

## ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN BENUE, NASARAWA, AND TARABA STATES

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### ABSTRACT

The study anchored on assessment of communication strategies of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States in Nigeria. The statement of the problem centred on how effective the communication strategies were in terms of their deployment; the specific communication channels used; the challenges of the use of these communication strategies. The objectives of the study were to: determine the communication strategies, ascertain how the communication strategies are deployed and the challenges of communication strategies used. The theories used were the Developmental State Theory and Alternative Paradigm Model. The aim of this study was to ascertain how the communication strategies are deployed. The methodology adopted in this research designs were survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The population of the study was 11, 468, 425; the sample size was 384, while the sampling techniques were multi-stage, and simple random sampling techniques. The study find out that the respondents were fully-aware of the CSDPs in their communities based on the communication strategies; and that mobile phone calls/text messages and WhatsApp messages have now displaced radio as the dominant communication channels. The finding of the study show that the communication strategies deployed contributed maximally to the success.

**Keywords:** The Concept of communication, The Concept of Communication strategies, The Concept of Community Development, and The Concept of Social Development.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

All over the Global South, especially Africa, developmental challenges continue to stare the people in the face. And development, being so serious an issue that should not be toyed with, if sustainable growth and advancement must be achieved in society, has now become what the government at the various levels, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations, and

philanthropic organisations try to share ideas, and pool resources together in order to achieve. In Nigeria, the crises of development have always been evident in the poor level of governance which has dogged the country since the country's independence in 1960, coupled with weak institutions, and deplorable infrastructure, particularly in the rural areas. It follows therefore that since the middle of the 20th Century, the international community, especially the United Nations, and the Bretton Woods Institutions- the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank have been obsessed with the mantra of growth and development in all aspects of human lives. Within this period, there was a resurgence of many organisations and government institutions globally, saddled with the daunting tasks of bringing about development to the people, especially the less-privileged, so that the people can reach their potential. It was this quest for this kind of development that led to the term "sustainable development"- which means meeting the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meeting their own needs ([www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org](http://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org)).

Development ordinarily, it is worthy to note, is the process of social interaction that makes people to come together with the aim of focusing on a course of action that will make them to move forward or improve their living conditions. In most cases, it results in social and behaviour change. Most of the developmental processes are usually financed or promoted by multilateral organisations, such as the World Bank, Department for International Development (DfID), European Union, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others; the state and federal governments, like in Nigeria, and international partners/donor agencies, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, among others. These bodies and institutions usually focus on the developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Lopez-Carrion and Marti-Sanchez, 2024). One of the insights from the mid-20th Century conception of development is that it was seen largely from the prism of economic progress, which had to do with the size of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Later, development became embroiled in the argument that all the countries of the world must succumb to the logic of a knowledge-driven economy, accelerated by globalisation and neoliberalism. It is this neoliberalism which has engendered an argument that the state must be restructured in such a way that it must scale back its social responsibility and allow market forces to determine the affairs of the people (Novianto and Wulansari, 2023).

As time went on, particularly around the Second World War, the term "development" became synonymous with international projects of coordinated social change which also ushered in the era of "development agencies", "development projects", "development studies" and much later "development communication". It is based on this trajectory that Cowen and Shenton (2023: 3), synthesised "development" as "a process of enlarging people's choices; of enhancing participatory democratic processes; and the ability of people to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives; of providing human beings with opportunities to fully develop their potential; of enabling the poor, women, and free independent peasants to organise for themselves and work together". So development must acknowledge some ideological values like empowerment, sustainability, capacity-building, role of women, participation, transparency, self-reliance, social justice, probity, accountability, and equity (UNDP, 2023). For the developing economies in the Global South, particularly in Africa, the central focus of development must be about how to improve the living standards of the people, especially the poor and other vulnerable members of society. However, the quest to bring development to the

developing countries, usually referred to in derogatory and pejorative term as the “Third World”, manifested in two ways: First, was when the people wanted a change, and they were ‘assisted’ to do so by an outside agent, such as the World Bank.

The second was when the people were not given any free-will to develop themselves in their own desired way, instead were ‘guided’ by the development agents to accept their own development prescription. A clear case was the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), in the developing countries. It followed that for a long time, this second perspective became the dominant development strategy in the developing countries, even when the condition of living of the ordinary person in the “Third World” did not change. Later, it dawned on experts in development economics and development studies generally that a one-size-fits-all approach to development was not tenable, because no one could claim to have the ability to develop another person, if the top-down approach was seen as the silver bullet (Huriyah, 2019; Abubakar, 2021; as well as Sulaiman, Rosyadi, Handoko, Masrukin, Putri, Wijayanti, and Faozanudin, 2024). So in line with the Alternative Paradigm School of Thought in development studies, development experts came to the realisation that meaningful development cannot be realised if it does not emanate from the people’s yearnings, desires, and aspirations for change. This realisation must take into cognisance the fact that development must be people-driven and pro-poor, and all efforts must be geared towards empowering the people to be in charge of their development destiny. But for decades, many governments, the multilateral organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and philanthropic organisations invested huge efforts and resources to initiate, support, and sustain the process of changing the standards of living of the people in the developing countries through the top-down approach (UNDP, 2023; and World Bank, 2023).

