

Factors Affecting Participatory Communication for Development: The Case of a Local Development Organization in Ethiopia

ADEM CHANIE ALI
Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia
ademchanie@yahoo.com

STEFAN SONDERLING
University of South Africa
stefansonderling@me.com

ABSTRACT

The research set out to explore the major factors affecting the practice of participatory communication (PC) in development processes using the development and aid works experiences of a leading local NGO in Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) called Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA) as a case study. This qualitative case study used in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and document analysis and field observation for data collection. The study was framed based on the participatory model of development which has been assumed to bring about sustainable socio-economic change of a country. The research reveals the presence of several factors affecting the practice of participatory development communication in ORDA. The factors could be divided into three sub themes which include the individual, the institutional and the environmental factors. Because of such pressing factors participatory communication is marginalized and genuine participation is the missing link in the development process. To avert such trends, the paper calls for professionalism for the development communication, structural change of the organization and holistic approach of development for successful development endeavors.

Keywords: *Development communication, participation, participatory communication, human development, empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

Although a lot of efforts have been exerted to attain sustainable change in underdeveloped countries, the outcome has not been significant. A large number of development efforts have become ineffective to bring about change (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes, 2008). Projects' dreams and hopes have failed, for the efforts made so far are insufficient /inadequate. Thus, gaps have been widened between the haves and have-nots. Even if plenty of development endeavors have been made for more than six decades, the living standard between the developed and third world countries has remained large. In other words, the efforts made to alleviate the underdevelopment problems of nations have been inadequate. Especially lack of genuine participation in development process of the local community could be one of the major causes for the failure of development projects in achieving their targets. Therefore, academicians and practitioners seem to have learned from their past failures and they tend to understand the need for the participation of stakeholders in the development process by considering the paramount roles the stakeholders play for the success of the development projects.

Research reports and experiences in various contexts of the third world countries have confirmed that cultural, social and political involvement of a certain community can be enhanced by using participatory development communication to take part in the development process. This approach can mainly be used to be effective in agricultural, economic, health and other community development programs (Chitnis, 2005; Bessette, 2006; Sengupta, 2007; Servaes, 2008). In other words, mainstreaming participatory communication for sustainable development has become a point of discussion in recent years. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the major factors that impede the participatory communication in development efforts.

On the other hand, research reports and practical experiences confirmed that lack of people's participation could contribute to the failure of development projects since the inception of the international development agendas (Thomas, 1994; White, 1994; Freire 2005, Sreveas, 2008; White 2008). For example, a study by Fraser and Estrada as cited in Servaes (2000, p.84) concludes that communication and people's involvement in development process could be two central factors that determine the successes and failures of most development projects across the developing world. Therefore, understanding the factors that hinder the genuine participation of the local community in development efforts could be extremely an important issue.

Concerning such area, I could not find exhaustive information with regard to how, when, and why the different factors affect participation of the local community in development agents in the ANRS. Of course, the target development organization of this study placed community participation as a key implementation strategy of development in its official documents (ORDA's third strategic plan, 2009; ORDA's fourth strategic plan, 2014) and even has been claimed as participant development agent (MMT interview 4, 24 December, 2014), community participation is found a missing link in the development efforts.

The researcher thinks that this research is timely and essential due to the dimension of poverty and degree of underdevelopment in the third world countries in general and in the region in particular; there is still a need to learn how to implement effective and sustainable participatory development projects in different contexts that can transform the lives of the poor and marginalized people.

The main objective of this research is to explore factors impeding the practices of participatory development communication in the Ethiopian context. The development work experience of ORDA, one of the leading local development actors in Amhara National Regional State, becomes the focus. The specific objectives are aimed at:

1. Identifying major factors hindering the practice of participatory development communication
2. Analyzing how the factors affecting the practice of participatory development communication

To address the aforementioned objectives, the research was framed the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that hinder the practice of participatory development communication?
2. How do the factors affect the practice of participatory development communication?

The study would help our understanding about participatory development communication perceptions, practices and their implications in the development efforts. By understanding the major factors that affect the practice of participatory communication in the development endeavors, it is possible to avoid, if not minimize the problems and promote the adoption of genuine participatory approach. The results of the study could also promote the mainstreaming of participatory development communication in development efforts. Especially, the selected organization and NGOs working in similar contexts will benefit a lot since the study could have data showing the importance of making development communication policies that shape our development agendas and perspectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE PARTICIPATORY THEORY

In the field of development communication, the experiences of the past 50 years development efforts have clearly demonstrated the indispensable role that communication plays. For participatory paradigm, development has been perceived as not something that can be imported from western tradition but it is something that can be emerged out of the indigenous culture. Participatory paradigm rejects the assumptions of modernisation paradigm that advocates a universal model of development; and instead advocates culture specific and people-centred holistic development approaches. In other words, development has been understood as a participatory process of social change within a given society. This participatory process needs genuine participation of the local community and the contextualisation of development works into local cultures and settings (Rogers, 1976; Searveas, 2008; Mefalopulos, 2008).

