

Imploring Strategic Communication Skill in Dialogue for Community Development

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ABSTRACT

As communities around the world are struggling to cope with the changing social, economic and environmental structures, the demand for participation in the planning of policies is rising. The imperative to promote peaceful, accountable and inclusive societies and institutions has increasingly resulted in the adoption of community dialogue in the planning and implementation of community development projects. However, the successes of dialogue in achieving community development is dependent on the communication strategy employed. This study was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of strategic communication in dialogue for community development in Nigeria. The study employed integrative literature review method with a search strategy that ensured the inclusion of all relevant peer reviewed studies. The study found that community dialogue has proved effective in rural development as it accommodates the perspectives of the stakeholders in the community and the community development agencies. The study recommends that communication; especially strategic communication should be integrated into every community development programme.

Keywords: community, communication, community development, strategic communication , dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Development strategy processes for sustainable development are a complex task that put people right at the center of attention; their analyses, dialogue, images, competences, planning, investments and actions are to define a society's joint economic, social and ecological goals [1,2,3]. In order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment, and a right attitude in development projects [4], strategic communication is imperative. In the pursuit of this goal, participation is very important in any decision-making process [5]. This could be enhanced through strategic communication. Strategic Communication in this context is supposed to be a pre-requisite and an instrument of effective policy making and public participation: from formulating a vision, negotiating and decision making, developing and implementing plans to monitoring impacts [6,7,8]. Many countries use conceptual umbrellas such as Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) or National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSD). [9,10], to achieve

sustainable development. In fact, if communication must play a more strategic role in steering development policy, there will be the need to employ good knowledge of strategic communication skills to drive development at the community level. It is one of the key means through which access to and application of knowledge and information are facilitated [11,12,13]. Strategic communication is an important means of establishing a common understanding among all participants of a development initiative, and creating a base for common action and involving stakeholders with knowledge and information that can be applied to effective decision making, accountable management, social and political mobilisation, helpful behaviour change, and individual and collective growth [14,15,16,17,18]. This distinguishes it from the traditional approaches to communication which entails a top-down public education campaigns by line ministries about particular development project. The question then is what are the

strategic communication skills imperative for community development and how can such skills be deployed for meaning

community dialogue in rural development of the Nigerian state?

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose and the central objective of this study is to explore ways of utilizing strategic communication to achieve meaningful community development within the rural settings of Nigerian State. This objective will be addressed by dissecting:

1. Strategic communication skills for

driving community development.

2. Strategic Communication driven dialogue for Community Development.
3. Participatory development in a diverse community member's opinions.

Statement of the Problem

Many development projects are conceptualised and planned - far from where they will be implemented -by development agencies who fail to understand the complex power relationships and unique communication processes existing in local settings [19,20]. Furthermore, these projects are often being planned in a top-down manner without involving the specific community in the needs analysis, the decision-making or the planning process [21]. Although communication has shown its usefulness and impact in change and development situations, its role in development is still not appreciated or

understood by many. Communication often does not form a central part of a development project, which is surprising given that there cannot be development without participation and it is almost impossible to have participation without communication [22]. In general, there is a feeling that the communication function in development is being poorly handled by project managers and policy administrators. The problem of this study, therefore, is to provide the ways strategic communication skills could be used to engage in a meaningful dialogue for community development.

METHODS

The study employed integrative review method summarizing past empirical or theoretical literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under discussion. The answers to research questions were

discovered through the integrative review process. The reviewer evaluates the current state of knowledge, judging its quality so that the future directions for research studies in the area are clearer [23].

Literature Search Strategy

To investigate the use of strategic communication skills in dialogue for community development, data were sourced mainly from Google and Google Scholar. Articles selected werethosewritten in English language. Different search terms including community development, development communication, sustainable development, dialogue, community dialogue, community-led development, strategic communication, rural development,

strategic planning etc. were used for the search of relevant articles. The researcher used a number of well-defined strategies to minimise threats to internal validity, enhance rigour and reduce bias associated with electronic search. To broaden the search, the researcher used Boolean operators AND and OR. The researcher selected full text articles. The search techniques of truncation and phrase searching were also utilised.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concepts of Community

