

## Assessment of the Role of Participatory Communication in Enhancing Development in Rural Communities of Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of participatory communication in enhancing development in rural communities of Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja. Participatory communication, which involves the active involvement of community members in decision-making processes, is crucial for sustainable development. This study therefore aims to explore how local engagement through dialogue, collaboration and shared information contributes to addressing key developmental challenges in these rural areas. The paper is anchored on the theoretical underpinning of the Participatory Communication Theory developed by Paulo Freire in 1970 which emphasises dialogue or two-way communication as a means of providing consensus for sustainable action in development activities. The research draws from a population of 102,299 residents of Kuje Area Council. Through the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 100 respondents selected through a multi-stage sampling technique was utilised. Being a survey methodology, data were collected using structured questionnaires and interviews to assess the impact of participatory communication on areas such as healthcare, education and infrastructural development. The findings are expected to reveal the extent to which community-driven communication fosters collective action and contributes to the socio-economic improvement of these rural communities. Insights from this study could inform future strategies for more inclusive development policies in Kuje and similar rural areas.

**Keywords: Role, Participatory Communication, Developments, Rural Communities**

## Introduction

Communication, with the inclusion of the dissemination of information, is a crucial aspect of enhancing development in all communities (Tacchi, 2012) because it facilitates the exchange of ideas, information and knowledge among individuals and communities. According to Alemoh (2024, p.3) “Communication creates an avenue to engage with community stakeholders, listen to the needs and concerns of these community people as well as build consensus and foster collaboration towards achieving common goals.” As asserted by the American Management Consultant, Louis-Allen (2014) posits that communication is the totality of all that an individual does in order to create an understanding in the mind of another. Not only does the sender actively participate in this endeavour, the receiver as well has the responsibility to key into the process by paying rapt attention in understanding the purpose for communication.

Chinese Philosopher Lau Tse 1977 as cited in Gloria (2024, p.2) embodies the essence of the participatory communication to rural community development in the following poem.

Go and meet your people, live and stay with them, love them, work with them.  
Begin with what they have, plan and develop from what they know and in the  
end, when the work is over, they will say: we did it ourselves.

This ironic description of Chinese Philosopher Lau Tse has a direct linkage with the theories, concept, principles and approaches of participatory communication in rural community development.

Participatory communication plays a crucial role in enhancing development in rural communities by empowering individuals and communities to actively participate in decision-making processes, problem-solving and resource management (Oloyede, 2008). According to Servaes (1999) cited in Tsegyu, Kelvin and Suleiman (2022, p.33), participatory communication is “the process through which people, individually and collectively, create and express themselves freely and engage actively in all processes of decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation of development initiatives.”

In a study conducted by Johnson (2018), it was found that participatory communication led to interventions and improves healthcare facilities in rural communities of Nigeria, including increased awareness of healthcare services and adoption of healthy behaviours. Similarly, a

study by (Ahmed, 2020) highlighted the role of participatory communication in enhancing agricultural productivity and food security in rural communities.

Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria, is characterized by a mixture of urban and rural communities, despite its status as a developing city, rural areas in Abuja like the Kuje Area Council is faced with the challenges of limited access to basic amenities, poor infrastructure, low literacy rates and economic disparities. These challenges underscore the need for interventions aimed at enhancing development in rural communities of Nigeria as whole.

This study focuses on the role of participatory communication in enhancing development in rural communities of Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja. It aims to identify the challenges or barriers to effective participatory communication in rural areas. It comprehensively examines rural communities within Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja in a bid to understand the specific dynamics of participatory communication and development. It also analysis various development indicators to assess the impact of participatory communication in rural development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The rural communities within Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja are faced with multifaceted development challenges ranging from limited access to basic services, infrastructural deficiencies, to socioeconomic disparities. There exists a noticeable gap in development initiatives despite various interventions. This raises the question of whether participatory communication strategies are adequately utilised and effective in engaging local residents in the development process. Despite the presence of development interventions, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains uncertain. The problem statement underscores the critical need to explore and understand the role of participatory communication in addressing the multifaceted challenges facing rural communities in Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja, with the aim of enhancing their development outcomes in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This is to add to the existing body of knowledge that has been able to outline the effect of the role of participatory communication in rural areas. It is against this backdrop that this research intends to examine in critical terms the role of Participatory Communication in enhancing development in rural communities with a view to recommend solutions on how to enhance the living standard of the rural populace.