So a universal adoption of development, driven by a neo-capitalist ideology and undergirded by the “Washington Consensus” was forced down the throat of the developing countries. It is instructive to note that the “Washington Consensus” refers to a set of 10 economic policy recommendations perceived to be the standard reform package for developing countries overwhelmed by the crisis of development. These development prescriptions were handed down by the Washington, D.C.-based Bretton Woods institutions- the IMF, the World Bank, and United States Department of the Treasury. This free-market ideology promoted such policies as trade liberalisation, privatisation, and financial liberalisation, underpinned by market fundamentalism and neoliberalism (Williams, 2017). In specific terms, according to Baab and Kentikelenis (2021:4), these 10 broad sets of policy prescriptions were: (1) “fiscal policy discipline, with avoidance of large fiscal deficits relative to GDP; (2) “Redirection of public spending from subsidies (“especially indiscriminate subsidies”) toward broad-based provision of key pro-growth, pro-poor-services like primary education, primary health care and infrastructure investment”; (3) “Tax reform, broadening the tax base and adopting moderate marginal tax terms; (4) “Interest rates that are market determined and positive (but moderate) in real terms; (5) “Competitive exchange rates”; (6) “Trade liberalisation: liberalisation of imports, with particular emphasis on elimination of quantitative restrictions (licensing, etc.); any trade protection to be provided by low and relatively uniform tariffs; (7) “Liberalisation of inward foreign direct investment” (8) “Privatisation of state enterprises”; (9) “Deregulation: abolition of regulations that impede market entry or restrict competition, except for those justified on safety, environmental and consumer protection grounds, and prudential oversight of financial institutions; and (10) “Legal security for property rights”.

In apparent realisation of the pitfalls of the top-down and one-size-fits-all approach to development, the World Bank, in partnership with the Federal Government of Nigeria, and 28 states: Katsina, Kebbi, and Zamfara (North West); Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe (North-East); Benue, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and FCT, Abuja (North Central); Ekiti, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo (South West); Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, and Enugu (South East); and AkwaIbom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, and Edo (South-South), established the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) as a national flagship project that provides grants for human capital development of the selected communities and vulnerable groups such as women's group and People Living With Disabilities (PLWDs) to enable them to embark on their own development projects of choice. Its major areas of focus are: Education, Health, Rural Electrification, Transportation, Socio-Economic Development, Environmental Resources, and Community Housing. The CSDP, a bottom-up development strategy employs Community-Driven Development (CDD) approach in deploying resources for socio-economic and infrastructural development to benefitting communities and vulnerable groups (World Bank, 2021). The CSDP tends to meet about nine of the SDGs. According to the World Bank (2024), the CSDPs have benefitted over 23 million vulnerable Nigerians in rural areas; financed over 16,000 micro-projects aimed at improving access to education, water, electricity, health, environment, transportation and social inclusion; implemented in over 5,700 communities across 28 states in Nigeria; provided over 1, 160 psychological sessions to over 3,800 people; and supported the establishment of over 7,000 new businesses.

In Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States in particular, the Community and Social Development Agency, (CSDA) was established by law to carry out the activities of the Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP), in the states. The CSDP is designed to support the development, appraisal, coordination, implementation, supervision, and evaluation of community-based plans and the provision of financial grants. The CSDP was then established with the aim of improving access of social infrastructure to the rural poor through upgrading and construction in the education, health, and electricity and water sectors. It also involves the construction of rural feeder roads, bridges and multipurpose community management services and safety nets support. CSDP was the new programme that would build on the Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project (LEEMP) and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) structures to effectively target social and environmental infrastructure at the community level, as well as improve Local Government Areas' (LGA) responsibility to deliver. At the state level, an agency was established by law to manage and carry out the daily affairs of the CSDP in the rural communities. In Nigeria, 28 states including Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are participating in the CSDP.

