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## **SURVEY OF THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: DISCOURSES OF POVERTY REDUCTION IN ETHIOPIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Ethiopian Government has made significant efforts to enhance the economy of citizens and develop the country. The attempt has clearly noticed in many policy statements and changing programs as articulated in a hegemonic discourse “We do not pass poverty to the next generation but development and our great enemy is poverty.” Greater emphasis was given to many community-based development programs and is expected to play an essential role in the reduction of poverty, especially in rural areas where the bulk of the population lives. It is generally based on the belief that problems in communities have solutions in communities and the people should participate in matters that affect them.*

*For the success of community development projects, language and culture also play a very significant role. When language is used, ideas are shared, and important information is passed between individuals. It is often held that the function of language is to express thought and to communicate information. It enables development agents to store meanings and experience to facilitate communication for development in the successful implementation of development projects. Communication is the central component of any development activities. Mobilizing community members for community development purposes is important but members of communities can only be mobilized when communication is effective. An effective and adequate community communication can lead to effective collaborative efforts towards reducing poverty in general and solving difficulties in development activities in particular.*

*The objectives of the survey were to assess the communication strategies used in communicating development information by development agents to reduce poverty and identify effect communication has on development and the linguistic and communication gaps in the communication process by development agents and local community. The study employed descriptive survey method to assess the effect communication has in mobilizing community to tackle poverty. The survey identified out that the role of language and the different mode of communication applied to development interventions have received very little attention from the parties concerned though they party aware that the use of effective communication would lead to active participation of members in community development and social interactions are sustained by agreeable communicative principles. Moreover, the study revealed that when community is closely involved in community development plan and activities, it helps them take ownership of the initiative of development rather than seeing themselves as beneficiaries of development. Based on the findings, it was recommended that community members, community leaders, government officials as well as community development agents should engage in clear communication process so as to increase the participation of community members in development activities.*

**Keywords:** Community, Development, Communication and Poverty.

## 1 BACK GROUND

### 1.1 A Contextual Overview and Poverty Reduction in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a developing country located in the Horn of Africa with a total area of 1, 251, 88859 km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of 79.3 Million (CSA, 2007). According to the US Bureau of the Census estimation by July 2012, it has a population of 91,195,675 with an annual growth rate of 2.8%. For several decades, Ethiopia has gone through many economic, social and political crises. For instance, poverty is evenly distributed as compared to sub-Saharan countries. Poverty, in its most general sense, is the lack of necessities such as basic food, shelter, medical care and safety. These are generally thought to be necessary based on the shared values of the human dignity. The causes of wide and deep-rooted poverty include political instability, natural disasters, shortage of access to infrastructures and resources (*World Bank, 2001*).

On the other hand, for several decades, Ethiopia has gone through many economic, social and political crises as history tells us. In 1992, the Ethiopian government declared a Federal State comprising nine regional states and two autonomous administrative towns. Every region is divided in a number of administrative zones, each of which is formed by woredas that are composed of a number of kebele which are the smallest unit of the local government structure in Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government has followed a pro-capitalist and market derived economic policy in order to stabilize the national economy and eventually achieve healthy and dynamic economic growth (ECA, 2002). However, according to the World Bank, Ethiopia remains the poorest country in the world and is ranked bottom of the list of countries whose per capita is 100 US dollars. On top of this, recent economic growth rates are encouraging

and signifying that the economy grew by 5% in 2003. Yet most of the citizens are still living in absolute poverty (2003). In 2000, according to the Poverty Assessment for Ethiopia, 42.2 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, while 22.5 percent of households were extremely poor and lived below the food poverty line of 1650 kcals per person per day' (World Bank 2006). This gives a clear direction that the growth of the food supply of the country does not match the population annual growth.

Now days, Ethiopian government has made significant efforts to enhance the economy of citizens and develop the country which is clearly seen in many policy contents and changing programs and with hegemonic discourse "***We do not pass to the next generation poverty but development! and Poverty is our grate enemy!***" One major effort was the development of the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) which was exercised from 2002/03–2004/05. Then, as a result of dynamic economical change the country had, Ethiopia developed the second phase of similar program called Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) I which was implemented from 2005/06–2009/10 and PASDEP II (2010/11–2014/15) ongoing. The major concern of the Ethiopian government in its PASDEP is to give emphasis to the countries all and basic industry agriculture through its strategy called Agricultural Development Lead Industry (ADLI). In the document greater emphasis was given to many community- based development programs and is expected to play essential role for reducing poverty especially in rural areas of the country where a bulk of populace well (85% of the population.)