## Objectives of the Study

Broadly, the research was set to provide valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing participatory communication and promoting inclusive development in rural communities of Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja. Specifically, the research was conducted to:

- i. identify communication barriers hindering effective engagement and participation in development processes;
- ii. explore the role of participatory communication in community development outcomes in rural communities of Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja;
- iii. analyse best practices and strategies for enhancing participatory communication in rural development initiatives;
- iv. examine the effectiveness of participatory communication strategies in promoting community engagement and participation in rural development initiatives.

## Review of Literature

### Participatory Communication

The term 'communication' originates from the Latin word 'communicare', meaning 'to share' and then the French word *communis* translate to mean “common” in English (Abbott, 1995). Communication therefore is a purposeful effort to establish commonness between a source and receiver (Schramm, 1965) cited in (Ate, 2009). Whatever is been shared could be associated with knowledge, experience, thought, ideas, suggestion, opinions, feelings etc. Therefore, communication is seen in this study as the process of exchanging or sharing information, ideas and feeling between the sender and the receiver. It involves not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and style - anything that adds meaning to a message. Baran (2003) has defined communication as the process of creating shared meaning. This is because the participants in communication encounter are interested in obtaining messages that are understandable. That is why they have to be negotiable, seek clarification and ask for explanation to ensure that they have obtained the meaning intended in the message.

According to Mefalopulos (2008), mass communications, interpersonal communication and health communication are just some of the specialties that can be found under the communication curricula of major academic institutions in countries around the world. Also

included are international communication, speech communication, intercultural communication, communication education, applied communication, organisation organisational communication and political communication. This list could be expanded even further to include journalism, media production, information and communication technologies, public relations, corporate communication and development communication, indicating the diversified and multifaceted nature of communication.

### **Development**

Development on its part is defined by Oso (2002) as a term that came into widespread application after the Second World War to mean growth, industrialisation, change, modernisation and democracy.

Communication and development are two sides of the same coin. Without communication, there is no development. Development itself is not feasible without human interaction, in industry, commerce, government and non-governmental social intercourse. Hence, development and communication re-enforce each other. Therefore, paradigms of development derived outside the classical theories of development have emerged as schools of thought that are largely seen as alternative theories of development (Moemeka, 2012). Development means the process by which social conditions are improved. In brief, development can be defined as a long process of qualitative and quantitative changes in society in political, economic, social, cultural and social terms, which leads to individual or collective well-being (Agena, 2015). To interrogate a concept is not simply to define it but to raise relevant questions that will bring out its true substance,. In this way, the core elements of the concept will emerge for further interrogation and understanding.

### **Rural Communities**

Rural communities are very important component of every nation, Nigeria inclusive. This is especially so because about 70 percent of food, raw materials and human beings reside in the rural areas or communities. According to Ekong (1988), a rural community is an aggregation of families, within the same geographical confine, having similar cultural beliefs and influence one another socio-culturally.

The ever increasing rural-urban migration has placed a premium on the needs for rural community development. The uplifting of rural communities will reduce the pressure on social

infrastructure in the urban centres, generate employment for youths and make raw materials available for local industries and even for export. In order to achieve these results and more, concerted efforts must be made towards developing the rural communities by all stakeholders. However, not everyone understands the dynamics of the rural society as most of the programmes have not achieved their desired objectives. Rural community development is a comprehensive programme made up of social and economic transformation which involves all segments of the population. It also involves the integration of rural people in the programme because they form the largest contingent of the population and majority of the rural poor in many developing countries. Therefore, if rural development is to be meaningful, the precondition must be an acceptance of the restructuring of socio-economies of the rural areas in favour of rural development.