Contrary to the modernisation paradigm that considers the developing culture as a bottleneck for development and that the economic dimension of development is emphasised, this participatory approach acknowledges the role of culture for development and focuses the human dimension of development. Thus, participatory paradigm widens the horizon of development concepts by including the non-material notions of development such as social equality, freedom and justice through which grassroots level of participation can be maintained in the development process.

Different from the top down and one-way communication approach of the modernisation and dependency paradigms in the process of development, the participatory approaches acknowledge dialogical and horizontal nature of communication for achieving development. This alternative paradigm presumes the indispensable role of two-way communication for empowerment of the poor and marginalised sections of the developing nations and rejects the old assumption that mere transmission of information could not be enough for achieving development (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

Therefore, this research mainly used participatory communication as a theoretical framework, because for one thing the very nature of the research questions and the approaches of the study appear suitable for the theoretical foundation of participatory communication for development. The basic tenets of dialogical participatory communication such as empowerment, dialogical, problematisation, endogenous, action and reflection, acquiring skills, increasing self-confidence, control over oneself and one's environment, achieving quality of life, freedom, understanding one's ability and limitations are used as theoretical framework to analyse the data (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Freire, 2005).

Theoretically, the potential of participatory communication for sustainable development has been acknowledged. Participation is a buzzword in the development discourse and is preached as the hopeful and legitimate path for sustainable development. However, when it comes to practical level, its potential is challenged by a number of factors. This section discusses different challenges that limit the adoption of participatory communication for development. Waisbord's (2008) institutional perspective on challenges of participatory communication enlightens us the bureaucratic factors that hinder the application of participatory communication. The institutional dynamics denigrate the potential of participatory communication in three ways. These are bureaucratic requirements for messaging, making communication as a subsidiary discipline, and seeking technical solutions to political problems.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this research is a qualitative study. Qualitative research method refers to exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions to gain deep insight about social phenomena or about people's reality (Creswell, 2002; Newman, 2007). It seeks to understand people's interpretations as it stresses the need to see through the eyes of one's subjects and understand social behaviour in its social context. In this approach, the data are experiences and perceptions of the people in the environment. In the case for the present study, the experiences and perceptions of change agents and the local community towards factors that affect participatory communication are used for data source. Since qualitative approach enables to understand the inside view and to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, data were qualitatively gathered. Using qualitative case study as a research design, this research used in-depth interview, FGD, document analysis and observation as data gathering instrument.

The research sight includes Sekota district in Waghmera zone, Wadela district in South Wollo, and Nefas Mewcha district in South Gondar zone. In other words, the three districts where ORDA has been working for long period of time were the targets of the study. The field work was carried out in Sekota, Wadela, Lay Gayinet and Bahir Dar by three phases or round trips. The first round trip was focusing on sites visiting, establishing rapport, making pilot study and arranging things for interview and FGDs at the sites in Sekota, Wadela and Lay Gayint. This round was conducted from 25 May to 04 June 2014. The second round trip was organised for actual data gathering in the three sites (Sekota, Wadela & Lay Gayint) which they are far from the researcher home town and it was conducted during 25 June -19 July 2014. The third round was focussing on gathering data at the head quarter of ORDA; Bahir Dar (my home city), and it was done during 02-26 January, 2015. Generally, the field work was carried out for a period of two months.

The interviews were conducted in a bottom up process as participatory development paradigm dictates. That is, the interview started with the local people first, then it was conducted with the professionals and managers from the lower to higher levels. Two individual interviews and two FGDs were conducted in each of the three sites. Forty two local community members were participated in the FGDs. Twelve individuals from development practitioners and coordinators and five members of the management of ORDA were interviewed. All the individual interviews except four were conducted with a tape recorder. The four research participants from the development workers were not interested to be recorded and I was forced to take notes during their interviews. All the interviews were

conducted in Amharic which is the official language of the region in particular and the federal language of the country in general. All the research participants then are fluent in it. The Amharic transcription carefully translated into English. On average each FGD session took two hours while the individual interviews lasted for 45 to 120 minutes. The reason for such variation of time duration was because of data saturation that enabled me to reduce the interviews time as I started the data reduction process in the field though special attention was given not to miss important issues.

It is important to note that during individual interview most of the development workers and managers were assertive enough to speak on behalf of the organisation and their personal feelings, perceptions and attitudes about the research issues. Only a few participants were hesitant to speak the perspective of the organisation. The interviews with development workers, communication officers and managers of the organisations were conducted in the offices of the organisation while the interviews and FGDs with the local community were conducted in Farmers Training Centres and near the shade of big tree in the rural areas.