However, as laudable as the CSDPs are, it is pertinent to emphasise the role of strategic communication in civic engagements with the beneficiaries of these development projects. Communication remains central to the diffusion of development in any society. Communication strategies aimed at planning and implementation of development projects must take into account the participatory development communication approach (Huriyah, 2019; as well as Sulaiman, Rosyadi, Handoko, Masrukin, Putri, Wijayanti, and Faozanudin, 2024). According to Alakwe and Okpara (2022), communication strategies for rural development must be egalitarian, emancipatory, and dialogue-oriented, so that the real beneficiaries of development can share their experiences, ideas, yearnings, and aspirations; that throughout the process, all the parties concerned-the multilateral organisations, the government, and the

community, should engage in reciprocal exchanges of ideas and information from the planning or conceptualisation stage of the projects to the implementation, and also evaluation stages. UNICEF (2024:22), said, Communication for Development (C4D) goes beyond providing information. It involves understanding people, their beliefs and values, the social and cultural norms that shape their lives. It includes engaging communities and listening to adults and children as they identify problems, propose solutions and act upon them. Communication for development is seen as a two-way process for sharing ideas and knowledge using a range of communication tools and approaches that empower individuals and communities to take actions to improve their lives.

Jain, Shroff, Merchant, and Bezbaruah (2022), as well as Tian, Liu, Liang, and Wu (2023), support the above by stating that strategic communication, which must be participatory as a form of development planning deliberation must involve all the relevant stakeholders/actors of development, such as the donor agencies, the government, members of relevant civil society organisations, the private sector, and the community, in a series of negotiations, lobbying, interactions, or even transactions in order to achieve mutual agreement and understanding, as it pertains to development planning and implementation, based on mutual problems, interests, and desires. In addition, strategic communication as a form of development communication, promotes an open, aspirational, egalitarian, and accommodating consensus between all the stakeholders, especially at it concerns the bottom-up planning and implementation of development projects. This is quite important because as Ekenberg (2016), as well as Dziubaniuk, Gongne, and Berdysheva (2021) argue, if the participatory involvement of the beneficiary-communities is lacking in the strategic communication for project planning and implementation, then development efforts will continue to elude the people, especially the vulnerable. The focus of this research therefore is to assess the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of the Community and Social Development Projects (CSDPs) in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Most development projects in Africa that should benefit the people usually fail because of the top-down approach to the issues of development and the communication strategies in particular. When the aspirations, desires, and yearnings of the direct beneficiaries of development efforts/projects are not taken into consideration, then strategic communication becomes a one-way, instead of mutual process of communication. In some cases, apart from weak strategic communication interventions, the socio-cultural nuances and ethos of the target beneficiaries of development projects are not also studied so that strategic communication is not done in a vacuum. While Zulch (2024), argues that strategic communication is quite central to the success of project conceptualisation and implementation because all the stakeholders need to collaborate, share, and exchange information and knowledge to realise set objectives, Novianto and Wulansari (2023), note that ineffective strategic communication can make the planning and implementation of development projects to fall short of its intended objectives, and in the process, the aspirations, desires, hopes, and yearning of the intended beneficiaries of the development projects could be dashed. Arising from the above, the study assesses the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects (CSDPs) in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this research is to assess the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects (CSDPs) in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States, but in specific terms, it is to:

1. Determine the communication strategies of the Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States.
2. Ascertain how the communication strategies are deployed in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States.
3. Find out the effectiveness of communication strategies in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States.
4. Find out the challenges of the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The following objectives guided the study:

1. What are the communication strategies of the Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States?
2. How are the communication strategies deployed in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States?
3. What is the effectiveness of the communication strategies in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States?
4. What are the challenges of the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is significant in the following ways: (1) it will make multilateral agencies involved in global development, the government, both at the state and federal level, as well as other philanthropic organisations involved in global development to understand and appreciate the bottom-up approach to development and also the imperative of the participatory approach to strategic communication for development; (2) it will make the target beneficiaries of development efforts/projects such as the communities, and the vulnerable therein to have a sense of belonging concerning the ownership approach to development projects through the ventilation of their aspirations and desires on life-touching developmental projects; (3) it will add to the scanty extant empirical literature on communication strategies and the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects (CSDPs) in Nigeria.

## 2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Communication is an activity which touches every social action, whether political or economic Ciboh, (2021). By its very nature, communication is conterminous with society hence society can be viewed as a set of shared understandings which imply communication since the knowledge which people have of their society must be acquired, maintained and altered by communication. This makes the universal nature of communication familiar, yet the concept is difficult to contain in anyone definition without tampering with the adequacy of such definition.

Nevertheless, communication can be defined as the exchange of ideas. Thus, the oldest meaning of communication in English language can be summed up as the passing of ideas, information and attitude, from person to person, indeed, “to be” is to communicate. Without communication, man is not different from lower animals. Our ability to carry out symbols around with us, to interpret them and relate them around us, makes us distinct.

The very word communication means “share” When people share, they are one. When people agree, they are of one mind, and that means they understand one another. This one another is unity, a group of people, a society, a culture, are people in communication. The degree of communication, that is sharing, is a measure of one mindedness. Society can then be defined not only as a network of political and economic arrangement but also as a process of learning and communicating. It is an interactive process that works in a circular, dynamic and on-going way. It is talking with people, a process with no permanent sender and no permanent receiver. The roles of sending and receiving messages change depending on who is talking and who is listening. This implies freedom, equality and shared interests.