### **Factors that influence Participatory Communication in Rural Communities in Nigeria**

#### **1 Empowerment**

The term empowerment has different meanings in socio-cultural and political contexts and does not translate easily into all languages. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world always leads to lively discussion. These terms include self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capable of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening and capability to mention only few (Mabogunje, 1980 as cited in Ibrahim, 2003).

The concept of empowerment in the context of participation of people in rural communities at the grassroots centred around four major elements; access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organisation organisational capacity. Suffice it to state at this point that participation in rural development at the grassroots is enhanced by a balance communication/information system in the society (Bakare, 1997).

#### **2 Mobilisation**

Mobilisation is a process where by a group of people have transcended their differences to meet on equal terms in order to facilitate a participatory decision-making process (Tacchi, 2012). In other words, it can be viewed as a process which begins a dialogue among members of the community to determine who, what and

how issues are decided and also to provide an avenue for everyone to participate in decisions that affects their lives.

Rural mobilisation is a capacity-building process through which community, individuals, groups, or organisations plan, carryout and evaluate activities on a participatory and sustained basis to improve on the quality of life of the communities either on their own initiatives or stimulated by others (Oso, 2002). The media play an important role in grassroots mobilisation. This includes; educating the community, giving necessary information, providing for mobilizes and calling out the people of the community for action. For the media to be used effectively in mobilisation, it must possess the ability to make the necessary contact for giving the relevant information.

However, participation is equated with mobilisation of people. In this case, the rural community members which forms the majority of the total population can become conscious of the resources at their disposal and are motivated and energized to collectively utilise such resources to improve their respective lot. This view sounds like preparing the rural population to collaborate with government development plans. Hence, it suggests the case in which the higher authorities conceive and design social and economic development projects and mobilize the communities at the level of execution of such projects.

### **3 Self-Help Programme**

There is no doubt that no government, however richly endowed can supply all the needs of its people. This is even more in a developing country like Nigeria where there is almost a revolution of expectations. Most people look upon the government to do one thing or the other for them, despite the fact that the resources available to meet these expectations are continually dwindling. Besides, there are wide gaps between our people's expectations and actual accomplishments on the part of the government. This has led to a number of adverse effects, such as alienation, frustration, withdrawal of support, legitimacy and lack of interest on activities of the government.

Self-help can also be seen as a strategy that induces progress in rural societies, all of which do not involve action by government. It could be related to an individual who alone has the resources to implement a project or projects to satisfy the basic needs of a community. It could also apply to coordinated efforts within a

community to select and execute local, economic and social programmes addressed to the development of a community. This implies the improvement of the people through their own efforts largely for their own benefit.

Castle (2010) conceived self-help as a situation whereby man himself becomes both the object and subject of his own improvement and not merely as an instrument in a process imposed from above or within. In rural development, the element of self-help is adopted to secure the active participation and co-operation of the people in programmes designed to improve their standard of living and promote their development, which means that every organisation in the community, namely: clubs, age grades, towns union, women groups, headmasters, religious leaders, traditional rulers and in fact all opinion leaders must be involved in initiating and implementation of self-help programmes and to invite the government and non-governmental agencies when necessary.

Empirical studies have often situated participatory communication within the broader framework of development communication. Development communication evolved from a top-down " modernisation" model to more inclusive, people-centred approaches like participatory communication (Phree, 2023).

A number of empirical studies have focused on the role of participatory communication in development projects, particularly in rural settings. These studies highlight that participatory communication fosters community ownership, better project outcomes and sustainability of development initiatives.