The data analysis process started with preparing the data for analysis; then carrying on to deeper understanding of the data, representing the data and conducting interpretations of the wider meaning of the data using the theoretical framework of the study (Creswell, 2002, p.220). The research themes which emerged out of the data are classified into major thematic categories. Such themes are presented and discussed in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors That Affect Participatory Communication

This section analyses and discusses the major factors that affect participatory communication. The potential of participatory communication for sustainable development has been praised at the theoretical level (for example, see Searveas, 2008, Mefalopulos, 2008). Participation is a buzzword in the development discourse and is preached as the hopeful and legitimate path for sustainable development (Mefalopulos, 2008). But when it comes to the actual practice, it seems not to be less reflected. In ORDA, participatory communication is the missing link in the development process. A number of factors could hinder the implementation of genuine participation. The major factors that affect the practice of participatory development communication could be listed as follows:

1. *the economic perceptions of development*
2. *the top down development approach*
3. *short time span of the development projects and the dollar driven nature of projects*
4. *the perceptions of participation as labor and material contributions*
5. *the dependency syndrome*
6. *the perceptions of development communication as information transmission*
7. *lack of professionalism of communication*
8. *lack of adequate man power*
9. *the organization's structural problem*
10. *lack of adequate budget*
11. *the absence of communication policy*
12. *political interference and lack of democratic culture*

Let me discuss how these factors hinder the practice of participatory development communication in ORDA in the following sub-sections.

i. The Economic Perceptions of Development

ORDA conceives development as economic growth mainly focusing on food security. One of the senior managers of the organization defines development with the perspectives of ORDA as follows:

Development is defined from the economic perspective. It is the increment of income to the local community in which self reliance self reliance could be maintained. It is building their capacity to feed themselves. There should be sustainable economic change to achieve this. To this end, we are working in different asset creating activities. Our development work includes changing attitude, building skills and capacities of the local community primarily for their economic empowerment. We are working with the poor section of the society who are aspiring for self reliance (MTT interview 2).

Many development workers share such economic notion of development. The above quotation could highlight us that ORDA as an organization perceives development as economic growth of the local community. That is, the economic conception of development outweighs the other dimensions of development. This is a perspective drawn on the modernization and the dependency paradigm despite their convection on the idea of participation. Moreover, understanding ORDA's conceptions of development, examining its four strategic plans was a must. In all the first strategic plans (1997-2003) ORDA's priority areas are identified: natural resource protection, agricultural development, rural water supply and access, road construction and emergency food aid (ORDA second strategic plan, 2004; ORDA third strategic plan, 2009; ORDA fourth strategic plan, 2014).

The ORDA's economic focused conception of development seems to become different from the definition of participatory development which focuses on holistic development including the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of a given society. The emphasis of the organization on economic issues usually marginalizes the dimension of human development contrary to the principles of participatory development.

This conception and approach largely determine the practice of participatory development on the ground. That is, the economic perspective of development closes, if not narrows down, the room for employing holistic development. This in turn impedes the human dimension of development which is the major concern of participatory development. As a result, the conception of development by itself shapes the development practice on ground and limits the opportunities for practicing participatory development.

ii. The Top-Down Development Approach

ORDA's development work is predominantly top down. It means development projects are designed without the active involvement of the local community, and local needs and concerns are rarely prioritized. What is more is that the local community is not empowered to control resources and to make decisions that determine their future. Development projects are designed primarily for fulfilling the requirements of donors and the local governors. The community becomes at the third level in the hierarchy of requirements. The

usual procedure in the design of development projects commences from securing fund from donors. Hunting fund is one of the top priorities of the organization. In other words, the development works are chiefly dollar driven. It is supply driven.

One of the development workers states such strong influence of the donors in the design of the projects as follows:

If the program is funded by USAID and FHI, they make decisions about all the activities and programs and give it to ORDA head office. The head office sends to us keeping the organizational hierarchy and originality of the project as determined by the donors (DW interview 2).

In such type of projects, the donors measure and count each and every activity of the projects. ORDA is simply the implementer and participation becomes rarely implemented. That is simply participation as co-option. By doing this, the type and place of development projects are determined before contacting the local community. After that ORDA goes to the community with the already decided projects. The room for involving the community during the design stage of projects is rarely opened as mentioned by a development expert:

We cannot conduct need assessments for the donor driven projects. What we do is we go to the community with decided projects such as water, road, health centre, etc., and orient them and seek their contribution. You see the projects are already pre-determined. What we do is convincing the community for their contribution. Then we implement the project, and hand it over to the local people when we leave the place (DW interview 5).