In order to understand how strategic communication skills could best be used in dialogue for community development,

it is important to clarify what community means in this context. In a general sense, community may be understood as both

geographical locations and people who have common values and beliefs [24]. National Institutes of Health (NIH) researchers conceptualized community in four ways: as a setting, target, resource, or an agent [25]. On the other hand, [26], believed that “community is much more than a designated territory....is, rather, the people who make it up, the structure of their relationships among themselves and with external partners, their skills, attitudes, beliefs and contributions”. This implies that there are many ways to think about community. For instance, [27] explained the concept of community from four perspectives: system perspective, social perspective, virtual perspective and individual perspective. Each of which provides different insights into the process of community engagement [28]. From a systems perspective, a community is similar to a living creature, comprising different parts that represent specialized functions, activities, or interests, each operating within specific boundaries to meet community needs [29]. For example, schools focus on education, the transportation sector focuses on moving people and products, economic entities focus on enterprise and employment, faith organizations focus on the spiritual and physical well-being of people, and health care agencies focus on the prevention and treatment of diseases and injuries [7]. For the community to function well, each part has to effectively carry out its role *in relation to the whole organism*. A healthy community has well-connected, interdependent sectors that share responsibility for recognizing and resolving problems and enhancing its well-being [5]. Successfully addressing a community’s complex problems requires integration, collaboration, and coordination of resources from all parts [9]. From a systems perspective, then, collaboration is a logical approach to community development. From the social perspective, a community can also be defined by describing the social and political networks that link individuals, community organizations, and leaders [11]. Understanding these networks is critical to planning efforts in engagement.

For example, tracing social ties among individuals may help engagement leaders to identify a community’s leadership, understand its behaviour patterns, identify its high-risk groups, and strengthen its networks [15]. Such understanding is pivotal to community development. On the other one hand, the virtual perspective refers to online community. While some communities map onto geographically defined areas, in our today’s world, individuals rely more and more on computer-mediated communications to access information, meet people, and make decisions that affect their lives [9]. Examples of computer-mediated forms of communication include email, instant or text messaging, e-chat rooms, and social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter [6]. Social groups or groups with a common interest that interact in an organized fashion on the Internet are considered “virtual communities” [8,12]. Without question, these virtual communities are potential partners for community-engaged and participatory development.

On the other hand, individuals have their own sense of community membership that is beyond the definitions of community applied by researchers and engagement leaders [9,14]. This is referred to as individual perspective. Moreover, they may have a sense of belonging to more than one community. In addition, their sense of membership can change over time and may affect their participation in community activities [20]. The individual perspective of community emphasizes two perspectives on identity: the “I,” or how a person thinks about himself or herself, and the “me,” or how others see and think about that person [23]. Sometimes these two views agree and result in a shared sense of an identity, but other times they do not. People should not make assumptions about identity based on appearance, language, or cultural origin; nor should they make assumptions about an individual’s perspective based on his or her identity [3]. Today, the multiple communities that might be relevant for

any individual — including families, workplace, and social, religious, and political associations — suggest that individuals are thinking about themselves in more complex ways than was the norm in years past [9]. In the pursuit of community development, [5] stated that it is important to consider two perspectives on identity: The eligibility criteria that scientists, policy makers, and others develop for social programmes and research projects reflect one way that people perceive a group of proposed participants, but how much those criteria

Perspectives on Community Development

The concept development is very broad and encompasses values such as capacity building, equity, sustainability, self-reliance and empowerment. In general, as different scholars have defined that includes the improvement of people lives in terms of economic, social, political, environmental, spiritual/personal and cultural aspects. Development is central to man's survival on earth [6], and community development is at the heart of every development that is holistic. Scholars, researchers, and practitioners have various definitions of community development. However, they all agree that the approach puts the local community in the driving seat as agents of their own development, with background support from civil society organizations (CSOs), governments or community development specialists [7,9,10,13]. Many people mistake community development as another name for urban planning. It is often what people think of first when the concept is brought up. While the two are similar and can have a symbiotic relationship in a community, they are not the same. Community development is defined by the United Nations as a process where the conditions of social and economic progress are created through participation within the community and reliance on community initiatives. It is "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems" [5] In a broader sense, community development is a broad

reflect the participants' actual view of themselves is uncertain. Practitioners of community engagement need to learn how individuals understand their identity and connections, enter into relationships, and form communities. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research, the notion of community is conceptualized as a setting, primarily defined geographically, and is the location in which interventions are implemented [16]. It refers to those people whom the organization or community developer is working with directly or intend to work with eventually.