### **Agriculture and Sustainable Practices**

The Implementation of Rural Water Project in Malawi by Mefalopulos (2008) demonstrated that involving the local community in decision-making processes significantly improved the project's success. The study showed that when communities are allowed to voice their concerns and preferences, they are more likely to take responsibility for maintaining the project infrastructure. The farmers' knowledge about local conditions was leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of external innovations.

The Kuje Area Council could reflect this as agricultural livelihoods are a significant aspect of rural communities. The role of participatory communication in empowering farmers to adopt

sustainable agricultural practices aligns with previous studies. Empirical studies demonstrate that when communities are actively engaged in development projects via communication platforms, there's a higher level of success. This is common in development projects related to agriculture, health and education in rural areas globally. For example, studies from South Asia and Latin America also indicate that effective communication between rural communities and governmental bodies increases project ownership and long-term success, which aligns with the expectations for Kuje Area Council.

Studies from rural Abuja communities such as Gwagwalada and Abaji suggest that participatory communication is critical in agricultural projects. When farmers are engaged in discussions about agricultural practices, they are more likely to adopt new technologies and methods, leading to improved productivity (Adamu, 2015).

In some studies, especially those from highly literate or technologically advanced rural areas, communication tools might include digital platforms, mobile phones, or online networks. In contrast, the Kuje Area Council may rely more heavily on face-to-face communication and localised media like community radio or town criers due to lower levels of infrastructure. This creates a divergence in the type of communication strategies studied and the practical tools recommended.

The current research may diverge in the focus on rural communication tools specific to Kuje, as many studies do not explore localised tools or traditional communication modes in-depth. In rural African communities, methods such as town halls, oral traditions and community radio are often highlighted as suitable tools for participatory communication, while research from other parts of the world may focus on more advanced technologies.

### **Health Interventions and Communication**

In Nigeria, empirical studies have examined participatory communication within rural development projects, especially in health, agriculture and infrastructure development. A notable study by Okoro and Agbo (2019) explored participatory communication in rural healthcare delivery in southeastern Nigeria. Their findings revealed that when health communication campaigns were participatory, communities were more receptive to health interventions like immunizations and sanitation practices.

Studies by Hornik (2002) and Figueroa et al. (2002) highlight how participatory communication enhances the effectiveness of health interventions. For example, health campaigns that involve local leaders and utilise traditional communication channels have been more successful in encouraging community-wide behaviour changes, such as in maternal and child health. Some health-related studies tend to focus on urban or semi-urban populations, which might differ from the challenges faced in Kuje, a more rural setting where access to basic health facilities could be a greater issue.

However, these case studies point out that participatory communication fosters greater accountability and transparency, ensuring that the development outcomes reflect the needs and values of the rural population. For instance, studies conducted in India and Latin America show that when people are given a voice, they hold their leaders accountable, which leads to better governance and development outcomes. This aligns with the focus on the Kuje Area Council, where local participation can lead to more accountable local government.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper is anchored on the Participatory Communication Theory. The theory was developed by Paulo Freire in 1970 and emphasises dialogue or two-way communication as a means of providing consensus for sustainable action in development activities. The theory seeks to involve audiences in horizontal dialogue and active participation in rural community life which invariably result in improvement in the development of the community.

Onabajo and Osifeso (2008, p.181) remarked that “the theory seeks to replace modernisation theory especially in the area of its emphasis on knowledge diffusion and technology transfer.” They assert that instead of encouraging ‘residents of developing societies to participate in development initiatives plans by outsiders, it encourages residents to make their own plans.’ Musara (2011) and Mishra (2017) align with (Anaeto, (2008) in their view that participatory communication theory was propounded following the perceived failure of modernisation theory to meet the needs of developing societies.

The theoretical framework for the project topic "The Role of Participatory Communication in Enhancing Development in Rural Communities of Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja" can be grounded in several key theories and concepts within the field of communication for development (C4D). The framework integrates participatory communication theories,

development communication models and concepts of community engagement and empowerment.