Such types of economically driven projects are predetermined, and they make the development approach top down. This makes localizing development and empowerment impractical. On top of this, the top down approach of development does not give room for the participation of the local community. The top down approach is suitable for centralized administration. In this regard, Servaes and Arnst (1999, p.114) argue for the existence of administrative obstacles in employing participatory approach. In other words, participatory approach is hardly practiced by a centralized administrative system that is structured to manage important activities such as decision-making, resource allocation and information dissemination. Such kind of structure usually has no room for people's involvement in decision making, resource allocation and information generation and access. In such types of organizations one-way, top down planning and decision-making takes place even without a need assessment is conducted by professionals.

iii. *Short Duration of Development Projects and Their Dollar Drive Nature*

The short duration of most of the development projects affects the practice of participatory development where considerable length of time, more than the standard duration of three to five years of development projects, will be needed. Even the international donors want tangible and timely report for their fund, not the process of participation which takes long time to use it effectively. In the international development context the usual duration of development projects is between three to five years. Such short time duration obliged the development organizations to rush to deadlines and reports, rather than to work on

participation and empowerment of the local community. The research participants state that people's participation consumes time and costs resources and they usually prefer using the top-down approach. In short, donors set their fixed time and this affects the implementation of participatory development in ORDA. The organization, of course, should rush for performing the development works based on the donors' schedule. This in turn directs the attention of the organization to prepare reports and to keep deadlines rather than consider local demands and build consensuses. The short duration of projects' life span is also mentioned as an impediment of participatory development by scholars such as Servaes and Arnst (1999), Mefalopulos(2008) and Waisbord (2008). For example, Servaes and Arnst (1999, p.115) contend that highly structured and deeply institutionalized projects are not suitable for participatory development.

In addition, the dollar driven nature of most of the development projects such as Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), Development Food Aid Program (DEFAP) and Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development (GRAD) discourages the practice of ORDA's participatory development. For example, it could be possible to infer from the data that projects funded by donor organizations such as USAID and FHI are top down. They are powerful in deciding the type, the nature and place of the projects. This process marginalizes the local community from actively participating in all the phases of the development works.

iv. Conceptions of Participation and Participatory Development

Another factor that shapes the practice of development in ORDA is the conceptions of participation and participatory development. ORDA's development workers perceive participation of the local community as labor and materials contributions and administration of the projects after being handed over.

The development experts who are working in the three project sites of the organization express how they understand and perceive participation and participatory development in the following way:

Participation is labor and material contributions by the local people during physical development works (DW interview 9).

Participation is the involvement of the people in the development works of ORDA (DW interview 1).

It is the participation of the local community by material, labor and sometimes by cash contributions. For example, if there is health centre or hand dug well building, the community participates by collecting water, stone and sand. This is what participation is meant in our context (DW interview 2).

These responses show that participation is perceived as martial and labor contributions by the local community. In referring Yoon's (2004) categories of participation this is categorized as participation in implementation when people are encouraged and mobilized to take part in the realization of projects whereby they are given certain responsibilities and perform certain tasks. In such form of participation the local communities are not part of the decision

making process. This form of low level of participation is referred to as pseudo-participation (Tuftte & Mefalopulos, 2009, p.6-7).

v. *Dependency Syndrome*

Dependency syndrome is one of the major impediments of participatory development in ORDA's intervention areas. As pointed out above, the development work and aid has been going side by side for more than two decades. The development work could not affect the aid work. Rather the aid work affects the development work by developing dependency syndrome. The presence of such dependency syndrome is apparent and has become one of the major impediments of participatory development. Lots of expressions that acquaint and substantiate the presence and dimension of dependency syndrome are presented by research participants. For example, one interviewee says:

There is no doubt about the existence of a dependency syndrome in our locality. People choose being dependent than working and changing their life. They compete for aid even those who have better income (DW interview 8).

One of the important cases that demonstrate the high levels of dependency syndrome in ORDA's intervention area and the absence of genuine participatory communication is the ineffectiveness of Fota Irrigation project in Belesa. A research participant who was involved in studying the project design and administering its implementation narrates the case as follows:

The Fota Irrigation scheme was built five years ago, and covers around 300 hectares of land. ORDA built the scheme since the place is convenient for irrigation, and Belesa is one of the food insecure districts that has depend on food aid for a long period of time. After the irrigation has been built the local community refused to use it thinking that if they started production using the irrigation project, the aid would be stopped. If the aid stops, the charity could not reach their homes. Imagine, they refused to use it after we had built the irrigation dam and it was a mess for us. The main problem for the failure of Fota project is the community's sense of dependency on aids that has developed for years. It was this attitude that led to the failure of similar irrigation projects around Sekota. But, I recently heard that For the last two years, there has been an improvement in this project. Some individuals have started to use it after five years of resistance (MMT interview 4).

This case depicts the high level of dependency syndrome and the price of lack of participation of the local community at the start of the development projects. Even more, it could be seen how the development approach could not break the dependency syndrome. This generally implies that communication is not effectively working for attitude and behavior change.

