviewed because they occupy strategic positions in the implementation of the MDGs in the state.

In all, seven women and youths made up the FGD in each of the two selected communities while two staff members of the MDGs office were purposively selected for interview.

A sample is a subset of a population that is taken to be representative of the entire population. A sample that is not representative of the entire population, regardless of its size, is inadequate for testing purpose, the result cannot be generalized (Wimmer and

Dominick, 2000)[11]. Purposive sampling under the non probability sampling technique was employed for both the FGD and interviews who all explained their level of awareness and involvement, and to an extent, that of the community in the implementation of the MDGs projects. The MDGs state Coordinator and head of information and communication were purposively sampled to understand problems affecting communication in project actualization.

INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data for the study was collected using primary and secondary sources of data collection. For the primary data, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and the interview were recorded. The questions were open-ended for in-depth answers from participants. In view of the fact that the MDGs is a community based development agenda, these two instrument were selected because they were most appropriate to interrogate the variables under discuss. Field notes from the participant also gave credence to the answers of the participants. The secondary data was sourced through library materials such as text books, journals, newspapers and the internet. All these were used to support the data from the FGD and interviews.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

In line with qualitative research, the interpretation and analysis of data was reflective of the technique used. Since it is difficult to compress qualitative data into charts because they come in form of sentences and extended quotes, data here was grouped into a category system with each comments coded into an appropriate category. This is where conclusions are drawn using the General Inductive Approach for qualitative data analysis. Justifying this method, Thomas (2003)[13] explained that 'the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data'.

The researcher as part of demand to act responsibly with integrity in respecting the rights and dignity of research participants provided them with a clear and informative explanation of the rationale for the design of the study and the method used.

Although not all participants were present at the debriefing sessions, those present asked pertinent questions as to how the study will affect their communities positively. The research provided answer to participants' questions pointing out that results of the study could provide a road map for government at all levels well as development workers.

The researcher had before had sought the consent of all participant in the process of carrying out the study. Participants were assured that the study was strictly for academic purposes and that their participation is voluntary, after explaining in clear terms the purpose and potential benefits of the study[14].

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Table 1: Responses to question one 1 and 2 from Focus Group Discussion with community members comprising of Women and Youths.

Question 1	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5	Person 6	Person 7
Do you have MDGs project in your community?	We have MDGs project in our community, the first is the borehole and they renovated our PHC clinic.	The MDGs constructed a motorized borehole close to the primary school.	Yes, I saw on the wall of the clinic, they wrote MDGs.	The People came to our community and gave us water.	When they were doing work here, I asked and was told it is MDGs people.	It was the MDGs office that brought project to our community.	Yes, we have because our community has now changed.
Question 2	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5	Person 6	Person 7
How do you know about the MDGs in your community?	I heard about the MDGs on the radio.	Our politicians came here to tell us.	How we heard about the MDGs is through an illustrious son of Fan Mr. Godongs (former MDGs State Coordinator) came here to explain what the MDGs is doing and we also understand from the inscription on their cars, that is why we are sure that it is MDGs.	I know because the chairman of community development told me.	I heard of MDGs through the local government.	It was through the radio and TV. Some people also told me.	It was on the radio.

Source: Field Work, August 2014

Table 2: Responses to Question 3 and 4 from Focus Group Discussion with community members comprising of Women and Youths.

Question 3	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5	Person 6	Person 7
Where you given roles in planning and execution of projects?	We were not mobilized as a form of community work, it was based on daily pay till the end of the project.	We were only involved as labourers working with the contractors so that they pay us at the end of the day	No, they did not involve us, they just told us they have finish the work.	We have never been called to participate. If we were told as women to participate in the project, I think it would have been beneficial because it is us that use water more.	We as women have never been called and our roles outlined to us.	We were not given any role at all. Honesty lack of participation is not helpful at all	Nobody involved me in this project.
Question 4	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5	Person 6	Person 7
Through which medium of communication did you hear about the MDGs?	The MDGs people came and spoke with the community and they created awareness and we were happy.	I heard of the MDGs from the Community Development Association.	I learnt of the MDGs on radio.	I use to watch different programmes on TV, that is where I heard about the MDGs.	A friend of mine actually told me about MDGs and what it stands for.	It was on the TV.	It was both on radio and TV.

Source: Field Work, August 2014

Table 3: Responses to question 5 from the focus group discussion with community members comprising of women and youths.

Question 5	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5	Person 6	Person 7
Do you rate the source credible or not?	I believe them because the MDGs people came and we saw them.	I agreed completely with what the stakeholders said because it later happened and the project was implemented.	Why not? I agree because I saw the work and it was good.	I believe what is said on TV because I do not think they will lie.	I agreed with the source that told me about MDGs because it is the same thing I heard on radio.	The TV can show visual pictures of the MDGs activities, that is why I rate it credible.	I believe what I heard on TV but sometimes we prefer they come down to the community so that we see them face to face, so doing we will believe more.

Source: Field Work, August 2014

Table 4: Responses to question 1, 2 and 3 from interview session with MDGs officials.

Question 1	Person 1	Person 2
Do you have strategies in place for community engagements and outreach?	We have a plan of communication, it is a strategy that we use to reach out to communities by way of town hall meetings and other forms of communication.	We have a communication work plan; it is a document that is well articulated and it serve as a guide to our engagement with communities.
Question 2		
What are the problems encountered?	One of the challenges of communicating the MDGs to our people is that of difficult terrain. Another challenge we have faced is the crisis that engulfed some communities.	The major problem in terms of community sensitization is that of funding. The nature of projects execution is project specific and the communication component has remained largely not too adequate to take care of the communication needs so we have problem of funding.
Question 3		
What is the way forward?	The way out is for communities to begin to see project in their locality as their own.	Since funding is the major problem, if we have improved funding for the communication component of the MDGs, we will see a better awareness by communities.