Applying these theoretical concepts to the Kuje Area Council, participatory communication can play a significant role in enhancing development. This can involve:

- i. Engaging Community Members: Facilitating regular community meetings where members can express their needs and concerns.
- ii. Utilizing Local Media: Leveraging local radio stations and community newsletters to disseminate information and gather feedback.
- iii. Capacity Building: Providing training and resources to community leaders and members to enhance their communication and leadership skills.
- iv. Collaborative Decision-Making: Establishing mechanisms for community members to participate in decision-making processes related to development projects.

The theoretical framework for examining the role of participatory communication in enhancing development in rural communities integrates participatory communication theory, development communication models and concepts of community engagement and empowerment. By grounding this paper in these theoretical contexts, it becomes possible to develop strategies that ensure meaningful community involvement, ultimately leading to more sustainable and effective development outcomes in Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja.

### **Methodology**

The study adopts the quantitative research design which includes the survey research method, by primarily obtaining data from the selected rural communities of Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja using a structured questionnaire from a population projection of 102,299 of some sampled communities as indicated the table below:

#### **Population**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Community 1</b>	<b>Figure</b>	<b>Community 2</b>	<b>Figure</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kuje Central Ward	Godiji	484	Jaida	2,150	2,634
Chibiri Ward	Lanto	7,760	Kiyi	12,330	20,090
Gaube Ward	Bamishi	1,640	Riji	899	2,539

Kwaku Ward	Gawu	2,700	Gaye	1,372	4,072
Kabi Ward	Kabi-Kasa	13,160	Kabi-Mangoro	6,107	19,267
Rubochi Ward	Simami	5,420	Tika	7,000	12,420
Gwargwada Ward	Gwargwada	7,557	Gombe	5,050	12,607
Gudrun Karya Ward	Darka	7,336	Huni	3,486	10,822
Kujekwa Ward	Bida	4,420	Odu	6,403	10,823
Yencge Ward	Yenche	5,970	Gbede	1,055	7,025
<b>Total Population</b>					<b>102,299</b>

The Taro Yamane sample size calculation formula of 1966 was used to arrive at the given sample size of the study which indicates below:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + Ne^2)}$$

n = Sample size

N = Population size

e<sup>2</sup> = Margin error based on confidence level which in this case is 0.10

Where

N = 102,299

e = 0.10

1 is constant

$$n = \frac{102,299}{(1 + 102,299 \times 0.10^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{102,299}{(1 + 102,299 \times 0.01)}$$

$$n = \frac{102,299}{(1 + 1022.99)}$$

$$n = \frac{102,299}{1023.99}$$

$$n = 99.90$$

Approximately n=100

Therefore, the sample size of the study is 100 respondents.

## Results Presentation and Analysis

Data from the survey were presented and analysed using frequency table and simple percentage, of which one hundred (100) copies of questionnaire were administered to the various respondents, out of which ninety-five (95) copies were retrieved and used for the analysis.

**Table 1: What are the main sources of information about community development projects in your area?**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local leaders	20	21.05%
Community Meetings	18	18.95%
Radio	22	23.16%
Television	17	17.89%
Social media	13	13.68%
Others	5	5.27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** *Researcher Field work (2024)*

**Table 1** above shows 22(23.16%), considers the radio as their main source of information about community development projects. Local leaders are the primary source for 20(21.05%). Community meetings are preferred by 18 respondents 18(18.95%). Television is selected by 17(17.89%). Social media is the main source for 13(13.68%). Finally, 5(5.27%) rely on other sources.

**Table 2 What barriers do you face in receiving information about community development projects?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Language	26	27.37%
Illiteracy	29	30.53%
Lack of access to media	10	10.53%
Cultural differences	7	7.37%
Lack of trust in information sources	15	15.79%
Others	8	8.42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *Researcher field work (2024)*

Table II highlights that illiteracy 29(30.53%) and language barriers 26(27.37%) are the biggest challenges in accessing information, followed by lack of trust in sources 15(15.79%), media access 10(10.53%), cultural differences 7(7.37%) and other factors 8(8.42%).

