

IMPACT EVALUATION OF ACTIONAID NIGERIA AND WOMEN AID COLLECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to rise irrespective of interventions by government and development organizations towards curbing the menace. This situation is attributed to Nigeria's socio-cultural leaning which development and gender experts believe is patriarchal. The success or failure of VAWG interventions is dependent on the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by programmers. To ascertain this, the research evaluated the impact of the communication strategies used by ActionAid Nigeria and Women Aid Collective in communicating violence against women and girls' programmes in the Federal Capital Territory and Enugu State respectively within a five-year period (2015 to 2019). The research was anchored on Feminist Communication and Behaviour Change Communication theories. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, secondary data were collated and analysed from extant literatures, while primary data were derived from interviews with forty respondents through purposive sampling from persons who are either working on or were affected by VAWG. Findings of the study revealed that that ActionAid Nigeria and Women Aid Collective employed mixed communication approaches to communicate their VAWG interventions. However, high impact change were not achieved. The study concludes that this affected programme outcomes, and therefore recommends that VAWG implementers should be more deliberate in planning communication from project design to implementation continuum if change in behavior of target audience is to be achieved.

Keywords: Women's rights, Violence against women and girls, Communication strategies,

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is considered as an obstacle to the realisation of the objectives of equality, development, and peace. This is in line with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), which was established in 1946, and became the first international instrument that referred specifically to human rights and to the equal rights of men and women. The UDHR enjoins all members of the United Nations to strive towards the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Building on this, the

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established to ensure that the needs of women and the enjoyment of the internationally agreed rights are met. One fundamental objective of the CSW has been to define and elaborate the general guarantees of non-discrimination from a gender perspective (UN Women, 2009).

Since then, there have been bold steps to fulfil this mandate through several instruments and frameworks such as the introduction of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women of 1952, the Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW provided a framework for addressing discrimination on basis of gender (UN Women, 2009). Then followed the 1995 convening of the largest World Women's conference- Fourth World Conference known as the Beijing Conference that created a platform for inclusive conversations as critical issues of concern were identified and adopted by the UN Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). The Declaration was aimed at setting up principles to promote equality of men and women development and of peace. These areas include education and training, poverty, health, violence, economy, armed conflict, power and decision making as well as establishment of institutions to advance human rights of women and girls (Mohammed, 2020). Feminists and women activists around the world took advantage of the Beijing conference to make demands for inclusion and participation in policy issues around these areas (O'Neil et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding these strides, gender experts and feminists have expressed concerns that the aftermath of the 1995 Beijing Conference have not yielded so much dividends as expected, in putting in place policies and practices to address VAWG (O'Neil et al., 2014). In response, there were renewed interests by the international community and national stakeholders relating to the gaps in the implementation of the CEDAW and other frameworks. In 2005, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was enacted to ensure that women have a voice and participate in peace and security issues. This was followed by revived interest by bilateral agencies to sponsor gender related programmes across various development streams or support actions and reflections that can spur women focused programmes (O'Neil et al., 2014).

Violence against women and girls exists in Nigeria. Available evidence shows that 28% of women have been through one form of violence or the other, and that 45% of victims did not report the cases to anybody or authority (Mohammed, 2017). Collaborative research by the Federal Ministry of Health, UNICEF, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation reveals that 31% of women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, while 36% of married women have experienced spousal violence (NPC & ICF, 2018). This has implications for achievement of socio-economic and political rights of women and girls in Nigeria and negates the fundamental principle and proviso of the UDHR. Within the past two decades (2000-2020), Nigerian women and girls have been most affected by conflicts that have ravaged the country. They have had to endure increase in sexual violence, along with related health complications including involuntary pregnancies, increased food insecurity and internal displacement (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2017).

Nigeria is a signatory to the CEDAW, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) with its Optional Protocol on Women's Rights, the Maputo Protocol among others. The country, therefore, holds itself accountable to the domestication and full implementation

of these international and regional frameworks including its obligation to eradicate violence against women and girls. In addition to policy focused responses, there has been a surge in the promotion of women's issues by development organisations. In the recent, there are numerous registered women focused organisations operating at community, state and national levels resulting in increased visibility of women and girls' rights programming including ending violence against women and girls in Nigeria (ActionAid Nigeria, 2019).

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Notwithstanding the various commitments that Nigeria has made towards the advancement of women's rights as evidenced in the plethora of international, regional and national laws and policies that Nigeria signed on to, and development interventions by non-state actors, VAWG appears to be unabating.