According to (Ciboh, 2021), Communication generally means the spoken words, signals, gestures, pictures, visual displays, print, broadcast, film, all the signs and symbols by which human beings try to convey meaning and value to one another. Every social interaction is communicative and any social process is a communication process. We act in a socially meaningful way and transmit meaning to a particular or observer. We then engage in a complex exchange of meaning even when and where this is not our conscious intention.

The most developed of all system of communication evolved by man is, of course, human speech and language. These are responsible for thought organization which results in self-awareness and sense of social responsibility, ethics and law. Through speech and language, man has become a self-conscious and responsible social creature. But as earlier alluded to speech and language are not the only systems of communication. Other forms of communication also includes: movement of hands and face, nods, smiles, frowns, handshakes, kisses, fist shakes, all convey the most subtle understanding. Economic systems for trafficking in goods and services also have focus of communication, such as coins, bonds, and letters of credit. Convention of dress, rules of the road, social formalities, good manners, rules of membership and function in families, business and institution, all have communicative value, (Ciboh, 2021).

Life in the modern world is increasingly dependent on technical means of communications like the telephone, radio, cable, television, cable and satellite communications, computers and the internet. Without these no modern state or nation would exist for one week. It is by these that trade and business depend and goods and services are distributed where needed.

Communication therefore rendered true social life practicable and has enabled social life to grow from village to town, to modern city state, to organized systems of mutual dependence which have grown to cover the entire world. Communication definitely is life.

For (Orvihi-Ivase, 2017) communication is viewed as behaviour that has no opposite hence there is no such thing as non behaviour. The implication is that one cannot behave. And if we accept that all behaviour in an international situation has message value, that is communication, then no matter how you try, you cannot communicate activity or inactivity; word or silence all have message value; they influence others, whom in turn respond and thus communicate themselves. Communication does not only take place when it is intentional, conscious or successful, that is, only when mutual understanding occurs.

Again, Tyagi&Misra (2018), note that the English word “communicate” is derived from the Latin word “communicare” which mean to “share”. This in turn is derived from the Latin word “communis” which means “common” Communication is a much-hyped word in the contemporary world. It encompasses a multitude of experience, actions and events, as well as a whole variety of happenings and meanings, and technologies too. Meetings, conferences, or even a procession can be a communication event. Newspaper, radio, video, television, and the social media are all communication tools that communication professionals use.

In the same vein, Sharma (2021), note that communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages or information, through the writing or speech. It is the meaningful exchange of information between two or more living creatures. Pragmatics in communication means any sign- mediated interaction that follows combinatorial, context -specific and content coherent rules. Communication is an inherently social interaction, and communicative competence is the ability to engage inter-subjective interactions. Communication requires a sender, a message, and a recipient, although the receiver does not have to be present or aware of the sender’s intent to communicate at that time of communication; thus communication can occur across vast distances in time and space. Communication requires that the communicating parties share an area of communicative commonality. The communication process is complete once the receiver understands the sender’s message. Communication is a vital aspect to change behaviour of the receiver.

As a matter of fact no executive can be successful without communicating effectively with his superiors or subordinates. Message is in the form of words, symbols, signs, letters or actions. Communication is a tool of management to get the things done through people. The process of communication demands the necessity of a transmitter, message, symbols, channel, decoding, receiver, action and feedback. Communication is therefore a primary tool for effecting behaviour change. (Sharma, 2021).

Communication can simply be defined as a process by which people exchange information, express their thoughts, feelings, ideas and views in discussion with other people using verbal or nonverbal expressions, signs and writing to convey message among themselves in the society. Okwor (2017) simply defines communication as a process and the activity of passing information from an individual to another person in the society. Fasel (2020) defines communication as the ongoing interchange among people of thoughts, ideas, opinions, impressions, information and data by speech, writing or signs. Interestingly, communication is



an ongoing interchange process which involves expression of thoughts, views, ideas, opinions, information and data in human environment in order to influence people's action for an improved living condition in the society.

The concept of communication can also be viewed as an exchange of information between the sender and the receiver in the society. The sharing of information is inevitable in communication for effective service delivery in community development. Communication is very critical to community development in the participating communities in the society. Communication is, indeed, central to every human activity in community development process. In the views of Okwor (2017), communication is very central because the person involved must endeavour to share his or her experience with target audience to explain the entire exercise. Without communication no information will be provided to relevant stakeholders as a guide for effective promotion of community development.