concept, applied to the practices of civic leaders, activists, involved citizens, and professionals to improve various aspects of communities, typically aiming to build stronger and more resilient local communities. Until recently, community development was imagined as a type of gentrification and renovation for poor, decrepit neighborhoods in desperate need of improvement. (Anon, n.d). This has been the typical view of community development for many years and is still treated as such to some degree today. However, many communities use community development as a means of general improvement for the benefit of all. The goal(s) a community has will often focus on providing resources to residents of all socioeconomic levels in the neighborhood, and giving them the opportunities to use services they need when they need them. It is important that in the discussion of community development, "community" is not necessarily specific to a particular geographic area-although that will often be the case. The concept can be applied to communities of identity, interests, or culture and heritage. There is a central theme to each community, something that ties its members together in the first place. The actions taken for community development will often need to focus on that theme and the individual elements associated with it in order for a plan to be formulated and for things to be successful. In many instances, the involvement and participation of community members is necessary as they

are each individual component that make up the whole. This also makes each community unique, so paying attention to the individual elements is very important. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people with the skills they need to effect change within their communities. These skills are often created through the formation of social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers must understand both how to work with

Community-led Development [CLD]

“Think globally, act locally!” During the last decades, this has been a maxim of many scientific areas and now starts to become more important in developing countries as well. It has become a prerequisite of sustainability and local development [9]. Acting locally in relation to global thinking has to be considered in the short-term, within our daily processes and in the long run, in our strategies for life. This principle is also valid for the choice of local initiatives in order to create [13] and sustain community development. Furthermore, the author stated that a responsibility of this principle is to satisfy social needs as well as shaping the social structures of decision making. Due to this goal, every citizen, every household, every community, and every organizational body in their various types are called for their individual initiatives to consider this calculus in their daily processes. Global impulses are followed by local actions. Furthermore, these actions are triggers for global impulses. Before persons can engage in “successful” community development, they must understand the interconnection between community “needs analysis” and “asset mapping” as well as understand how to effectively respond to “people” dynamics as core components of community development. Community “gaps and needs” together with challenging societal factors such as poverty, power, privilege, race, class, gender and other social inequalities and health disparities [16], must be taken in

What is Strategic Communication for Sustainable Development?

Communication serves information exchange, establishing consensus among

individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. Community development approaches are recognised internationally. These methods and approaches have been acknowledged as significant for local social, economic, cultural, environmental and political development by such organisations as the UN, WHO, OECD, World Bank, Council of Europe and EU.

accounts in order to drive successful and impactful community development. Inspiring Communities defined CLD as “the process of working together in place to create and achieve locally determined visions and goals” [7]. [10], also noted that CLD encourages the mobilization of community action and effort with 'place' as a core focus. CLD establishes a model for what is important to a specific community and builds capacity by recognizing that only working together can capitalize on the possibilities and address the constraints [5]. It also helps channel external investment and support towards relevant local priorities and plans (Inspiring Communities, 2013b). CLD encompasses community-level initiatives implemented by various actors including communities, NGOs and governments. The review included inputs from each for an accurate understanding of the CLD concept. Much of the research originates from NGOs and the public sector as an alternative development approach, thus giving insight for empowering marginalized local voices and providing support for them to lead their own development. The reviewed literature was mainly conducted in developed countries where CLD has gained prominence as a viable means to alleviate poverty. Comprehensive Community Initiatives, Inspiring Communities and Vibrant Communities in the United States, New Zealand and Canada respectively, are among the well-documented CLD initiatives studied.

divergent opinions and interests, and facilitates the building of know-how,

decision making and action capacities at the heart of the delicate cooperation between government, civil society groups and the private sector. Consequently, OECD and UNDP regard communication and awareness raising as one of nine core mechanisms to support strategy processes for sustainable development. In a sense, two-way communication is the 'lifeblood' of any strategy. Without it, a strategy will not succeed because cooperation and collaboration among key stakeholders depend on it. However, communication that is goal-centred needs to be strategic. "Being strategic is about setting goals and identifying means of achieving them; this implies adopting an approach that is based on good evidence, has an underlying vision, sets priorities, goals and direction and sets out the main tactics for achieving these [8]. For sustainable community development, being strategic requires a comprehensive understanding of the concept and its implications, but not necessarily a comprehensive set of actions - at least at

Approaches, Skills and Tools of Strategic Communication for Sustainable Community Development

