Communicating for Development Purposes: The Perspective of Ondo State Women in Agriculture

T. Fola-Adebayo,
Federal University of Technology,
General Studies Unit,
P.M.B. 704,
Akure.

Abstract

This study considered the relevant development communication strategies that would be appropriate for increasing the participation and productivity of Ondo State Women in Agriculture. Focused group discussion and interviews were employed in eliciting data on the current practices, constraints and challenges faced by these women. The study revealed that appropriate communication media, relevant development communication messages alongside the use of suitable language are some of the development communication strategies that could lead to optimum productivity among this group of women.

Introduction

In September 2000, world leaders at the United Nations’ Millennium Summit set a global agenda, which made development central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. These goals set definite objectives of reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. Three years later, the Global Governance Initiative of the World Economic Forum that began assessing what had been done to achieve the goals outlined in 2000 revealed that the world was failing especially in the areas of the reduction of hunger, availability of food to the poor and provision of development assistance to the poor. Developing countries have not fared any better as they still experience constraints concerning the implementation of these objectives. For instance, globalization which is considered by some as, “a weapon of subordination, dependency and marginalization (Soola, 2002:19) has continued to underline the socioeconomic and technological chasm between the economically strong North and the dependent South, resulting in the South becoming chiefly importers of goods, sites for turnkey technology, exporters of raw materials and victims of unfair trade and loan practices.

Even the issue of how to sustain and manage technological development and share resources equitably within the ambit of well-conceived initiatives such as the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East Africa; National Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD); and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) has remained a difficulty for some developing countries. This has remained so because the test of these initiatives is delivery; and the challenge – good leadership (Maathai, 2005:12) – both, rare commodities in some developing countries.

What is Communication?
Viewed in the light of development, communication focuses on the empowerment of the disadvantaged – “the rural poor, the urban destitute, the elderly, children and women” (Quarmyre 1990:1, cited in Soola, 2002:19). This view perceives communication as a transactional, participatory, and highly interactive process which is receiver-oriented. This involves the active involvement of the people – the excluded – who assume responsibility for determining and shaping their own destiny. For development to take place, development efforts must start at the local level i.e. the immediate community. Reasoning along this line, Richardson (1977:14) claims that:

… Communication caters to the human dimension of development: it establishes a dialogue with rural people, involves them in the planning of their own development, provides information as a basis for social change and conveys the knowledge and skills required to improve the quality of their life…

Definition of Development

Early conceptions on development were synonymous with westernization as the earlier writers on the concept equated it with growth. For instance, Olatunbosun (1975) cites the well-known dual economy model of Ranis and Fei and a host of others who analysed development from the perspective of growth with little or no attention paid to matters of equity. Furthermore, development was erroneously seen in qualitative terms: gross national product, per capita income growth, mass production, technology, modernization and extensive investment in mass media infrastructure.

This approach to development did not take into account the complex, multidisciplinary nature of development. Later views on the concept shifted the emphasis away from a purely economic and diffusionist view to a humanistic and contextualised one. Maathai, the African female Nobel Peace Laureate, (2005:12) illustrates this new approach with the imagery of the African stool. She explains that an African stool has three legs on which one balances a basin. One of these legs is peace, the other good governance, and the third, good management of our resources, including equitable distribution of natural resources.

Oladipo had earlier on reconceptualised this view on development in the dual concepts of human development and sustainable human development. He emphasized that development is “pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-jobs, pro-women and pro-children.” Soola (2002:15) sums up this view by proffering a holistic view of development. He claims it is people-based, human capital-centered, and designed to promote the welfare of the beneficiaries of development benefits. He continues that, “it must recognize the need for people participation and self-reliance within the complex, increasingly interdependent world of globalization.” He claims further that the concept is both quantitative and qualitative in a mutually beneficial and reinforcing manner.