Community-based development is an evolutionary paradigm shift in development approaches necessitated by the failure of the modernization approach

to fight poverty. It is an approach aimed to secure development in its fundamental meaning and more in the human face. Community-base development as an intervention strategy focuses on action and stresses on operationalizing the idea of development at the community level and implementing plans that construe further the welfare of the poor. As Jones and Inaba (1997) stated, locality-based or community-based development provides the opportunity to define and measure the social nuance of progress in a community, neighbourhood, or household. The emerging of this idea as an alternative approach to poverty alleviation takes the community as a unit of solution to the process at large. It is generally based on the belief that problems in communities have solutions in communities and the people should participate in matters that affect them at the community level (UNDP, 1997).

## 1.2 Community Development

Community development (CD) is a broad term applied to the practices and activities that concern the improvement of various aspects of local communities. It combines the meaning of the two terms 'community' and 'development'. Community is "... a group of people who have something in common and will act together in their common interest" (UNAIDS, 1999). Allan (1997) also exposed community as specific group of people usually living in a common geographical area who shares a common culture, are arranged in social structure and exhibits some awareness of their identity as a group. Development, on the other hand, is a process that increases choices. It means new options, diversification, thinking about apparent issues differently and anticipating change (Christenson and Robinson, 1989). Development involves change, improvement and vitality- a directed attempt to improve participation, flexibility, equity, attitudes, the function of institutions and the quality of life.

Adedokun (2008) sees development as the power of people to solve their own problems with their own wisdom, experience and resources with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation. Akinpelu (2002) stated the target of development as being human beings and not the material accumulation surrounding them or of the economic growth of the nation. According to Akinpelu (Ibid), development as the process of enhancing man's knowledge, skills, attitudes, boosting his self confidence, self-reliance, and self-pride to face the world. For all these to come about, there is need for effective communication.

CD was first imitated from Egypt, Jamaica and others in the 1930s. It grew after the end of World War II in the UK and the US (UNAID, 1999), where there was a need to assist the social needs of the urban poor in the industrializing cities and it was designed to make citizens involve in the local decision-making process (Abbott, 1996). At this time, the developed nations also tried to assist the developing countries with programs of adult education and community betterment. The term community development gives a form suited to the twentieth century to the long-standing tendency of membership of a group to act together to improve the lifestyle of the group as a whole. Klonglan and Head in Chekki (1976) and UN (1956) also viewed community development as a process designed to create conditions of economic and social program for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative.

The basic concepts, values and principles of CD seek to change the living standards a community and empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to affect change in their own communities. It focus on the joint rather than individual effort to empower peoples

ways of life from a less desirable to a more desirable one using their own resources, skills and knowledge. The Community Development Challenge Report (2006), produced by UK-based Community Development Foundation for Communities and Local Government, defines community development as a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening development. CD will provide a general orientation that will enable you to contribute to community development within your organization and participate effectively in collaborative community development initiatives. It emanates from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in a creative manner, can be channeled into collective action to achieve the communities' desired goals. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power to ensure that everyone takes part in issues of development and that affect their lives. The overall result of CD is to ensure that communities become self reliant by using joint efforts, skills and available resources to change their situation to a better one.

CD is a collective activity where a group of people that share mutual interests and concerns become aware of their needs and resources, and act together to improve their situation. Moreover, it involves the coming together of a group of people in a community planning and acting together to bring about the satisfaction of their needs with a view to bringing about desirable change in the lives of the people through their cooperative efforts and by actively taking part in measures designed to improve their conditions of living (Adedokun 2008). The coming together of these people in a cooperative way take for a grant that there must be effective communication between and among the

people in the community. Without effective communication, there would be misgiving and misunderstanding and this would always result in conflict, lack of cooperation and subsequently lead to underdevelopment.

Through communication one can help a community to strengthen itself, participate well, commit to their target and develop towards its full potential where any form of language- verbal or non verbal employ much.