The success or failure of interventions to end VAWG may be dependent on how effectively these interventions are communicated and the strategies employed. This is because communication strategies serve as blueprints for communicating information related to a specific issue, event, situation, or audience (EPA, 2018). Communication strategy is important for changing the awareness, levels of knowledge, attitudes, practices and perceptions of people (Mefalopulos & Kamlongera, 2004), and this is particularly important when it comes to gender and women's rights issues. While it is evident that different organisations have different communication strategies designed and mainstreamed for their programming, not so much is known about the effectiveness, quality, and delivery of these strategies towards changing the awareness, levels of knowledge, attitudes, practices and perceptions of people, and by extension, people's perception on VAWG.

According to Sharma (2011), communication strategies are designed by development organizations based on prevailing circumstances or contexts of existing projects. Patterson (2007) on the other hand, considered it from the perspective of its resource value or advantage, arguing that the availability of resources would largely determine if a communication strategy would thrive or not. Ifatimehin (2013) considered communication strategy from the point of effectiveness for community engagements, suggesting the adoption of communication strategies that are inclusive and participatory.

However, as important as these insights by scholars and studies are, very little attention has been given to narrowing the effectiveness and quality of communication strategies within VAWG contexts. This gap is the focus of this research work, by evaluating the impact of communication strategies used by two case studies, ActionAid Nigeria and Women Aid Collective in communicating VAWG interventions, the study will provide evidence for effectiveness of communication strategies in mitigating VAWG at community and national levels.

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research work provides added knowledge to policy and decision makers on existing policy and legal instruments gaps. In addition, this study provides information on strategic communication processes and tools that will be useful for development organisations in addressing complex development issues such as VAWG. It is also hoped that other women

focused organizations will take up the challenge of evaluating communication strategies for other components of women programming.

3.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

3.1 Gender Based Violence (GBV)

The concept of Gender Based Violence has been defined by different development experts in the field. According to Save the Children (2004), GBV is any violence directed at an individual based on specific their gender role in a society. It can be targeted at a male or female. GBV is argued to be one of the most oppressive hinderers of gender equality as it affects women and girls' full participation in political, social and economic spheres of life, and also significantly a major impediment to women's full autonomy and empowerment. This perspective is further dissected in the United Nations definition of GBV as "any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (Russo & Pirlott, 2019).

However, both Save the Children and the UN definitions no doubt recognise that females bear the brunt of GBV. GBV includes physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated, condoned, or accommodated within the family unit, the general community or empowered by states and institutions. It is worthy to note that GBV is also defined based on organisations' focus of work. For instance, the UN Women and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) preferably use the term, Violence against women and girls to describe the focus of their work (World Bank, 2019).

The World Bank study (2019) and IASC factsheet (2018) espoused the various forms of GBV to include sexual violence (actual, attempted or threatened - vaginal, anal or oral) rape; sexual abuse and exploitation; forced prostitution; transactional/survival sex; and sexual harassment, intimidation and humiliation; physical violence (attempted or threatened physical assault or battery; slavery and slave-like practices; and trafficking); emotional or psychological violence (abuse and humiliation, such as insults; cruel and degrading treatment; compelling a person to engage in humiliating acts; and placing restrictions on liberty and freedom of movement).

It is important to note that overtime, the definition of GBV has changed according to context. For instance, within the humanitarian context, the term is conceived as Sexual and Gender Based Violence. This assumes that sexual violence may be separated and not based or determined by other gender hierarchies. In the same vein, there has been the use of the term, Gender Based Violence in Emergencies based on the foreknowledge that gender-based violence is a component of war and conflict primarily targeting women and girls in conflict settings who are often used as weapons of war (Save the Children, 2004).

3.2 Women's Rights

The concept of women's rights is traced to the original definition of human rights. Hence, just like human rights, women's right is predicated on the universal understanding that men and women should attain and enjoy equal rights in a world free of discrimination. The United Nations has a long history of addressing women's rights-first, dealing with every form of

discrimination against women based on sex, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, health status, marital status, education, disability and socioeconomic status, among other grounds (ONHCR, 2014).