Development Communication

Development communication scholars have identified two paradigms of development communication: the diffusion (or dominant) paradigm and the participation (or alternative) paradigm (Windahl, Signitzer and Olson, 1992). The diffusion model holds the view that innovative ideas and practices are accepted through the transference of such innovation from the innovators to those who will accept them in society. On its part, the participatory paradigm posits the view that communication effectiveness is enhanced when
the receivers are actively involved in the processes of message production and distribution. Also each of these two paradigms has been associated with the theories of communication process and effects. The dominant paradigm for instance has been associated with one-way message transfer models of communication, while the alternative paradigm has been associated with two-way interactive models of communication. Development communication is therefore defined as the systematic utilization of appropriate or relevant communication channels and techniques targeted at increasing people’s participation in development and to inform, motivate and train rural population mainly at the grassroots’ level (Jayaweera, cited by Ngugi : 1995).

Communication plays a dominant role in development efforts, particularly in the area of agriculture. MacBride et al (cited in Lanihun 2002:72) claim that communication has tripod functions: increasing understanding of development problems; building up a spirit of solidarity in a common effort; and increasing the capacity of men and women to take charge of their own development. Receiver-oriented communication strategies alongside the activities of extension workers can play a key role in creating awareness, changing attitudes and increasing the adoption rate of recommended innovations and practices in agriculture.

African Women in Agriculture

Women in agriculture constitute a significant social and economic force. In fact, studies indicate that Nigerian rural women play significant roles in farming and that a large percentage are involved in the following farming activities: cultivation of crops, harvesting, transportation, processing and decision making (Famoriyo and Ewuola, 1990; Federal Office of Statistics, 1972; Ekwe, 1996; Boserup, 1970). Some African women have even ventured into areas that were once the preserve of men – tree cropping and environmental conservation (Salami, Ekanade and Usongo, 2002). Also women in sub-saharan Africa contribute 60 – 80 percent of labour in food production, both for household consumption and for sale. Mutume (2005 p. 54) claims that women in sub-saharan Africa contribute 60 – 80 percent of labour in food production, both for household consumption and for sale. He continues by quoting Oudrago who asserts that women’s contributions to agriculture, which provides more than 70 percent of food in Africa, are not adequately recorded in national statistics.

Inspite of the active participation of women in agriculture and consequently in economic development, they have been marginalized and their contributions hardly acknowledged. This may be because they are mainly engaged in what people consider as family farming or simply housework, which is not, considered an economic activity. Besides, they do not receive as much assistance from extension workers and have therefore settled for subsistence farming. Research data reveals that women’s participation in agricultural activities is greater than is generally assumed; (Mutume, 2005) therefore ignoring their role may jeopardize the actualization of development goals. It is against this background that this study hopes to consider the appropriate communication strategies that can be used to increase women’s participation and productivity in agriculture. This study is in two parts: the first section presents information on needs analysis conducted to elicit data on the current practices, constraints and challenges women farmers in Ondo State face; the second part presents information on the relevant development communication strategies that would be appropriate for the group.

The Study Area
Oda village is about eight kilometers from Akure, the capital of Ondo State. It is located in Akure North Local Government and has a population density of about three thousand plus. The area is located in the humid tropical region of Nigeria and like Akure enjoys abundant rainfall. The people of Oda are mainly farmers planting cash crops like cocoa and cashew. It is significant that only the men grow these while the women help them tend these. The women are mainly involved in subsistence farming and they grow food crops such as yams, coco-yams, cassava, plantain, maize and vegetables.

Methodology
Convenience sampling was employed in the selection of Oda; the village was divided into two groups: indigenes of Oda and non-indigenes. Five women were selected at random from each group in order to ensure a fair representation for the interview. The same criterion was applied in selecting women for the focused group discussion; in all, a total of ten women took part in the group discussion. Only women who had been involved in farming for at least five years were included in the sample. The village head and three leaders – all males were interviewed in order to corroborate what the women said. Focused group discussion (FGD) and interviews were used as data collection methods. In all, twenty women were used as sample. The following questions on various aspects were asked: respondents’ age; educational level; literacy level; marital status; mode of land acquisition; crops grown on farms; operational technologies; problems encountered on farms and proffered solutions; access to extension workers and frequency of interaction and assistance from them; source of help on farms; access to credit facilities; cultural hindrances to extension information; level and type of involvement in farming activities; timing of extension contacts; accessibility of markets for farm products etc. The data was analysed using simple descriptive statistics.