Of course, a development worker expresses the trajectory of aid and dependence syndrome in a more extended and complex way reflecting the political dimension of aid in Sekota region:

The local people expect some temporary benefit from development organizations and projects. They do not expect social welfare. People hunt for individual and temporary benefits. We warn them by saying that the safety net aid will leave the place as a call to prepare them. Very sadly, there are farmers who verbally replied that aid will continue by changing its project name as we have seen for so many years. This is the result of long time persistence of aid in the area. Maybe aid is politicized. Some of the local community think that the government should feed them to sustain its power. This is a result of long time war in this area, and may be the relationship between this place (Sekota) and the current ruling party. ORDA has been providing food aid since the then war time in the 'independent' areas from the Derge regime control. (DW interview 2)

These expressions enlighten how long time relief works affect the attitude and behavior of local community. They have developed a feeling that the government is responsible to feed the community as it has been doing it for three decades in Wagehemra zone. This zone was a place of armed struggle between the then Derge regime, and the current ruling party. Wagemra was a place of armed struggle during the extended war of the 1980s by the then guerrilla fighters of Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the Derge. ANDM, the current ruling party of the region, had started its armed struggle in this place in 1982 (ANDM, 2012). ORDA started its aid in 1984 by the members of ANDM in the same place, just after two years of ANDM's birth, by the party members. This creates special affiliation between the organization and ANDM. Even this special relation confuses some of the local people and sometimes they think that ORDA and the government are the same. It is also very clear that the local people accommodated the then insurgents during the war time, and they consider aid as affirmative action for the war struck region and should sustain it as long as the government exists. This is an indication that dependency is a deep-rooted problem in the area which impedes efforts of sustainable development.

Still other development worker states the depth of dependency syndrome as "there are people who give births to a baby in order to increase the amount of food aid since the amount of distribution considers number or members in families" (DW interview 3).

The local community expects some kind of temporary benefits to participate in the development process. They see development projects as an employment creating opportunity rather than something that they must take control of, and develop to so they become self sufficient. In the absence of some type of payment, they are reluctant to mobilize themselves in the process of participation and empowerment that has resulted in long term impact on the life of the community. The existence of dependency attitude among the beneficiaries of ORDA was also found in Bruke's (2010) study on analyzing communication strategies in community forest development projects around Woldia district.

vi. *Perception About Communication*

The other factor is related to the perception of development practitioners about communication in the development context in general and within the local community in particular. The extracts below inform us that the development experts in ORDA consider communication as information transmission or a persuasion activity not as a means of empowerment.

Development communication is dissemination of development information for the public (DW interview 3)

It is reporting the development activities of the organization to inform and motivate the stakeholders about development (DW interview 8)

It is advocating development to tackle poverty in the region and to secure food gaps (DW interview 11)

From the extracts, it is clear that development communication is perceived as dissemination of development information from the organization to the general public. In other words, it is one-way process and lacks a dialogic aspect. Because of such conception of communication, disseminating information is one of the dominant communication activities in the organization.

vii. *Lack of Professionalism*

The other major factor that affects the practice of development communication, in general and participatory communication in particular, is lack of professionalism in the communication department of the organization. When we see the profile of the communication staff, there is only one expert who has graduated in the field of communication. Others are not from the field of communication. In all the project offices of the research sites there is no one assigned based on his /her profession, communication. Because of this gap, participatory communication could not be practiced professionally, and its role for development may not be understood well. In other words, the lack of skills to handle participatory communication is the result of such professional gaps. The data shows that the poor handling of community conversation (CC) affects the communication with the local community not to be dialogical in ways that empower the local community. Generally, lack of knowledge and skills on how to communicate in the development context are among the gaps that hinder the communication works of the organization. This goes with Waisbord's (2008) critical reflection on the marginalization of participatory communication. He contends that when other disciplines determine the status of communication, professionalism will suffer a lot. Other privileged professions in development may need communication to disseminate information in order to achieve their pre-determined objectives. As a result, community's participation, dialogue, decision-making, local knowledge and empowerment and other notions of participatory approach will have no room in the development process or they might be manipulated. This will result in the prevalence of information model of communication that favors dissemination of experts' information commonly in a top down fashion. The technical mentality of these professionals will pave way for the continuity of the top down approach by blocking the participatory room. The weak status of communication in development organization will limit the adoption of participatory communication and this in turn would limit the potentials of communication for sustainable development (Waisbord, 2008, p. 513-514).

viii. Lack of Adequate Human Resource

Still the other factor that affects the practice of participatory communication is lack of adequate human resource. The communication unit has only five members of staff specifically the unit manager, one communication officer, one IT officer, one web master, and one audio-visual officer. For such a huge organization that administers more than 800 employees, seven Zonal Coordination Offices and 22 Project Offices at grassroots or district level (ORDA, 2013) covering the communication works with only such few members affects the communication practices seriously. Only one officer who is not from the communication field is assigned at the front line of the communication unit. The worst case is that nobody is assigned for the communication work in the project offices where actual development work is performed. As a result, one could observe the poor handling of participatory communication. This is similar with what Waisbord (2008) contends that constant structural problems such as insufficient budget, poor management, corruption, lack of political commitment to help the poor and marginalized people, and inadequately trained staff are chained development organizations in the third world.