### **1.3 The Role Communication in Community Development Projects**

Communication is a key component of development activities. Mobilizing community members for community development purpose is important but members of communities can only be mobilized when communication is effective. Adequate community communication leads to effective collaborative efforts in issue of development. Moreover, communication will help engage citizens in development. Sarvaes and Liu (2007) exposed that to bring about social change among the marginalized and vulnerable population groups, participation must be fostered through communication; as such will lead to the transformation of the community. This is to say that communication is a central or the mediating factor facilitating and contributing to collective change process.

Community is precipitated on the fact that daily interaction of citizens is essential to collective action and that effective communication serves to stimulate and direct such interactions. When mention is made of communication in relation to community development, it means an interactive process in which information, knowledge and skills relevant for development are exchanged between community members and information providers either personally or through media such as radio, print telephones and internet. Development

communication aims to transform existing living conditions of the community through communication strategies, practices, and technologies. The aim of effective development communication is to put community in a position to have the necessary information for decision making and the relevant skills to improve their livelihood. According to FAO (2006), in communication for development, community is at the centre of any given development initiative and so communication is used in this sense for people's participation and community mobilization, decision making and action, confidence building for raising awareness, sharing knowledge and changing attitudes, behaviour and lifestyles.

Whenever communication is thought of, we always associate it with language. Language is a vehicle that we use in presenting our ideas, thoughts, feelings, opinions to the world to communicate. It is what we exhibit our cultural norms and orientations in development activities and the whole essence of our being is captured in our language. Development involves interactants interacting with concepts to create meanings and messages, construct and reconstruct meanings and values in order to arrive at a common understanding usually witnessed by a common social action. Language is vital to social change because it is the process 'by which persons share information, meanings, and feelings through the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages' (Klopf, 1998).

Language is key to social processes and interactions which form the basis of human survival. A destruction of language or the denial of a people's language amounts to denying them the freedom to express themselves. In addition to this, language also plays an important role in maintaining the social order particularly when one considers its communicative function (Omondi, 2006). Communication is an essential tool for the establishment and maintenance of a good

social and working relationship in the development process. It involves constant change of ideas and interactions among people for the solution of their problems and they see effective communication as essential prerequisite for every aspect of group functioning. Effective communication enhances participation of every community member towards the achievement of the goals of community development. It makes people participate actively in matters of development. Communication is a powerful trend to facilitate participation in development. It is about encouraging community participation with development initiatives through a strategic utilization of various communication strategies.

Effective communication, in this sense, is a two-way activity; it is not a one way dissemination of information, nor should it consist of telling people what they should or should not do. Rather, it is viewed as a way to motivate people to participate in activities in which they did not have input. Communication is expected to be used to facilitate community participation in a development initiative. When communication is used for community development purpose, it is based on the one hand on participating process and on the other hand on media and interpersonal communication which facilitates a dialogue among different stakeholders around a common development goal, with the objective of developing and implementing a set of activities to contribute to its solution, or its realization and which supports and accompanies this initiative.

## 2. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this research is to examine the role of communication in reducing poverty through community developments programmes.

**The specific objectives are:**

1. assess the communication strategies used in communicating development information by development agents;
2. identify the linguistic and communication gaps in the communication process by development agents and local community;
3. Assess the impact of communication on community development programs to bring the intended change on the life of the target community.

**3. Methodology**

The study was conducted in West Shoa Zone: Ambo and Gindebarat slum areas which were selected on purposive sampling base. It entails an attempt to establish good correspondence between research questions and sampling, meaning that the researcher samples on the basis of wanting subjects who are relevant to the research questions. Ambo was selected because it is the zonal town which offer more opportunities jobs (daily labourers) they crowd here and also do get the required work. Gindebarat is also purposively selected as the town is away from the main road but relatively biggest of the rural village where supposed to accommodate many slum populations. The study used descriptive survey research method in general sense. The study population consisted of different subjects who are involved in communicating about community development messages with the development agents and do participated in development or social committees. A total sample representative of 200 was taken and taught to be proportional representation of the population under study. To select participants both availability sampling and purposive samplings were used. The participants were people who involved in different economical and social activities such as

community development project practices, local development committee, has role in different social activities. They could also be representatives of local development committee, local institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and other concerned peoples.