Community development approaches are recognized internationally. Different communities tend to use different means to achieve this, but it is generally a universal concept. Community development exists in various forms. [5], for instance, establishes three major classifications community development: locality development, social planning, and social action. Strategic Communication for Sustainable Development borrows widely from long-lasting experience with communication in sectors such as rural extension, health, family planning or AIDS. More recently, approaches such as social marketing, non-formal, entertainment and environmental education, conflict management and negotiation or civil society mobilization, including participation and ownership were added to this spectrum [9]. The principles, methods and tools of Strategic Communication for Sustainable

any one time. Strategic Communication is more than disseminating of information but involves the active solicitation of stakeholders' perspectives [9]. The author submits that strategic communication ensures a two-way flow of communication, addresses human factors such as sociology, psychology, culture, behaviour, and politics, and helps building consensus and partnerships regarding the development agenda. Both, internal and external factors influencing human communication have to be taken into consideration. Internal factors comprise human features such as norms and values, attitudes and behaviour, emotions and beliefs, culture and social relations. External factors include material such as posters or films, the 'carrier' of a message, as well as media such as print or broadcast media, information and communication technology (ICT), street theater, a wall or interpersonal or group communication, the 'vehicles' that brings the material with the message to the target audience.

Development are derived from a mix of different fields and approaches. According to [12], "Dialogue, enabling people to understand the key factors of their physical, social, economic and political environment and their interdependence so that rising problems can be solved competently" is significant in any attempt to achieve sustainable community development project. Dialogue is a form of communication which the major components are participation, discussions and feedback. [11], states that communication by definition incorporates feedback. Information does not; hence, communication is the transmission belt between information dissemination and action planning. According to [7], five branches of strategic communication are particularly applicable to sustainable community development:



Source: [10]

Development and environmental communication: This involves breaking down complex information into understandable elements in a socio-culturally relevant way for different audiences to understand. It is a prerequisite for consensus building and change. In this strategy, a particularly successful model is the problem-oriented, participatory and focused Strategic Extension Campaign (SEC) developed by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

- Social marketing: This involves gathering input from that will be the beneficiaries to design communication campaigns promoting socially beneficial practices or products in a target group. Audience segmentation is a crucial element in this regard.

- Non-formal and environmental education: These involve promoting awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour for sustainable development and effective participation in decision-making process.

- Civil society mobilisation: This involves listening as well as 'talking', and combines vertical and horizontal social interaction through community-controlled media.

- Conflict management and negotiation: Mediation, conciliation or arbitration can help to address communication deadlocks and power imbalances, and increase trust. Against the backdrop, it is not surprising that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [9] and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) regard communication and awareness raising as one of nine core mechanisms to support strategy processes for sustainable development. Related core mechanisms that cannot be but analytically separated from communication are participation, negotiation and conflict management [8]. Strategic communication for community development borrows widely from Participation of community members in community development uses participatory community development model. The participatory development model endorses the framework of multiplicity and stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities and of democratization and participation at all levels—international, national, local and individual. This underpins any meaningful attempt aimed at encouraging and enhancing

development at the community level. It points to a strategy, not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional 'receivers'. [14] refers to this as the right of all people to individually and collectively speak their word: "This is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every man. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can he say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words". Therefore, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems argues that "this calls for a new attitude for overcoming stereotyped thinking and to promote more understanding of diversity and plurality, with full respect for the dignity and equality of peoples living in different conditions and acting in different ways"[8]. This model stresses reciprocal collaboration throughout all levels of participation [4]. Hence, these newer approaches argue, the point of departure must be the community [7]. It is at the community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed, and interactions with other communities are elicited. The most developed form of participation is self-management. This principle implies the right to participation in the planning and production of media content. However, not everyone wants to or must be involved in its practical implementation. More important is that participation is made possible in the decision-making regarding the subjects treated in the messages and regarding the selection procedures. One of the fundamental hindrances to the decision to adopt the participation strategy is that it threatens existing hierarchies. Nevertheless, participation does not imply that there is no longer a role for development specialists, planners, and institutional leaders [11]. It only means that the viewpoint of the local groups of the public is considered before the resources for development projects. There is, however, the possibility of other models that may arise from mutations of the three basic

models. [5] also suggest a three-fold division of the field of community planning and change. Change will take place through (1). Modifying human attitudes and behaviour patterns through educational or by changing the policies of formal organisation, or (3) effecting reforms in major legal and functional systems of a society. The change approaches discussed here are all planned change and not when a changes or changes take place accidentally as the case may be.