Advocates for Human Rights (AHR, 2016) described these rights to include those related to safety and security rights, equal protection and due process rights, and non-discrimination rights. These rights refer to right to life and liberty, in which case the right to be free from violence and or protection from exploitation and abuse within the family and other spaces. It also refers to right to be treated equally and be protected by the law without discrimination. The right to non-discrimination refers to right to live free from any form of personal and institutional discrimination because of one's sex. Additionally, right to work is also an important body of rights which refers to right to work, including equal pay for equal work, equal employment opportunities, and paid maternity or other benefits that ensure women do not lose employment, or benefits due to pregnancy. Finally, right to education, which speaks to equal access and opportunity in all forms and aspects of education regardless of sex.

3.3 Communication

There are many paradigms that can be used to study communication, even though, the research study was concerned with the development perspective of communication and strategies that can be employed to communicate complex development processes. Communication takes place at different levels within the individual (intrapersonal); person to person (interpersonal); from person to many (group) within an organisation (institutional or organizational) and from individual or group to the large, heterogenous and independent mass of people (mass communication). Therefore, communication is basically a form of social interaction through message sharing. It is also a process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another (Sola, 2008).

An expanded definition addresses communication as a process of exchanging messages and creating meaning rather than an outcome (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996). This implies that even though messages and meanings are transferred, the recipient of the information determines the application of the message or meaning to his or her situation. Therefore, communication can only be effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to it. This could be dependent on prevailing factors such as state of mind, perception or personal ideology.

Significantly, the views of Dale (1970), Sola (2008), and Gudykunst & Shapiro (1996) are relevant to this research work, as it helps the researchers to understand what extent do target audience of communication attach meaning to messages shared on VAWG, and the role the communication strategies play in achieving desired result and the impact thereof. From another angle, scholars have drawn a cause-and-effect relationship between communication and development. They establish that communication (cause) is one of the benefits of development which includes: the accelerated advancement in health, education, wealth creation, security, happiness and nation-ness (Waisbord, 2001, Agunga, 1997, Galadima & Adeyanju 2017). In essence, communication is not just about transmitting information but creating and stimulating understanding as a basis for development. Communication approaches have potentials of

creating transformative realities by painting the true picture of different aspects of development including dismantling patriarchy.

4.0 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

4.1 Violence Against Women and Girls in Nigeria: Trends, Practice and Prevalence

Evidence from the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (2019) and National Demographic Health Survey - NDHS (2018) reveal that 3 out of 10 females have experienced physical violence before the age of 15. These experiences are either through forced or early marriage, physical, mental and sexual assault on females.

Compounding this is the inherent systemic culture that enables violence through harmful traditional practices. Nigeria is ranked high in major risk factors such as acceptance of wife beating, and early and forced marriage (World Bank, 2019). This syncs with NCF & ICF (2014) report that revealed that 43 percent of girls in Nigeria (2 out of 5 girls) are married out before age 18 (UNICEF, 2016), with Zamfara as highest at 48.6%, Jigawa at 87.4%, Kebbi at 66.9% and Taraba State at 43.3%. The culture of early marriage is extremely harmful to girls. Global evidence shows that girls married before the age of 18 have higher rates of repeated unwanted pregnancies, obstetric fistula and intimate partner violence (Erulkar 2013).

The NDHS further revealed that the rate of sexual intimate partner violence among women stands at 16%, GBV among female children due to early marriage at 44%. According to World Bank (2019), girls who are under 13 years, and who engage in informal economic activities or undertake trade in any public sphere such as street hawking are at risk of being abused or violated.

At the other end, with the increased conflicts and humanitarian situations in Nigeria, women and girls have become more vulnerable in volatile areas. The Human Rights Watch further affirms this and noted that the farmer/herder conflicts and the Boko Haram insurgency are two leading causes of women's human rights abuses in Nigeria between 2017 and 2018.

The recent COVID 19 Pandemic has had a direct impact on increasing the spate of VAWG in Nigeria. The restriction in movement occasioned by the confinement/lockdown imposition affected livelihood, limited women and girls' access to social protection services, thereby increasing their risk and vulnerability to VAWG (UN Women & WHO, 2020). A study conducted by 100 Women Lobby Group (2020) revealed that the mandatory lockdown period in Nigeria had a disastrous impact on women and girls who were trapped in the house with their abusers. Hence, there was a 14% increase in VAWG amongst young girls aged 15-19, and a slight increase in VAWG among women who engage in formal and informal economic activities. The Shadow report by the UN (2020) preliminary data on violence against women in 24 states in Nigeria, shows that the total number of GBV incidents reported increased from 346 in March 2020 to 794 in April 2020 depicting a 56% increase in just two weeks of lockdown.