**Table 3 How do you perceive the importance of your participation in meetings for community development?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not important	16	16.84%
Slightly important	27	28.42%
Moderately important	19	20%
Important	20	21.05%
Very important	13	13.68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: *Researcher field work (2024)*

Table III above, suggests that, 16(16.84%) of people perceive their participation in meetings for community development as not important, 27(28.42%) find it slightly important, 19(20%) believe it's moderately important, 20(21.05%) think it's important, 13(13.68%) view it as very important. Overall, most people consider it at least somewhat important, with a smaller group seeing it as very important.

**What strategies do you think could improve communication about development projects in your community?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Translating of information into local languages	24	25.26%
Use of visual aids	10	10.53%
Regular community meetings	14	14.74%
Training community leaders in effective communication	19	20%
Increased use of social media	22	23.16%
Others	6	6.31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: *Researcher field work (2024)*

Table IV suggests that the top strategies for improving communication in development projects are translating information into local languages 24(25.26%), using social media 22(23.16%) and training community leaders 19(20%). Regular community meetings 14(14.74%) and visual aids 10(10.53%) are also helpful, but less favoured.

**Which communication channel do you find the most effective for engaging with community members in rural development projects?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Community meetings	19	20%
Social media	28	29.47%
Radio Programmes	24	25.26%
Inter-personal communication	20	21.05%
Others	4	4.21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: *Researcher field work (2024)*

The data in Table V above, shows that 19(20%) consider community meetings as the most effective communication channel for engaging with community members in rural development projects. 28(29.47%) selected the social media, 24(25.26%) believe the radio is more effective, 20(21.05%) thinks Inter-personal communication is more effective while 4(4.22%) believe in other communication channel for effective engagement.

**What methods of feedback collection do you believe are most effective in ensuring community voices are heard and integrated into rural development planning?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Survey	20	21.05%
Suggestion boxes	25	26.32%
Focus groups	19	20%
Social media	19	20%
Others	12	12.63%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: *Researcher field work (2024)*

Table VI analysis the method for feedback collection that is believed to be most effective in their communities. 21 selected survey which makes up 20(21.05%) of the sample size. 25(26.32%) selected Suggestion boxes as their preferred method for feedback collection, focus groups and social media was selected by 19(20%) respectively while 12(12.63%) selected other method for feedback collection.

**Discussion**

Drawing on the results, the discussion focuses on how effective communication strategies involving community members have contributed to rural development initiatives in Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja. The findings are contextualised within the framework of participatory development theory, which emphasises the active involvement of local populations in decision-making processes that affect their well-being. The research objective about the communication barriers hindering effective engagement and participation in development

processes in Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja. Based on the data provided, several key insights can be drawn from the patterns observed in information sources, effectiveness of communication, frequency of challenges and types of communication barriers.

It is established that radio (23.16%) is the primary source of information for most respondents, followed by local leaders (21.05%) and community meetings (18.95%). Television (17.89%) and social media (13.68%) are less preferred, while other unspecified sources account for a small proportion (5.27%). The reliance on traditional sources like radio, local leaders and community meetings may reflect the infrastructural or socioeconomic context of Kuje Area Council, where access to modern channels (like social media and TV) may be less widespread or trusted. This preference for traditional communication methods highlights a possible digital divide, which could limit participation in development processes, especially among those who are not tech-savvy or lack access to digital media.

From the survey, the study identified communication barriers which include illiteracy 29(30.53%) and language barriers 26(27.37%), which are the most significant challenges. Lack of trust in sources 15(15.79%), media access 10(10.53%), cultural differences 7(7.37%) and other factors 8(8.42%) also play a role. Illiteracy and language barriers highlight the need for accessible, inclusive communication strategies that account for the educational levels and linguistic diversity of the community. Development communication must be simplified and delivered in local languages to ensure comprehension by a broader audience.