Results
Majority of the respondents i.e. sixty percent (60%) were between thirty (30) and forty-five years old (Table 1). The absence of respondents below thirty (30) years indicates that younger women opt for western education and city life and that marital status is a crucial factor in determining female participation in agriculture in Oda village. For instance, seventy percent (70%) of the respondents in Table 2 indicate that the land they use for farming came from their husbands. A United Nation’s Food and Agricultural Organisation study in Benin, Tanzania and Zimbabwe reveals a similar trend (Newswatch, 2005 p. 54). The cited study indicates that women in these countries rarely own land; and that even when they do, their holdings tend to be smaller and less fertile than those of men. This situation can be accounted for by the fact that in most African societies women have no right over land. This lack of ownership can be attributed to inheritance laws and financial incapability. The easy option for land acquisition by women seems to be through marriage and they lose their hold over such land when they are widowed. One of the respondents – an eighty (80) year old widow confirms this by explaining that after her husband died she lost the right to the land she had been using for farming and had to return to farm on her father’s land. She justified this by claiming that, “ale baba mi, temi na ni”, i.e. my father’s land is equally mine. This reveals the pitiable condition of widows not only in Oda village but in most parts of Nigeria - when their husbands die they are dispossessed of their husband’s property and therefore seek solace in their father’s property. Also only a total of thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents attained between primary three and modern...
three educational level; while the majority, sixty-five (65%) had no formal education (Table 3).

The major sources of labour in the area are through hired hands or reciprocal labour known as “abo”; this is a group of women who work for one another in turns. However wives of labourers, probably because of their financial predicament do most of the work on their farm in order to support their families. Table 4 reveals that the sources of information on agricultural practice come mostly from the radio programme designed for farmers – “Ise Agbe”. This is an Ondo State Radio-vision Corporation (OSRC) programme that is aired at 5a.m. daily. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents indicate that they use this medium. Television programmes meant for farmers are aired in the evening and the majority of women interviewed claimed that they hardly watch this because it is aired at the time they prepare supper for their families; only five percent (5%) of the women farmers employ this medium. In addition the women claim that extension workers seem to have a preference for men. So far, all the help they received from extension workers/Agricultural Development Project (ADP) was the advice to form women cooperatives in order to secure funds and other governmental support – this they claimed did not yield much. The respondents also indicate that the extension workers who visited them were mostly men and that so far only two female farm outreach officers had visited them. Finally the female farmers reveal that they prefer female extension workers because they feel that they will be more sensitive and responsive to their plight.

The analysis indicates that finance, labour, land and gender are the major constraints faced by these women. They claim that with money they would be able to employ more farm hands; and in the case of wives of labourers, rent more farms and thus increase their farm yield. Even though storage is still crudely practised – drying in the sun and by the fireplace – it does not pose a problem for them. Also, the women reveal that they use simple implements like hoe, cutlass and only three of them (i.e. 15%) say they use fertilizers and pesticides. In addition, farm products are sold on the farms, in the village and nearby markets or given out as gifts and the rest is preserved for the next planting season. The women seem to be weary of government insensitivity to their plight; but wished that the following would be done to help alleviate their problems: provision of money and credit facilities to employ the services of farm hands, exposure to advice by female extension workers, reduction in the prices of foodstuffs like rice, beans etc. One of the wives of labourers claimed that the “mekunnu” (i.e. the poor masses) need urgent help in this area.