4.2 Review of Legal and Institutional Context of VAWG and GBV in Nigeria

Nigeria has a history of endorsement of conventions and legal instruments related to ending GBV and VAWG. According to the FMWA (2019), Nigeria has ratified 9 out of 13 major global human rights frameworks. While these instruments have been globally adopted, very few have been holistically domesticated at the national level including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW which was adopted in 1979 seeks to guarantee women equal rights in both private and public spheres such as marriage, voting, education, health care.

Other instruments Nigeria has adopted include the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) which was ratified in December 16, 2004; Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 which defines the protection of children from all forms of mental and physical violence, as well as sexual exploitation, child marriage, abuse, harmful traditional practices, and prostitution (World Bank 2019). Most importantly among these commitments was the Nigeria's participation as one of the 189 countries in the Beijing World Women Conference of 1995 and in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA) (FMWA, 2019). For the first time, through the BDPFA, accountability was demanded of Nigeria on upholding women's rights, activating new laws and policies to protect women's rights and provide funding support to improve the polarized gender environment in Nigeria.

While the above are obvious commendable progresses made to advance women's rights in Nigeria, a snapshot on these commitments reveals that there is limited commitment to enforce in full practice the intents of the policies. For instance, even though the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act were passed by the federal government, they have not been domesticated in all 36 states of the federation. The Sexual Offences Bill 2013, the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GOE) Bill 2016, and the Labour Amendment Bill 2016 have either been stalled or entirely objected from being enacted into law (Ekhatior, 2019).

4.3 Understanding Communication Strategy

Sola (2018) defines communication strategy as "a well-planned series of actions that are aimed at achieving specific objectives using communication methods, techniques, and approaches". The author specifically objectifies the term 'strategy' as a plan or method for achieving specific objectives. He argues that communication strategy must be feasible and clearly defined. The foregoing definition is a departure from the Environmental Protection Agency (2013) who posits that communication strategy does not need to be stated as a blueprint or in a formal document but should be clearly visualized and communicated.

Cook et al., (2007) posit that in selecting communication strategies, one must be deliberate to choose appropriate communication objectives and identify specific brand awareness and brand attitude strategy. These objectives can be audience oriented or solution oriented. EPA (2013) captures that any communication strategy must constitute: i) objective/goal of the communication, ii) stakeholders, iii) key messages to be communicated, iv) means/channel of communication and v) feedback mechanisms. It is important to note that communication strategy is not just problem oriented but solution oriented as it must be to resolve a specific issue around an emergency, communication risk or a response to a communication release.

Sola (2018) was more specific on what one must consider when developing a communication strategy. According to the author, it is important to identify the means of communication to be able to develop the right communication framework. This then will be followed by having a clear communication objective and approaches for effective dissemination of communication. Sola further argues that structuring the information needs of each stakeholder is critical, while identifying the appropriate modes of communication is essential. Finally followed by delivery of the communication activities. This therefore aligns with Cook's position that communication strategy must be deliberate.

Communication strategy is used for several objectives. First, communication strategies are problem identifiers and constitutes actionable steps or approaches to communicating an issue to an audience (public, stakeholders or individuals). EPA (2013) argues that these plans are undertaken to increase awareness or to provide information related to a specific event, issue, situation or audience. Communication strategies are used to enhance coordination such as delineation of organizational roles, putting in place procedures to synchronize activities and provision of access to shared resources and social rules (Patterson (2007). In other words, communication strategy helps to organize information that needs to be communicated, identify concerns that may be raised, and ensure the proper audiences are reached. Communication strategy is also used to encourage action, build or mobilise consensus; change behavior, promote

4.4 Assessing Communication Strategies and its Effectiveness for Interventions

Using well designed and targeted communication strategy has proven to be vital instrument for programme delivery within the development sector including health, social mobilization, women empowerment programmes. Describing the communication strategies for grassroots development, Sola (2008) observed that the first step is to study the target audience and understand their communication needs. Linked to women rights programming, communication strategies are necessary for consciousness-raising and the development of critical thinking. It assists oppressed populations like women who have experienced loss of power understand the role powerlessness plays in perpetuating personal and social problems (Boehm, 2003). Using the internet, powerless women can facilitate consciousness building, mutual relationships and constructive dialogues, online self-presentation and identity control. Much more, the participatory use of the internet has the potential of creating fluidity of conversations, open communication, diversity and new energy for feminist activism particularly among feminist or women focused development organizations.