To gather data, questionnaire and focused group discussions were employed. For the questioner, ten items were carefully prepared administered to the respondents to examine the role of communication on community development. To validate the items piloting was done on 20 subjects while the guided semi-structured questions for focused group were test and retested with expertise in the field of communication and development.

**4. Results**

Below are some presentation of the analysis of data and results identified in disseminating development information.

**I. Community knowledge of community development communication concept**

Communication is a social conscience; development communication is heavily oriented towards human aspects of development. Even though development communication is primarily associated with economic development, it is also concerned with the social development especially in slum areas. The reason it is much more demanding in slum town is that people may not get daily labourer job unless they communicate well. The knowledge and ability to communicate is an essential means to reinforce the capacity strategies of dialogue activities and strengthening interaction with stakeholders, partnerships creation and enhance access to relevant information. Accordingly, blow is table that depict the slum areas community communication knowledge.

**Table 1**  
**Knowledge and relationship of communication and development**

S. No	Item	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		No	%	No	%
1	Communication is the process of sharing ideas, feeling, emotion and thoughts in a meaningful way for certain purpose	165	82.5	35	17.5
2	Community development is a way of helping a community to strengthen itself and develop towards its full potentials	93	46.5	107	53.5
3	The problem of community can be solved by empowering individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to affect change in their own communities	66	33	134	67

From the above table, one can understand that slum communities do have good knowledge of communication but they do have very low knowledge about the concept of community development and development communication. Almost all, 165 or 82.5% of the community responded that they know communication is the process to share their thought, emotion, ideas and feeling. However, 107 respondents responded that they do not know as community development helps the community to strengthen itself and leads them to develop their capacity to exploit their full potential. On top of this, 134, 67% of the subjects exposed that they do not know as the problem of community can be solved by empowering individuals

and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to affect change in their own communities.

**Table 2**  
**The link between communication and community development**

S. No	Item	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		No	%	No	%
1	Communication is expected to be used to facilitate community participation in a development initiative.	181	90.5	19	9.5
2	Communication leads to effective collaborative efforts in issues of development	178	89	22	19
3	Formulating and using appropriate communication strategy for community development, providing direction to development communication facilitators plays a more strategic role in the development process.	80	40	120	60
4	The lack of appropriate communication causes problem in development.	91	45.5	109	54.5

Normally, communication is of great importance in community development. However, Table 2 revealed that slum communities do have less or only 45.5% of the respondents know that formulating and using appropriate communication strategy for community development, providing direction to development communication facilitators plays a more strategic role in the development process. On different hand, 181, 90.5 % of the respondents aware of that effective communication has a great impact on members' participation in community development.

The effect of communication in the development of communities cannot be underestimated when one can't realize that there is need for collaborative actions among community members. The confusion stated above, as the identified in focused group discussion, is because of the psychological attitude or personal

thinking that "One who communicates much spends less time on work." May be here, they don't identify well the distinction between talk and communication. Communication is an activity done for purpose. It is not a talk instated simply to talk.

**Table 3**  
**Communication practice and Strategies used to impart development information**

S. No	Item	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		No	%	No	%
1	<b>Phonic (verbiage or spoken ) communication</b>				
	a. Face-to-Face (trainings, conference, workshops...etc)	123	61.5	77	38.5
	b. Radio	152	76	48	24
	c. Newsletters	65	32.5	135	67.5
2	<b>Multimodal (involving two modes)</b>				
	a. Brochures	76	38	124	62
	b. billboards,	115	57.5	85	42.5
	c. posters,	80	40	120	60
	d. Television	84	42	116	58
	e. Others (leaflets, drama, video, film ...etc)	36	18	164	82

Table 3 exposes the forms of communication used to impart different development messages to the community by non-governmental workers/development agents. In order to communicate and get appropriate and targeted change development facilitators use different mode of communication like posters, picture, flipcharts, brushers, leaflets, billboards, radio and TV programs, dramas, theatres and others strategies of imparting development messages. Moreover, in order to transfer modern knowledge and skills and transfer the world technology for the community use, development facilitators along with other concerned bodies use different trainings, conference, workshops and field observation techniques. In general, the development facilitators applied three communication strategies to develop the community. The two development imparting strategies are the phonic and

multimodal as identified from the data collected.