### 3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is anchored on the Developmental State Theory and the Alternative Paradigm Model. The Developmental State Theory explains the leading role that the state plays in the economic transformation and growth of any nation. Rooted in the Post-World War II industrialisation policies of Japan and other East Asian countries, consisting of tariff protection, subsidies and other types of control measures, the theory argues that the development of a state cannot be left to neoliberal economic orthodoxies alone (Omoweh, 2012). Following the above, it becomes quite imperative that for Nigeria to have an inclusive development that will leave anybody behind, the state must be at the centre of development, after all, policy-making and implementation are the responsibility of the state and not the private sector. The theory emerged from the writings of Omani Edigheji, Thandika Mkandawire, Peter Evans, Ha-Joon Chang, EunMee Kim, and Daniel Omoweh, among others. Further, the concept of the Developmental State emerged as an offspring of scholarships rooted in Underdevelopment and Dependency Theory (UDT) debates concerning the crisis in the economies of the Latin American countries in the 1960s. Such scholars like Paul Baran, Gunder Frank, Celstado Furtado and Raul Prebisch had carried out studies on this issue. For instance, Prebisch carried out a study on the underdevelopment of Latin America in the 1950s and noted that its major cause was the exchange economy introduced by the subsidiaries of transnational corporations of America (Edigheji, 2012). So in a nutshell, Community and Social Development Projects can be more effective when the state is put at the service of the people.

The Alternative Paradigm Model, also known as the Participatory Theory, believes that real development can only take place when the intended beneficiaries participate from the conceptualisation to the post-implementation stage of the development process. This Model or Theory encourages the use of all the channels/media of communication- mass media, indigenous media, digital media, as well as groups to mobilise the people to identify and prioritise their developmental aspirations, desires, and needs. According to Waisbord (2001) cited in Inyang, Alegu, and Maku (2020), advocates of the Alternative Paradigm believes that development communication should engender the systematic use of the channels/media of communication and techniques to enhance a people's participation in the development process, as well as inform, educate, motivate, and train the people, especially those in the rural areas on how to participate in the development process. According to Inyang, Alegu, and Maku (2020),

the involvement of the target beneficiaries of development at the different stages of the development process, makes them to adopt the ownership approach concerning project conceptualisation and implementation. They argue that instead of seeing projects as government-owned, the people will see these projects as theirs and do everything to protect them. So the Alternative Paradigm leverages bottom-up approach to development over the top-down approach; it believes further that instead of talking at or even talking with the people, the governments and other developmental partners should talk with the people. This Model is at the heart of the Community and Social Development Projects.

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The research designs used for the study were survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Survey, is a kind of research design used to collect information from a sample of a population that is too large. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2015), the sample of this population must be representative enough to be generalisable. Focus Group Discussion is a kind of qualitative research technique and data collection method whereby a predetermined and selected group of people discuss an issue or topic in-depth. These groups of people usually have the same characteristics; and the discussion is usually facilitated by a professional or expert in that field. The number could be from 6-20 (Babbie, 2020). FGD was deemed quite appropriate because of similar experiences of members of the beneficiary-communities, who share common ancestry and experiences.

### Presentation and Analysis of Data

Out of the 384 copies of questionnaire distributed, 380 copies, representing 98.9% were returned and also found useful. According to Babbie (2020), in social science research, when the response rate from questionnaire distribution is 70% and above, then the findings of such research can be deemed valid. However, below is the presentation of the demographic data of the respondents:

**Table 1: Demographic Data of the Respondents**

Items	Respondents	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	243	63.9%
Female	137	36.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age-range</b>		
18-22	30	7.9%
23-27	59	15.5%
28-32	119	31.3%
33& above	172	45.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Education</b>		
WAEC/NECO	37	9.7%
Undergraduate	30	7.9%
ND/NCE	57	15%
HND	50	13.2%
BA/B.Ed/B.Sc.	85	22.4%
MA/M.Ed/M.Sc.	94	24.7%
PhD	27	7.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	223	58.7%
Islam	132	34.7%
African Traditional Religion	25	6.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Occupation</b>		
Public Servant	80	21.1%
Private Sector Worker	87	22.9%
Business	53	13.9%
Others	160	42.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>

From Table 1 above, the men are in majority in respect of the gender of the respondents. This could be attributed to the patriarchal nature of Northern Nigeria, and because the men are usually the opinion leaders and also constitute the majority of the workforce in the formal sector of the economy. Concerning the age –range of the respondents, a good majority of the respondents are in their 30s and above. This tends to be in contrast to the well-known youth bulge in Nigeria. Although at that age-range, most of the respondents can still be considered as youth, but they have gone past the media age of youth in Nigeria. For the education of the respondents, there is a good spread, especially from those who have HND up to the PhD level. The implication of this is that they understood clearly the focus and issues involved in the research. Concerning the religion of the respondents, while Islam is rooted in the selected states, Christianity is still the religion with the highest number of adherents in the three states. This does not detract from the fact that there are also adherents of the African Traditional Religion. Concerning the occupation of the respondents, while there is an appreciable representation of other categories of occupation, it is worthy to note that a good majority of the respondents do not have any visible means of livelihood. It is possible that many of these people could be undergraduates and unemployed graduates.