5.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researchers hinged the study on Feminist Communication theory and Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) framework. However, the study empathizes with SBCC as it helps us understand why people act the way they do and why behaviours change. Given the focus of this research, which seeks to evaluate the impact of communication strategies on target audience, and considering that violence is a behaviour driven action, SBCC theory is therefore relevant for this study. Feminist theorists are interested in the societal attitudes and values in relation to oppression that finds expression in gender inequalities. It draws evidence from macro level observations of legal and social systems that contribute and sustain these

inequalities. According to Laura Valenziano (2008) citing Jonhson, feminist theory seeks to find and acknowledge multiple truths and realities, requiring us to view the world from a broader perspective that includes the place and history of women in society. Hooks (2000) noted that feminism is focused on ending sexism. In specifics, feminist communication theory concerns itself with the examination and explanation of gender and gendered power within communicative texts. According to Lisa Cuklanz (n.d.), feminist theory in communication should not only concern itself with the gender and power relation, but also examines the relevance of other textual elements such as race, sexuality and class. In essence, the examination and critique of these textual artifacts in relation to their ability to account for intersectionality of a range of prejudices. This is important to this study as feminist communication theory helps us to understand how social norms transcends into communication products and outputs and help to shape and reinforce gender inequalities and violence.

Social Behaviour Change Communication theories on the other hand are helpful to guide SBCC program design and help programmers to focus on what or who to address their programme on. The theory has a different set of factors that explain behavioural change and area of focus—the individual, their intention to change their behaviour or their surrounding environment (John Hopkins, 2016). This theory emphasises that individuals form behaviours based on their perceptions and intentions, attitudes and subjective norms (Communication for Change, 2011). Therefore, the theory emphasises on the need to consider individual beliefs about a problem being addressed and the costs and barriers associated with changing that behaviour. It is salient to note that at the community level, the SBC theory suggests that people learn not only from their own experiences, but also by observing others performing actions and the benefits they gain through those actions. This concept is mostly modelled by development education programs. This is where communication strategies become most relevant, particularly for social and community mobilization, or advocacy.

6.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was done using a qualitative research method. The intent is to use the information from this study to investigate the nexus between effective communication and positive behaviour change towards mitigating VAWG in Nigeria.

A total of 40 respondents were selected, and they were interrogated on existing communication process and strategy, the effectiveness and impacts of the communication strategies, and recommendations for improvement where gap exist. In doing this, the researchers selected four communication specialists- two from each organisation to provide specific information relative to communication strategies around VAWG programming in their organisation using an In-depth Interview method. For purposes of triangulation and provision of additional insight, Key Informants were also identified and interviewed. A former Minister of Women Affairs, a staff of United Nations Women (UNWomen), two independent gender experts served as KII respondents. The researchers focused attention on how communication strategies were designed, for whom, how they were deployed and to what extent the Communication strategies had worked to amplify awareness and/or contributed to mitigating VAWG in Nigeria.

To ascertain the impact and effectiveness of the communication strategies employed by the Case studies, direct beneficiaries of the projects were reached through FGD. These include 32

women and girls who were direct beneficiaries of VAWG interventions and have been exposed to AAN and WACOL VAWG programmes. These respondents provided information on the various communication tools that were used to reach them between 2015-2019, the kind of messages they received and to what extent these interventions had effect on them (as target beneficiaries).

7.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is evident from the study that violence is pervasive in the study areas even though there are many interventions around ending VAWG. It is enabled and sustained by cultural norms and practices. Bennett's position on feminist theory of domestic violence while citing Pence and Paymar (1993) noted that VAWG is an outcome of societal condoning of aggressive behaviours by men while socialising women to be non-violent. If socialization is done through communication (verbal and non-verbal), it can also be reversed through communication. SBCC therefore offers the opportunity of reversing bad behaviours and beliefs when appropriately designed and delivered.

Interesting evidence from the study, is the rate at which VAWG is increasing irrespective of the awareness programmes by NGOs through their media campaigns. Respondents alluded that increase in VAWG is an indication that something is not working right with strategies used by the NGOs. While respondents are not arguing about the efficacy of media but rather questions the efficacy of single approach on behaviour change. In fact, the research revealed that behaviour change and mitigation of VAWG is achievable when disruptive approach is used, when communication approach is intentional through its design and delivery, and when multiple communication approach and tools are combined over a long period on a single issue like VAWG. This therefore means that VAWG messages must be designed based on understanding and challenging the socio-cultural messaging that encourages dominance, control and use of force by specific gender.