As one can conclude from the above table, Table 3, the verbalized communication form is by far the most commonly used mode of communication in the social interactions in the study. This mode is manifested in both face-to-face communications as well as distanced verbal communication. By face-to-face interactions I refer to the direct verbal exchange such as found in dialogic interactions like discussions, deliberations, presentations etc through meeting, training and workshop or in monologues such as found in lectures or expositions. On different hand, though the development agents' use multimodal strategies in their communication, it is found to be that the most under-utilized strategy of imparting development messages. The reason for this could be the problem of accessibility of those



multimodal communication technologies at the grassroots level. The observation data also prove that the local communities rarely have access to distance mode of communication, namely television-broadcast and internet services. Of the multimodal communication, the community is access only to telecommunication and quite a significant number of the community have accessed to television and internet services.

### 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Development communications presumes the social construction and mean moving from a focus of informing and persuading people to changing their behaviour or attitudes to a focus of facilitating exchanges to solve a common identified problem. Once mind thinking way of the same slum community to development communication is changed; certainly, it influences all members and creates convention. This in essence would lead to a common development initiative to experiment with people and to identify what is needed to support the initiative in terms of partnerships, knowledge and material conditions. In the process of community development; therefore, communication is important as it involves the study of people relating to themselves and to one another in groups, societies, influencing one another and being influenced, informing one another and being informed, teaching and being taught, loving and being loved, entertaining and being entertained for development agenda.

Communication plays an indispensable role in community development especially in slum areas. The communication works done in the slum areas seek to make the community involved in dealing their issues of economic, political and social life more frequently. In the strategies set to combat global poverty, greater emphasis is put on the communication activities. The use of variety communication tools help the community ensure their voice is heard. To

attract the attention of government as well as non-government organization development facilitators to their area, communication is a helping tools.

Generally, base on the findings the following recommendations are made:

- A. Community development depends on the effectiveness of communication as it helps in sharing of ideas and opinions and diffusion of good ideas while irrelevant ideas are thrown out. As many scholars stated, effective communication enhances participation of every community member towards the achievement of the goals of slum area community. It makes people participate actively in matters of development. Communication is a powerful trend to facilitate participating development. It is about encouraging community participation with development initiatives through a strategic utilization of various communication strategies. However, according to the data in Table 2, most community members exposed that communication has a negative attitude on development. This was basically happen because the process of communication does not give opportunity of involving and motivating the community to define, identify, analyze and solve problems that in turn made them to feel as communication takes much of their time. Thus, aware creation by development facilitators is important. It is also recommended that community members, community leaders, government officials as well as community development agents should engage in clear communication process so as to increase the participation of

community members in development activities.

- B.** Effective communication plays a pivotal role in development. It brings the community together and stimulates to improve aspects of their way of living in the life that constitutes many unequally distributed power and resources. It makes the community

collective activity where a group of people join and share mutual interests and concerns become aware of their needs and resources and act together to improve their situation. However, on the base of collected data, the community belief that changes in their area comes if non-governmental organization would help them. They are waiting the hands of donors. Thus, mobilizing the community to work hard, relay on their own and existing resource and produce self-help esteem is important. To do this, development facilitators should give training on entrepreneurship and attitude change especially for slum community.

- C.** In community development activities, little attention has been traditionally given for the role that language plays in societal economic development. Language, as a tool for communication and as a key element of culture, should place as a part and has capacity for the community economic development.

- D.** Slum areas are inevitably occupied by very poor people and families. The majority of slum dwellers in the town have taken shelter to easily available locations like the river bed and banks, edges of railway lines and hill slopes apart

from vacant industrial lands. These areas are; moreover, characterized as lack by some basic infrastructures- clean water and electricity and their living conditions are unhygienic. Thus, development facilitators should genuinely communicate and address these life facts so that the government can plan certain scheme to develop the area.

- E.** In this study area, there are two main modes of communication in development discourse interactions used to disseminate development information. These modes are the phonic mode and the multimodal mode that largely combines the two modes. Of many development information imparting modes, the phonic is commonly used in the study area; whereas, graphics and written materials like brochures, posters, flayers, leaflets, newsletters and others are less utilized.

Finally, despite the fact that many studies concluded that development communication can have positive impact; there is a call for developing new models of development communication, which perhaps indicates a level of discontent with the existing dominant approaches.

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