ix. The Structural Problem

The structural problem is a visible factor observed in this study, and it could hinder the development communication works. The communication and IT department of the organization is placed only at the head quarter level. In all the project offices of ORDA, there is no communication department. In other words, at the project offices level there is neither communication department nor professionals who can work for communication. Because of this there is no one who is assigned for the communication works of the development projects. The communication work is usually performed by other professionals as an additional task. This creates two problems. One is the marginalization of communication in the development process and the other is making communication works every body's business. Such practice could seriously affect the perception and the practice of participatory communication. Such type of problem is also loudly voiced by Waisbord (2008) as he refers this disregard as subordinate status of communication. As the author notes communication is usually housed in health, financial or agricultural programs in a way that obliges it to play only a role of subsidiary discipline. As shown in the previous section, the absence of communication departments and experts in all ORDA's project offices discloses this fact. This makes communication as "every body's" business. Such dependency takes its autonomy, and fails to determine its objectives and approaches. Professionals from other disciplines thus assume the authority to determine its status. Similarly, this problem in general becomes a challenge for realizing participatory communication in ORDA.

x. Lack of Adequate Budget

Another factor which is a result of neglect and marginalization of the communication element in the organizational structure is lack of adequate budget or funds. The communication and IT unit in ORDA does not have its own budget code. They use budget from other programs such as environment protection, water and irrigation, and agriculture and livelihood usually by bargaining with program coordinators. This makes the communication unit dependent on other programs. This is additional evidence for the marginalization of communication in ORDA.

xi. *Absence of Communication Policy*

One of the factors that is affecting ORDA's communication work is the absence of communication policy and written communication strategy. A communication policy that directs the communication works of the organization and determines the type of communication approach and channels is missing. Lack of awareness and attention on the role of communication policy to direct the communication practices are may be the reasons for the absence of communication policy and strategy. This could create a huge gap on communication works where irregularities and discontinuities become common as a result of interest and skills of the development experts who are usually from other disciplines. The communication work has also no clear direction. Such type of problem is raised during the interview by the development experts:

There is no communication policy and strategy that guide our work. The communication approach is determined by the experts who are responsible for implementing the project. For example, if the project is health, the health officer is responsible, and if it is agriculture, lively hood officer is responsible to do good communication. This is the usual trend in ORDA. It is based on the personal skills and interests. There is no direction about the type of communication mechanisms used in the development works. (DW interview 2)

Similarly, another participant of the study further states the issue as follows:

There is no guideline given by ORDA. We are working by ourselves. From my experience I understand the role of respecting other cultures. When I communicate with the local people, I try to consider the way of life of the community, their culture, tradition and religion. I respect this. No one tells me to do this, but I should act like this to implement my work in collaboration with the community. We do this only by applying our own personal knowledge. (DW interview 7)

In addition, a former communication officer of the organization states the disorganized communication works as follows:

ORDA's communication work does not have any written guideline and strategy. It is like distributing meat, 'shero', (a local non-meat food), beans, and cabbage for peoples meeting in a big hall where there are different interests and backgrounds (CO interview 3).

Generally, there is neither a communication policy nor a written strategy that guides the communication works of ORDA. Because of the absence of such policy and strategy that guides the communication work, the communication activity practiced in limited, if not, unsuccessful, manner.

xii. *Political Interference and Lack of Democratic Culture*

Another factor that highly impedes the practice of genuine participatory communication is related with the political history of the region in particular and the country in general. That is, the socio-cultural and historical contexts of community also affect participatory communication. By its very nature dialogical communication needs democratic environment

which is not compatible with the socio-cultural context of the region. The long time repression of the local community by the power holders since the country had been in the strong hands of dictators silenced the community not to engage in much dialogue. Following the 1974 revolution of the country that led to the fall of the last emperor of the country, there was a bloody civil war till 1991. Soon after the revolution, the coming of the Derg military Junta into power began to suppress different voices and take serious measures against those who had different opinions and voices. Especially the “red terror” that killed hundreds and thousands of people could not disappear from mind of most of Ethiopians and it could have impact on the socio cultural context of the country.

During the Derge regime and before that time criticizing the government and having opinions different from the regime had serious consequences or there have been some kind of retaliation such as jail, torture and killings. Killing was performed publicly during the “red terror”. The worst case was that parents were asked to pay money to take body of their dead sons or daughters lying down on the streets. This political history of the country has had cross generations impact on the mind and actions of most Ethiopians. As a result, the community was forced to live under the shell of terror. In other words, there was no room for freedom of speech and dialogue. Any discussion of freedom, justice, equality and equity were officially banned. The existence of censorship was additional evidence for the dimension of suppression of alternative voices during the Derg time. The widely known Ethiopian proverb ‘silence is gold’ reflects the political history of the country that shapes the socio-cultural life of the society till today. In line with this, Bessette (2004, p.18) contends that lack of democracy and freedom of expression affects participatory communication. His point of discussion focused on the need for a favorable environment to use the participatory approach. The favorable environment mainly refers to democracy and the right to express divergent views. The author argues that it is impossible, if not, difficult, to use participatory communication for social change in the absence of democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression.