In respect of the Likert Scales below, the mean for each statement on the Scale was determined by multiplying the frequency of each statement by the grade point and then adding all together, then dividing the sum by the total number of questionnaire returned (380). For example:

$$\frac{75x1 + 60x2 + 50x3 + 40x4 + 30x5 + 20x6 + 10x7}{380}$$

$$= \frac{75+120+150+160+150+120+70}{380}$$

$$= \frac{845}{380}$$

Mean = 2.22

Further, a benchmark mean of 4.0 was set. This benchmark mean which was used in determining the positions of the respondents on each of the statements was arrived at by dividing the total grade points on the Likert Scale by 7 thus:

$$\frac{1+2+3+4+5+6+7}{7} = \frac{28}{7} = 4.0$$

Therefore if a statement on each of the Likert Scales has a mean value equal to or greater than 4.0, then such a statement is accepted as the aggregate opinion of the respondents; if otherwise, then it is not.

**Table 2: Awareness of the Community and Social Development Project**

S/N		SD	D	SwD	NAD	SwA	A	SA	Mean
	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	I am fully aware of the Community and Social Development Project in my community.	27	37	31	29	77	82	97	4.91
2	I am fully aware of the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of the Community and Social Development Project in my community.	24	26	38	43	48	95	106	5.04
3	The officials of the Community and Social Development Project carry out stakeholder engagements in my community in the planning and implementation of the project.	20	17	30	29	51	98	135	5.39
4	The officials of the Community and Social Development Project use the indigenous, mass, and digital media in the planning and implementation of the project in my community.	45	37	33	54	49	68	94	4.59

**Key:** SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; SwD= Somewhat Disagree; NAD= Neither Agree nor Disagree; SwA= Somewhat Agree; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

From Table 2 above, the level of diffusion of information about the CSDPs has no doubt, heightened the knowledge and awareness of the respondents. This also shows that the officials of the Community and Social Development Agency are on top of the game with respect to the sensitising of members of the community about the imperative of the CSDPs and also the need

for collective ownership approach by the community. This goes to show that when the development process is participatory and inclusive, it will be easier for the level of awareness of the target-beneficiaries of such development efforts to be increased. Two key take-away from the Table above is that stakeholder engagements and the deployment of multiple media platforms are quite tangential to the acceleration of development efforts.

**Table 3: Communication Strategies Deployed in the Planning and Implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States.**

S/N		AI	I	SI	N	SA	A	AA	Mean
	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5	The officials of the Community and Social Development Project use radio in the planning and implementation of project in my community.	41	47	39	35	43	85	90	4.59
6	The officials of the Community and Social Development Project use indigenous media in the planning and implementation of project in my community.	31	24	22	25	82	79	117	5.13
7	The officials of the Community and Social Development Project use text messages/phone calls to mobilise the people in the planning and implementation of project in my community.	29	17	26	30	50	96	132	5.29
8	The officials of the Community and Social Development Project use social media platforms like WhatsApp to communicate with the people in the planning and implementation of project in my community.	30	27	39	25	70	82	107	4.97

**Key:** AI=Absolutely Inappropriate; I=Inappropriate; SI= Slightly Inappropriate;

N=Neutral; SA= Slightly Appropriate; A=Appropriate; AA= Absolutely Appropriate

Table 3 above underscore again the multi-pronged and multi-dimensional media channels and strategies adopted by the officials of the Community and Social Development Agency in ensuring that nobody is left behind in the community development process. So the holistic approach whereby the conventional mass media, the indigenous media, and the digital media, especially social media are utilised in driving the development process, speaks to the importance of strategic communication in facilitating the development process. One insight from the Table above is how members of the community have embraced the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp to engage each other and also the agents of development concerning these community development projects. It shows that the people can express their feelings, yearnings, and aspirations, unlike the Dominant Paradigm Era of development where

development ideas and projects were basically top-down or impose from above without the input of the people concerned, or without considering their socio-cultural peculiarities. So the people now are also part of the development process.

**Table 4: Level of Acceptability of the Communication Strategies Used in the Communities**

S/N		TU	U	SU	N	SA	A	PA	Mean
	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
9	The communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Project in my community have made us to have a say in the kind of project that we want.	19	28	21	36	73	88	115	5.21
10	The communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Project in my community have made us to have a common front.	14	18	20	12	78	95	143	5.62
11	The communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Project in my community have made the government to understand our needs.	20	16	12	48	60	103	121	5.38
12	The communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Project in my community have led to the sensitisation of the people.	15	19	21	28	44	96	157	5.59

**Key:** TU=Totally Unacceptable; U=Unacceptable; Slightly Unacceptable; N=Neutral;

Slightly Acceptable; A=Acceptable; Perfectly Acceptable

From Table 4 above, an aggregation of the opinion of the respondents indicate that there is a high degree of acceptability of the communication strategies used in the CSDPs. One of the hallmarks of communication strategies is the ability of the people concerned to comprehend the messages being passed and also to use these messages to drive the development process. Meeting the people where they can be found, and using the media that they are used to will give a big boost to the effectiveness of the communication strategies deployed. It is pertinent to note that communication strategies used in the development process can be effective if there

is openness in communication; in this case, people are encouraged to speak up; if the development agents use multiple channels and media of communications; prepare very well in advance; take down points of discussions, especially points of agreements and disagreements; and also note the body language and non-verbal cues of the people.