The study also shows that the majority of respondents (approximately 84%) view their participation in meetings as having some level of importance, with the most frequent responses being "slightly important" and "important". However, the relatively low percentage (13.68%) who see it as "very important" suggests a lack of strong engagement or conviction about the impact of their participation. Although most respondents acknowledge the importance of participation, the fact that the largest group (28.42%) only considers it "slightly important" highlights a lukewarm commitment to participation. This suggests that while people may conceptually understand the value of engagement, they may not see tangible benefits from their involvement, which might diminish motivation for active participation.

From the survey, it is clear that translating information into local languages (25.26%) is the most favoured strategy for improving communication. The use of social media (23.16%) is the second most favoured strategy, highlighting the growing importance of digital communication

even in rural areas. Training community leaders (20%) is another key strategy, recognising that local leaders play a crucial role in facilitating communication between development agencies and community members. Other strategies like regular community meetings (14.74%) and visual aids (10.53%) are also important but less prioritised. Meetings allow for face-to-face interaction, which is essential in rural settings, while visual aids enhance understanding, especially in areas with low literacy rates. Despite their lower rankings, these methods remain valuable, particularly when used in conjunction with other strategies.

Accordingly, the study reveals that social media (29.47%) is perceived as the most effective tool for engaging with community members. Radio (25.26%) remains a powerful communication tool, especially in rural areas where literacy levels may be lower and where access to digital technology is still limited. Radio's ability to reach large audiences with minimal infrastructure requirements makes it an essential component of any rural communication strategy. Interpersonal communication (21.05%) is also highly regarded, indicating that despite the rise of digital platforms, personal, one-on-one interactions remain crucial for effective engagement in rural settings. Community meetings (20%) continue to play an important role but are ranked lower than social media and radio. This may be due to logistical constraints such as time, distance, or difficulty in organizing large gatherings, particularly in more dispersed rural communities.

## **Conclusion**

This study's contributions to the field of development communication are significant, offering a roadmap for development agencies, policymakers and practitioners to re-imagine their approaches and prioritise the needs and aspirations of rural communities. This research has demonstrated that participatory communication is a vital tool in fostering community engagement and driving development initiatives. The study revealed that while feedback mechanisms such as suggestion boxes and surveys are widely preferred, there is also an increasing role for modern methods like social media in ensuring broader community involvement.

However, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of participatory communication strategies is mixed. While many respondents acknowledge its moderate to significant impact on development projects, there remains a portion of the population who are sceptical or feel

disengaged. This highlights the need for more inclusive and transparent communication efforts that reflect the diverse needs and preferences of the community.

Furthermore, the willingness of a majority of respondents to participate in future initiatives, contingent upon improvements in communication, underscores the potential of participatory communication to enhance rural development. To maximize this potential, development planners must address existing communication barriers and ensure that community voices are not only heard but integrated into decision-making processes. Strengthening participatory communication strategies in Kuje Area Council has the potential to significantly enhance rural development by promoting deeper community involvement, trust and ownership of development projects.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations aim to provide a comprehensive approach to improve the role of participatory communication in enhancing development in rural communities of Kuje Area Council, FCT Abuja.

1. **Establish Community-Based Communication Channels:** Development agencies should establish community-based communication channels to facilitate feedback, evaluation and information sharing.
2. **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Development agencies should ensure inclusive decision-making processes that reflect the needs, aspirations and perspectives of rural communities.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Development agencies should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact and effectiveness of participatory communication approaches.
4. **For Government and Policymakers:** Policymakers should provide policy support and resources to promote participatory communication approaches in development initiatives. Propose strategies for integrating participatory communication in development policies and programs. Advocate for training and capacity-building initiatives that enhance community engagement and emphasise the importance of local ownership and sustainability.

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