It was also evident from the study that budget constraint affects the fund to plan and implement a robust and holistic communication strategy that will make any meaningful impact. While respondents are unanimous in the effectiveness of SBCC and other forms of behaviour change communication models such as use of disruptive communication messages, they opined that NGOs do not use multi communication approaches that can target and reach different audiences over a long period due to lack of fund. Where NGOs, due to limited budgets, fail to employ communication experts and use multi communication strategies, the impact of their efforts is minimal in mitigating VAWG. This finding supports Patterson (2007) position which opines that effectiveness of a communication strategy can be measured from value perspective, stating that the availability of resources would largely determine if a communication strategy would thrive or not. In essence, there would be a difference in the use of communication strategy on well-funded and high reliability organisations such as international NGOs than staggeringly funded organisations such as small NGOs. From the study, this assertion holds true as respondents including a former Ministry of Women Affairs as well as Communication experts agreed that funding is a major constraint and hinders the effectiveness of VAWG programmes. In the case of AAN and WACOL, AAN has more resources, draws communication support from its international office and can afford to employ multi communication approaches to drive communication plan unlike WACOL that depends on donors and internal resourcing. However,

WACOL as a local NGO depends on words of mouth (testimony) of those who accessed quality service and the traditional institutions to communicate and affect their audience.

Another weakness identified by the research which affects the effectiveness of case studies and other NGOs communication strategy in mitigating VAWG is the non-inclusion or involvement of the direct beneficiaries in the design of the communication strategies. This in turn affects the effectiveness and impact of their communication products as some beneficiaries see themselves as mere recipient of messages rather than actors. This position aligns and is reaffirmed by Waisbord view that audience participation is one key element of participatory approach as it helps to integrate the causes, needs and opinions of community members.

8.0 CONCLUSION

NGOs with mandate on women's rights have communication strategies in place, some written, some based on applied knowledge. These communication strategies include the use of traditional media – the radio, television, face to face and small group communications-community dialogues and town hall meetings, and campaign actions such as street protest with use of printed flyers and posters to communicate messages on VAWG. There is also shift in using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Despite the communication strategies employed by the research case studies, respondents in the research are divergent in their view of the efficacy and impact of the communication strategies employed by these agencies in mitigating VAWG. While some believed that the communication strategies used by the case studies and NGOs are effective and resulted to increase in awareness and amplification of VAWG issues, a few think that the strategies are not effective as VAWG has continued to increase, and that at best, the communication strategies merely created awareness but did not achieve the required change in behaviour which ultimately would have led to reduction in VAWG in the study areas. This therefore implies that the communication strategies employed by the case studies are not as effective and impactful as expected.

8.1 Recommendations

(1) Given respondents divergent opinion on the effectiveness of communication strategies used by the research case studies in reducing VAWG, there is need for a concerted action to avoid waste of resources – time and money – without real impact on behaviour change. ActionAid and WACOL as well as other NGOs need to review their communication strategies to ensure they are effective, meet quality, and that the delivery of any of their communication strategies must contribute to changing the awareness, levels of knowledge, attitudes, practices and perceptions of their target audience on VAWG.

(2) To achieve the above, their communication budget size should be increased to allow for designing better fit and robust communication strategies. Without adequate funding, communication experts within the organisations struggle to develop and deploy and achieve communication result.

(3) One way that organisations with low budgets can be supported to be able to cope in dire lack of fund, is through creating access to pool of communication products. To achieve this, government institutions such as the National Orientation Agency can lead the designing of

comprehensive communication messages for ending VAWG. This will help in availability of mix of advocacies, campaigns, behaviour modifications tools.

(4) In view of the policy and implementation gaps, it is exigent that state government fully implement protective laws like the VAPP Act to criminalise the different types of violence. However, the real deal will be on ensuring that appropriate and timely information is available, is easily accessible and speaks to all categories of persons - general population, communities, security agencies, as well as potential and actual male perpetrators.

(5) Innovation is key to building interest and stimulating action. As identified by the study respondents, the use of disruptive messages has proven to be instrumental to challenging VAWG. Other innovative messaging could be focused on positive reinforcements and use of multi communication approaches that can target and reach different audiences at the same time.

(6) Furthermore, there is need to invest more time and resources to research development, documentation and sharing of best practices on communication strategies, communication messaging, SBCC programs and projects, among others. This will facilitate cross learning among communication actors, institutions, and practitioners.

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