**Table 5: Challenges of the Communication Strategies of the Community and Social Development Projects**

S/N		NT	RT	SIT	N	ST	UT	AT	Mean
	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
13	Poor training of the officials of the Community and Social Development Project is one of the challenges of the communication strategies.	34	37	50	50	58	62	89	4.59
14	Lack of sustainable structures is a challenge to the communication strategies of the Community and Social Development Project.	21	33	37	44	56	81	108	4.73
15	Inadequate logistics/manpower is a challenge to the communication strategies of the Community and Social Development Project.	23	27	29	30	50	99	122	5.22
16	Lack of synergy in the communication strategies used by the officials of the Community and Social Development Project is a challenge.	10	20	13	47	63	89	138	5.50

**Key:** NT=Never True; RT=Rarely True; SIT=Sometimes but Incorrectly True;

ST=Sometimes True; UT= Usually True; AT=Always True

Table 5 above shows that in spite of the aggregation of the positive opinions of the respondents in the aforementioned Tables, the respondents are in agreement of the challenges of the communication strategies used in the CSDPs. However, it is clear from Table 6, that these challenges are not insurmountable. What is needed by all the stakeholders is to engage in self-introspection in order to determine where improvement is needed.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The major objective of this research was to assess the communication strategies used in the Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States in Nigeria. The imperative of this research was hinged on the fact that for actual development to take place in a developing country like Nigeria, then the development process must be inclusive, participatory, interactive, and should involve all the relevant stakeholders. And at the centre of this, is strategic communication.

**Research Question 1:** What are the communication strategies of the Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States?

The pertinence of the above research question was that it was necessary to determine the communication strategies deployed in the planning and implementation of the Community and Social Development Projects, before determining the effectiveness and challenges of the communication strategies. Using Likert Scale, and with a mean score clearly above the benchmark of 4.0 findings indicated that the respondents were fully aware of the Community and Social Development Projects in their respective communities. This is also corroborated by the findings from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This shows that the Community and Social Development Agency has achieved some level of success in terms of creating awareness and mobilising the people for these development projects. This also underscores the fact that when the people are given a sense of belonging in developments that concern them, there will be that ownership approach. Findings also showed that absolute majority of the respondents were also aware of the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of the Community and Social Development Projects; that the officials of the Community and Social Development Agency carry out stakeholder engagement in the planning and implementation of projects; and that the officials of the CSDA use different categories of the media, such as indigenous media, mass media, and social media.

**Research Question 2:** How are the communication strategies deployed in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States?

Having expressed a high level of awareness of the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of the Community and Social Development Projects, it was necessary to determine how these communication strategies were deployed. Using Likert Scale, and with a mean score clearly above the benchmark of 4.0, findings showed that the officials of the CSDA use the radio in the planning and implementation of the CSDPs; that the officials also use indigenous media, text messages and phone calls, as well as social media platforms like WhatsApp.

**Research Question 3:** What is the effectiveness of the communication strategies in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States?

The essence of communication strategies in driving the development process is to create impact. So this research question sought to examine this. Findings from the study showed that the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of the CSDPs made members of the community not only to have a say, but also to have a sense of belonging; that the communication strategies made members of the community to have a common front; that the communication strategies contributed to making the government to understand the needs of the communities; and that the communication strategies have also made the people in the respective communities to be sensitised to the need for development. These findings underscore the place of the Alternative Paradigm or Participatory Theory in galvanising the people towards developmental objectives. There is no gainsaying the fact that the participatory element used the Agency has made the people to realise the potential and power in communal bonding. This



is consonance with the findings of Hassan & Arroyo (2019), as well as Mmutle (2019), which discovered the effects of participatory development communication in the execution of development projects. However, one of the respondents in the FGD disagreed with the notion that the communication strategies of the CSDPs have led to the governments understanding the needs of the communities. He noted that in his own community, there lack of government presence; and that it was the CSDPs that gave them a sense of belonging. This means that although the governments of the three selected states and the Federal Government of Nigeria are partners in the Community and Social Development Projects, there appears to be absence of synergy between these tripartite partners in this particular community. Research Question 4: What are the challenges of the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of Community and Social Development Projects in Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba States?