Source: Field Work, August 2014

FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The data presented in this study consist of the questions and transcribed answers given by participants during the Interview session and the Focus Group Discussion. In an attempt to assess the level of involvement of communities in MDGs project implementation as well as appropriate communication channel to drive community participation, a focus group discussion session of participants was recorded. Open ended questions were designed for the focus group discussion which was represented as FGD of seven people and their responses presented in tabular form. For each question, the number of people who answered questions was coded numbers one to seven in line with the sequence of answers.

The Plateau state coordinator of the MDGs and its head of department, information and communication were interviewed separately at the MDGs office, Jos. The aim of the interview was to provide answers to what constitute problems to communication, the

amount of resources channelled for communication purposes as well as proffer solutions for the way forward for effective implementation of the MDGs in Plateau state.

Based on the data collected and in an attempt to answer question one as to the effectiveness of communication strategies in attaining the MDGs, it was discovered that most respondents were aware of the existence of the MDGs as a result of projects sited in their community. The data also revealed that though participants heard about the MDGs from both interpersonal channels and the mass media, discussants displayed strong bias or preference for interpersonal means of communication. To buttress this, one participant (Table 3) explained that "I believe what I heard on TV but sometimes we prefer them to come down to the community so that we can see them face - to - face, so doing we will believe more". This position validates the theoretical postulation by Rogers (1997) that "mass media channels are more effective in creating knowledge of innovations, whereas interpersonal channels are more effective in forming and changing attitudes towards a new idea, and thus in influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea".

As to whether communities participated in the implementation of the MDGs, this study can deduce from the data gathered that communities were not carried along in the process of MDGs projects implementation. The data also showed that while the youths at some point were engaged as labourers on the projects, there was no deliberate platform to encourage a sense of ownership of projects by communities. Quoting one participant (Table 2) "we were not given any role at all. Honestly lack of participation is not helpful". This underscores the total neglect of benefiting communities which has dire consequences in the long run. Justifying this position, John (2010:216) stressed that "many development efforts in Nigeria... in which substantial human and financial resources had been invested, have failed to achieve the expected desired results primarily because the targeted beneficiaries of the efforts have not been involved in the planning and design of the programs. Generally, the intervention has been top - down".

To this end, it can be implied that the MDGs office did not consider the people as co-travelers in the development process, and that is why most communities have abandoned their assigned roles of safeguarding the projects. As a result of lack of involvement in the process, communities merely perceive projects as hand-outs donated to them by government. This is why Rahnema (1993)[10] submits that "a number of organizations agree that development projects had often floundered because people are left out. It was found out that wherever people are involved, and actively participating in the project, much more was achieved with much less, even in sheer financial terms".

The MDGs state coordinator and the head of information and communication provided answers to the impediments affecting communication in the process of project implementation. Data obtained from the interview with the two officials showed that it may have an articulated plan of action for communicating the MDGs to benefitting communities; lack of funds to drive the communication component has largely affected the smooth implementation of the MDGs in the state. Proffering solution to this challenge, one participant (Table 4) noted that “since funding is the major problem, if we have improved funding for the communication component of the MDGs, we will see a better awareness by community”.

To confirm the theoretical framework “diffusion of innovation” MDGs officials were placed as (innovators “opinion moulders”) of the system while community members as (“opinion” followers). The information flow from opinion moulders directly through interpersonal means serves as the channel to people who are dependent on others for their information needs. This confirms the assertion of Roger (1995) that communication is a process in which participants create and share information with one another to reach a mutual understanding. This will surely create a new wave of behaviour change as to how communities embrace any development project sited in their community.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the MDGs was conceived as a development agenda that is a participation process of social change to bring about social and material advancement. It involves greater number of people gaining control over their environment, empowering people to be self-reliant and creating the right environment for people to improve their living condition.

This study has revealed that most people have heard of the MDGs through one source of communication or the other and respondents also noted the importance of the MDGs in championing the millennium goals to reduce poverty and hunger. Critically also, findings revealed that while respondents appreciate various means or channels of information, most preferred interpersonal means of communication in dealing with community development issues. This is important because the literacy level at the rural areas is considerably low, as such communities prefer a face - to - face contact where they can ask questions, state their opinion freely and express their fears if any.

Based on the findings gathered from the focus group discussion, most respondents (whether youths or women) were not considered as critical stakeholders in the implementation of MDGs projects.

Findings also showed that inadequate funding, difficult terrain and communal clashes in some parts of the state hampered communication efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings and observations from this study which identified some factors which have negatively affected the process of communicating the MDGs to promote community participation, it is necessary to make the following recommendations.

1. Despite the awareness of the MDGs by community members and its agenda to reduce poverty, there is need to increase knowledge across board and engage community stakeholders, women and youths in the conception, planning and implementation stages of MDGs projects.
2. The flow of information should be redirected as community members are not supposed to be passive receivers of information but should have a voice of their own in determining which projects should be sited in their locality.
3. The MDGs at the national and state levels should reassess the powerful role communication plays in facilitating project execution and ownership. In view of this, adequate budgetary provisions should be made so that the communication component of the goals can achieve set objectives.
4. The information and communication unit of the MDGs showed arranged periodic round table sessions with a view of carrying stakeholders and communities along in the course of project implementation.

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