While the current government has taken different measures to tackle the problems mentioned above since 1991, the legacy of the dark political history of the country deeply affects the contemporary Ethiopian society. For example, there are changes at the theoretical and practical levels about freedom of speech including the abolition of censorship and protection of freedom of speech by the Ethiopian constitution of 1995 (Ethiopia. Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia. Constitution, 1995). However, what was rooted in the society about the repression of those having different opinions and positions have made established tradition of silence and needs a series of actions to be changed. That is, because of the fragile democratic system of the country, it is hard to tackle this deep rooted frustration and to establish a free dialogue culture. This is similar with what Waisbord (2002, p.21) elucidates that infant democratic culture of the third world countries has contributed a lot to the accumulation of power in the hands of local elites. Even the local people may not be interested in the participation of development process due to fear of retaliation by the power holders. Therefore, in such complex contexts practicing participatory communication becomes impossible, if not, difficult.

On top of this, the political and economic climate of the country after the 2005 national election has changed the role and performance of the NGOs in Ethiopia. The charities and civil society proclamation of the country (Ethiopia. Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia, Charities and Civil Societies Proclamation, 2009) has set restrictive

regulation on non-governmental organizations in a way that hinder approaching development from multiple-dimensions. The law restricts foreign and local NGOs that earn more than 10 per cent of their income from foreign aid to engage in the human dimension of development such as democracy, freedom and justice. By referring the restrictive law, ORDA which gets more than 10 per cent of its income from foreign aid limits its work only on hard development issues. Thus, this politico-economic climate of the country restricts the practices of development in ORDA. ORDA considers working on the human dimension of development as political work that should be left aside for the political parties. Talking about the major components of participatory paradigm such as empowerment, equity, equality, justice and freedoms are considered as crossing the red lines marked by the incumbent government. The research participants state that such issues are considered as taboos in the development process of the organization. This is another factor that opens room for the marginalization of human centered development work of ORDA. The impact of such restrictive measures on NGOs and development works is vividly echoed by scholars such as Desalegn and Wendwossen (cited in Haylemeskel 2015) and Haylemeskel (2015).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the major factors that affect participatory development communication could be categorized into three themes. These are the individual factors, the institutional or organizational factors and the environmental factors. The individual factors consist of the perceptions and practices focusing on the individual development works or experts in ORDA. These factors include the view, perceptions and beliefs of development workers about development as economic growth, participatory development communication as information sharing and persuasion, and participation as labor and material contributions. Besides, the perception towards the local community as beneficiaries, not as stakeholders, and the existing low level of professionalism in communication could be part of the individual factors hindering the practice of development communication of the organization.

The institutional factors refer to features that affect participatory development communication and have organizational dimension. These are factors beyond the scope of individual experts or development workers. These factors include the top down development approach, organization's structural problem, lack of adequate man power as well as absence of communication policy and strategy.

The environmental factors, on the other hand, refer to factors associated with the wider development context beyond the immediate control of the organization. These include the wider political history and socio-cultural contexts of the region or the country, dependency syndrome, short time span of the development projects and the impact of donors and government interventions.

Some of the factors thematically categorized above, however, are interlinked and sometimes they overlap each other and they are difficult to be categorized at specific levels. For instance, professionalism might have both individual and institutional dimensions. The durations of development projects might have both institutional and environmental dimensions. In the following figure, (figure 1) such factors and their impact on participatory communication are presented.

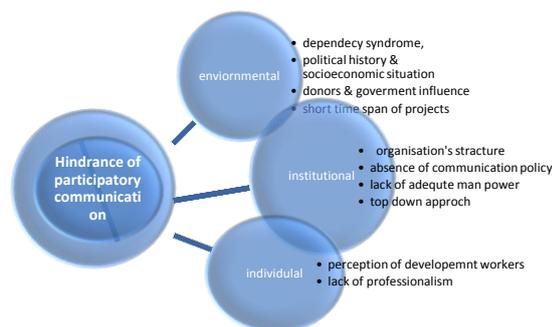


Figure 1: Factors affecting participatory communication

Generally, these factors tend to create a huge vacuum in the communication and development works of the organization in general and the participatory communication activities in particular. The aforementioned discussion substantiates the claim that communication is a marginalized discipline in ORDA, and the development context is not conducive to participatory communication. As a result ORDA's communication for sustainable development work seems to be insignificant and genuine participatory communication tends to become the missing link in the organization's development process.