In Nigeria, much of the early experience in the community approach took place in towns and small cities, and in, neighborhoods within larger communities. Five major assumptions that have particular relevance for the community approach are increasing the participation of people in local decision making and action, viewing local issues holistically rather than fragmentally, and bringing about changes that are understood, supported, and carried out by 'the people involved. Disadvantages include the possible limitation of 'this approach to relatively small communities, and the decreasing importance of territorial anchorage as a determinant of social participation. The community approach continues to represent much of what is identified as community development. Of the various approaches to community development, perhaps the community approach is most synonymous with the basic process we identify as community development. The community approach is based on the participation of a cross 'section of the people-in a particular locality. Emphasis is on the fullest participation of citizens in determining and solving their own problems through democratic, procedures and indigenous' leadership. Rothman uses the term "locality development", in place of community development to identify' purposive community change "pursued optionally through broad participation of a wide spectrum of people at the local community level a

goal determination and action. Popular or broad-based participation is certainly one of the unique features of the community approach. Community development approach can be holistic. In this case, development is based on a broad spectrum coverage of the felt needs of the community. It goes beyond providing the specific needs of a segment of the community to providing a more inclusive development programme that will involve a wider participation of community members. Inclusive participation is related to holistic view of community life and community needs. The broader the view of community, the greater the potential participation of the people in community decision making and action. The major variable, of course, is time. No community development programme can work on a wide range of concerns and involve large numbers of people at one time, but rather over time. There may be relatively, brief periods of extensive/participation (during community self-survey or a voter registration campaign) and times when a number of needs are under study: (when a priority list of community

concerns is being developed), but generally the process is focused on one or a few particular goals. and only persons with interest in those goals are active participants. A skilled community practitioner needs to be conscious of self in relation to the practice and relationships formed within the practice [5]. This is a jazzy exchange - conscious of self as musician/practitioner and also conscious of the exchange with others in creating the jazz piece; it is also important to understand this particular exchange as an embodied dialogue and to imagine it metaphorically as a response dance [7]. However, from [9] perspective, dialogical practice is not only about; 'turning to the other', listening, connecting, learning and finding collective coherence and potentially shared agendas. Applied to community development, it is also about practitioners eliciting a mandate from the people they are engaging with. This is a mandate to do critical analysis together, pushing the boundaries of how people together interpret the shared world, and then create 'other' spaces of awareness and possible action.

Strategic communication has the capacity to:

- "Persuade a country's decision makers to adopt new policies and build constituency and support at the same time.
- Strengthen the capacity of municipal leaders, NGO representatives, and community-based organisations to manage their economic, ecologic and social resources sustainably.
- Develop partnerships among governments, local communities, and NGOs to encourage people to work together for change.
- Motivate people, e.g. private sector

CEOs and engineers to adopt cleaner production technologies.

- Raise awareness and support for sustainable development issues.
- Accelerate and improve people's behavior, e.g. farmers' adoption of technologies and behaviors that lead to sustainable agriculture and forestry.
- Convince and help people to change their behavior, e.g. families to adopt environment friendly behaviors such as conserving water, protecting common water sources from contamination," [6].

Dialogue for Community Development

Development is about perceptions of 'what should be', and great frustration is experienced if people feel their

perceptions are not being taken into account [9]. Community development is people-centred practice grounded in

particular kinds of relationships between people. From a dialogical perspective, within community development, the kinds of relationship between practitioners and community members themselves, is other-oriented, whereby people disrupt self-orientation and instead, 'turn to the other', and in their other orientation there are attempts to reach for mutual understanding of the other. Turning to the other and reaching mutual understanding requires engaging with other perspectives, or what [7] calls 'horizons'. [11], affirms that while a significant amount of foreign aid has been spent on projects in developing countries, the results have been insignificant. He criticized the 'top-down' approach that forces adoption of presumably better solutions to the local communities. The solutions provided are often not based on the actual problems on the ground that they are neither built on the strengths. Impact and sustainability can only be ensured if those who live in that place understand the fragile complexities of the community problems set visions and integrate them into the existing structure [7]. This can best be achieved through community dialogue. Community dialogue is a participatory process through which equitable partnerships are developed with community stakeholders, who are enabled to identify, develop and implement community-led sustainable solutions using existing or available resources to issues that are of concern to them and to the wider global community and which poses a significant threat to health. Social mobilisation is one of a plethora of strategies recommended to address health issues [10]. Through the process of talking together that community dialogue promotes, individuals can understand the thoughts, feelings and values amongst themselves and others, and this facilitates a joint construction of meaning that possibly transforms the understanding of the community members [11]. This common understanding reduces the gap between differing perceptions and power differentials) that prevent an equal conversation. [6] describes Community