Most communication strategies and interventions in the quest for development usually have some challenges. That is what the above research question sought to find out. To this end, findings showed in contrast to the positive views of the respondents earlier that there were challenges in the communication strategies used in the planning and implementation of the CSDPs. These challenges ranged from poor training of the officials of the CSDA; lack of sustainable structures; inadequate manpower; and lack of synergy among the officials of the CSDA. The findings show that there appear to be a disconnect between in the logistics and operations of the Agency. This is because the respondents cannot heap so much encomiums on the Agency, while at the same time, believing that there are some teething challenges; and these challenges identified, if they were really so, would have hampered or hobbled the successes of these projects. Be that as it may, the onus will be on the Agency to carry out self-introspection on its activities. It is possible that the Agency, from the accolades of the respondents actually mean well; but the human element could also be a factor. In addition, the two theories used- the Developmental State Theory and the Alternative Paradigm were validated in the sense that the Community and Social Development Projects were products of both the state and federal governments in partnership with The World Bank to bring the people into the matrix of development; while the Alternative Paradigm showed how the people, through stakeholder engagements, ownership and the bottom-up approaches of development communication were able to make some achievements in terms of community development.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Development is one phenomenon that has gone through a lot of experiments in the hands of various governments around the world, and also the multilateral organisations. For a long time, the government and multilateral organisations thought that the top-down approach to development was the best approach. This is in tandem with the Dominant Paradigm and the also the Bretton Woods Institutions-inspired Washington Consensus. It took a long time for both the government and the multilateral agencies to realise that for real and meaningful development to take place, it must emanate from the people in a bottom-up approach, taking into consideration the people's aspirations, desires, yearnings, and socio-cultural and environmental peculiarities. It was realised that what worked in the West would not necessarily work in the Global South, especially Africa.

Central to the above is the place of communication in the development process. Communication, it is worthy to note, is very tangential to the development process, especially community development, in which the intended beneficiaries of the development efforts/projects participate. The importance of communication in the development process must be seen in the light of the fact that the beneficiaries should be in a position to share their experiences, and this leads to effective stakeholder engagement for the promotion of community development. Also, communication for community development can lead to the people influencing each other, creating and maintaining a basis of shared information and ideas which will guide them in their development choices, and this makes the development process to be engaging and participatory. Some of the major insights and implications from the research is that when the target audiences of development efforts/projects are fully consulted and made to be involved, they have a sense of belonging and also imbibe the spirit of ownership of the development process. Also, it is becoming glaring that radio is no longer the dominant medium of development communication, particularly in the communities, because of the absence of instantaneous feedback. It therefore goes without saying that the use of mobile phones and WhatsApp is gradually displacing radio in this regard. Mobile phones and WhatsApp are more personal to the users than radio, and they make communication to be easier and engaging; feedback can also be immediate.

## **6.1 The Need for the Community and Social Development Projects to Establish Liaison Offices in Each Local Government Headquarters**

It is a fact that the Community and Social Development Projects has brought development to the door step of the people, but for proper stakeholder engagements beyond the community level, the Community and Social Development Projects should establish a liaison office in the headquarters of each of the local government areas. This will lead to more personal interface and dialogue between the Agency and the people.

## **6.2 The Need to Prioritise the Strategies/Channels of Communication**

Although in devising communication strategies and deploying communication channels/media, a multi-modal approach can be better, but with community development and based on the knowledge of the media/channel choices of the people, it is better to prioritise the communication channels. In this case, dedicated mobile phone lines or that of the staff of the Agency as well as WhatsApp groups should be used more because of their decentralised and personal nature. Radio as the usual medium of development communication is gradually being displaced because it is not engaging enough compared with digital channels like mobile phones and WhatsApp.

## **6.3 The Imperative of Establishing Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms**

Development is a process as well as a continuum. Feedback is very important in the communication process because it shows if the receiver has got and understood the message. In order to determine the effectiveness of the communication strategies deployed in the planning and implementation of the Community and Development Projects, a research and data-driven procedure must be put in place by the Agency so that it can know if the desired results have been achieved. Such research and data-driven procedure can be anchored the

“SMART” model- the acronym meaning Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

## 6.4 The Need for a Peer-Review Process

All the stakeholders and partners involved in the Community and Social Development Projects- the World Bank, state and federal governments, must institute a peer-review mechanism and carry out a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of these projects as well as the planning and implementation process. This will make these development partners to know the latent and potential challenges that may arise. These development partners can take a cue from the African Peer Review mechanism (APRM) of the African Union and tailor it to their own peculiarities.

This research has contributed significantly to knowledge in the sense that it has shown how development can be effective if the intended targets of development efforts/process are involved and carried along. The research has also shown that there is a shift in the dominant channel/media of communication used in community development from radio to mobile phones and WhatsApp. For a long time, scholarships on development communication reiterated radio as the medium with the most impact when it comes to rural development communication. But this monopoly seems to have been broken.

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