To avert such trends, this research commends the importance of a shift in the conception and approach of development from the traditional top-down to human-centered approach. Besides, to empower the local people, communication should be at the center of development. Attention should be given for appropriate conception and practice of participatory communication to cross the barriers of development. Furthermore, there should be a communication policy or code of practice that guides the place and practice of communication in the development contexts. Moreover, the development communication structure or units should be reached up to the project office levels where actual development works are implemented. Likewise, development communication should be carried out by communication professionals and there should be also adequate professionals that practice communication works. The study also recommends the need of awareness building works for the managements and other development professionals to understand the importance of communication for sustainable development.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Adem Chanie Ali is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism and Communications, Faculty of Humanities, Bahir Dar University.

Stefan Sonderling is a Professor of Communication Science, University of South Africa

REFERENCES

- Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). (2012). *Brief history of ANDM*. [O]. Available: [http:// www.andm.org.et](http://www.andm.org.et). Accessed on 10/02/2015
- Bessette, G. (2004). *Involving the Community: A Guide to Participatory Development Communication*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2004, South Bound printing.
- Bessete, G. (2006). *People, land and water: participatory development communication for natural resource management*. Ottawa: South Bound printing.
- Bruke, B. (2010). *Communication strategies of the organisation for rehabilitation and development in Amhara (ORDA) in environmental protection with reference to sustainable community forest development in its operational areas*. MA thesis. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.
- Chitnis, K. (2005). *Communication for empowerment and participatory development: a social model health in Jamkhed, India*. PhD dissertation. Ohio: Ohio University. [O]. Available: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/rws_etd/document/get/.../inline Accessed on 05 November 2013
- Creswell, J. (2002). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed approaches*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ethiopia. Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia. (1995). Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia. Federal Negarit Gazeta, Proclamation No. 1/1995: Addis Ababa. Berhana Selam Printing Pres.
- Ethiopia. Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia. (2009). Charities and Civil Societies Proclamation. Federal Negarit Gazeta, Proclamation No. 621/2009. Addis Ababa. Behana Selam Printing Pres.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M.B. Ramos, Trans.) 30th Anniversary edition. NY: Continuum. (Original work Published 1970).
- Haylemeskel B . (2015). *YehayleMariam eda ena yemuslimu tigel*. [Sl: sn].
- Mefalopulos, P. (2008). *Development communication sourcebook: broadening the boundaries of communication* .Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Melkote, S & Steeves, L. (2001). *Communication for development in the third world: theory and practice for empowerment*. 2nd edition. New Delhi: Sage.
- Newman, L. (2007). *Basics of social research: qualitative and quantitative approach*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA). (2004). Second strategic plan document 2004-2008.
- Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara. (2009). Third strategic plan 2009-2013 . Bahir Dar.
- Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara. (2013). ORDA's profile. [O]. Available: [http://: www.orda.org](http://www.orda.org) Accessed on 15 January 2014.
- Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara. (2014). Performance review of the third five years (2009-2013) Strategic Plan . Bahir Dar.
- Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara. (2014). 4th strategic plan 2014-2018. Bahir Dar.

- Rogers, E. M. (1976). Communication and development: the passing of the dominant paradigm. *Communication Research* (3):21-133 [O]. Available: <http://crx.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/3/2/213>
Accessed 11 December 2009
- Sengupta, A. (2007). *Enacting an alternative vision of communication for social change in the Peruvian Amazon*. PhD dissertation. Ohio: Ohio University. [O]. Available: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/rws_etd/document/get/.../inline
Accessed on 05 November 2013
- Servaes, J & Arnst, R. (1999). Principles of participatory communication research: its strength (!) and weakness (?), in *Theoretical approaches to participatory communication*, edited by in Jacobson, T & Servaes, J. New Jersey: Hampton Press Inc: 107-130.
- Servaes, J (ed.). (2008). *Communication for development and social change*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Thomas, P. (1994). Participatory development communication: a philosophical premise, in *Participatory communication: working for change and development*, edited by White, S, Nair S & Ascroft, J. New Delhi: Sage. 49- 59.
- Tufte, T & Mefalopulos, P. (2009). *Participatory communication: a practical guide*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Waisbord, S. (2002). *Family tree of theories, methodologies and strategies in development communication: convergences and differences*. NY: Rockefeller Foundation. [O]. Available: <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdf/familytree>
Accessed 03 May 2009
- Waisbord, S. (2008). The institutional challenges of participatory communication in international aid. *Social Identities*. 14 (4): 505-522. [O]. Available: <https://www.andrews.edu/.../WaisbordArticle.pdf>
Accessed on 05 May 2013
- White, R. A. (2008). Ten major lines of research on grassroots, participatory communication in Africa. *African Communication Research Journal*. 1(1): 11-46 [O]. Available: <http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/files/articles/ACR/Grassroots%2520Participatory%2520Communication>. Accessed on 11/21/2012
- White, S. (1994). Introduction- The concept of participation: transforming rhetoric and reality, in *Participatory communication: working for change and development*, edited by White, S, Nair S & Ascroft, J. New Delhi: Sage: 49- 59.