Dialogues (CDs) as forums that draw participants across the community to exchange ideas in face-to-face moderated sessions, share personal stories and experiences, express perspectives, clarify viewpoints, and develop solutions to problems. This provides the enabling environment for the participants in community developments hold strategic conversations and shared perspectives. In this process, facilitators could be used to direct the talks and help reduce purposeless conversations [7,8,13]. According to [3], community development and the enhancement of participation promotes the ability for critical reflection of local problems and their capabilities to react on it. Community development is committed to social and environmental justice and its vision is a peaceful, just and sustainable world. "Community practitioners embodying dialogue are not so much conscious of dialogue but are in a state of responsiveness, and flow attentive to a diverse ecology of relationships. To position oneself in a responsive embodied stance enables the practitioner to be attentive to the narrative thread that is emergent from the tension between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies". [5], As a facilitator in community dialogue, you need certain skills, though such skills change in line with needs of the situation and the type of people you meet. A facilitator should be clear about what is his role and what is not part of his role. The facilitator's job is to assist the process of communication without expressing your own views about the issue being discussed. Just provide a setting and an atmosphere in which differing views can be exchanged and listened to honestly but without hostility. Also, the facilitator is responsible for the process, but not for the content of the discussion; meet with the key people from the groups involved to help them set their objectives; reach agreement in advance with the stakeholders on what issues to be discussed to avoid disagreement and make the group to 'own' and support the structure and aims of the process; In any case, there should be a brief statement of agreed objectives

at the beginning, to remind everyone why they have come. Encourage participants to

listen to each other.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the system theory. Systems theory aims to explicate dynamic relationships and interdependence between components of the system and the organization-environment relationships [9]. A system is established based on the structure and patterns of the relationships emerging from interactions among components. As a result of these emergent patterns and relationships, each system is different from another [5]. According to the authors, in the system theory inter-relationships, components of each system are structured in a hierarchical ordering, and components are interdependent with one another in the system to the extent that one component cannot function without the support of other components. Community development is such a complex term with varied meaning and stakeholder that it would be easier to identify the many of the components and processes involved using system theory [9]. The author also indicated that some of the key concerns of community development, such as understanding the dynamics of inter-group relationships, and considering the changes involved in planning development activities, can be

clearly described using system theory. [11], noted that system frameworks have a number of advantages in descriptions, explanations, predictions and prescriptions as well as searching out relationships and patterns of interactions. [13], define a system as a complex and highly interlinked network of parts exhibiting synergistic properties-the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is a collection of interrelated parts acting together to achieve some goal which exists in the environment. With regard to community development, [14] states that any attempt to change community behaviour, must take into account the community's nature as a complex living system whose elements are individual human beings. Because the feedback loops are omnipresent both among member of the community and between community members and their environment, the simple cause and effect model traditionally used in community development planning are not sufficient to explain behaviour and thus cannot by themselves form a solid foundation for intervention. Hence the use of system theory for this study.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that dialogues embodied in strategic communication is rarely used in the processes of community development in Nigeria. The common approach has been and remains the traditional top-down approach where the government determine the development needs of the community and goes on to provide such needs without the knowledge of majority of the community dwellers and their stakeholders. The few cases where there

are elements of dialogue between the government, None Governmental Agencies (NGOs) and other development agencies are when there are government projects intended for a community and in which the community is required to pay counterpart funds. In such circumstances, the members of the community and their stakeholders are allowed to be involved in determining their project needs and those that will collaborate with the providing agents to implement such project(s).

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the shortcomings identified in the review literature that reveal underutilisation of strategic communication and dialogues in enhancing community development in Nigeria, the study recommends as follows: Strategic communication should

be integrated in any conversation aimed at providing development in communities in Nigeria. Development agencies, whether government or NGOs should engage in dialogue with community members before, during and after implementing any project to ensure

sustainable community development. There should be community development education for community members and their stakeholders to prepare them to understand what community development entails and how best to approach it.

Development agents should be equipped with strategic communication skills to provide them with the know-how required for successful dialogue for community development

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