Tables 1 – 4 below present responses of the respondents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 – 45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 – 60</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 – 80</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source: Research Data

Table 2: Mode of Land Acquisition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Acquisition of Land</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through Husband</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Father</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Data

Table 3: Education Level of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Education</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern School</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Data

Table 4: Source of Information on Farming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADP</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Data

Discussion

This study, like early studies on the role of women in agriculture, reveals that women play a more dominant role in the cultivation of food crops using traditional methods (Boserup 1970; Ekwe, 1996). Inspite of the significant role played by the women of Oda village in agricultural production, it is apparent that issues of finance, labour, land and gender bias still constitute major drawbacks for them. This seems to be a general pattern in Africa and Obbo (1980) succinctly sums this up by quoting some African women who claim that; “the hardest of penalties is to be poor and also a woman”. A similar observation is made by Mutukwa (cited in Newswatch, 2005) who adds that poverty in Africa has continued to wear a woman’s face.

Development Communication Strategies

Based on the findings of this study, the following development communication strategies are proposed as means of achieving maximum productivity among women in agriculture in Oda village and similar rural settings. The following steps were taken in doing this: carrying out an audience needs analysis (which was done through the group discussion and interview in the first part of this study); selecting suitable media for development communication messages; and adopting both appropriate language and a participatory approach.
Choosing Appropriate Media for Development Information

A combination of the traditional and modern media will be most suitable for disseminating development information to this group of women; advocates of development communication assert that this type of media mix is invaluable for disseminating development information (Wilson, 1997; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997). The traditional media forms proposed include aspects of indigenous communication such as regular formal briefings at the Oba’s palace or village hall; regular informal briefings at places like the market, town festivals; through town mobilizers/criers; traditional drum mobilizers; singing troupes; talebearers; and nocturnal news disseminators (Adedeji 2000, cited in Akinyele 2002 : 68). Mundy and Compton (1995) rightly note that these channels of communication are important conduits of change as they have high credibility level, offer opportunities for participation by the local people and are democratic in nature.

Under modern media, the radio has advantages over other broadcast media because of its non-dependence on electricity supply and ease of operation. Ojebode (2002 : 93 – 96) enumerates the roles of the development radio as providing: information, enlightenment; adult literacy, mobilization, national cohesion and agenda setting i.e. facilitating dialogue between communities and governments. In fact Moemeka (1990 : 65) adjudges the broadcast media, especially the radio to be potent in development communication efforts.

In addition, indigenous newspapers are also beneficial in communicating development news; commenting on the relevance of the print media, Nwosu (1990 : 190 – 191) explains that in contrast to the broadcast media, they have an enduring characteristic, contain news items that are better interpreted and can be easily stored and retrieved. Besides respected opinion leaders can read newspapers and pass on the agricultural news gleaned from them in the style typical of, “what the papers say”.

Constructing Relevant Development Communication Messages

Messages that will motivate rural women and provide information for social change, convey the knowledge and skills required to improve the quality of their lives can be disseminated through the media identified above. Media operators must consciously do this as studies reveal that issues associated with Agriculture receive very low mention and prominence in the print media (Salawu 2001; Oladeinde and Fola-Adebayo, 2005). Also messages that will help them adopt better agricultural practices and encourage capacity building must run along side development news; these may include information on storage practices, fertilizers, pesticides, forming cooperative associations and adopting innovative practices.

Adopting Appropriate Language and a Participatory Approach

As development communication is about influencing people in the grassroots to accept new ideas, helping them embrace change and giving them social, economic and political leverage, its messages must have a persuasive potential. Its messages must be geared towards lifting the morale of the women and helping them see that they can go beyond subsistence farming. Also they can be encouraged to forge strong teams with other women in collaborative ventures that will help them surmount obstacles in agricultural practice. Even the language used must be the one they can easily identify with, i.e. the Akure dialect or the relevant indigenous dialect. Finally, the women concerned must be allowed to determine their needs and be involved in implementing policies that will benefit them.
Conclusion

In conclusion this study revealed that finance, labour, land and gender bias are the major constraints Oda women farmers face. There is the need to challenge them to move from subsistence to mechanized farming because current economic realities demand this. Since the African culture treats women as inferior beings, they must be empowered to improve their financial status. Infact Obbo (1980) claims that a woman’s strongest assets are her hands, through which she can accumulate property in the form of land. There is also the need for the active involvement of the government in issues that pertain to women in agriculture in order to facilitate sustainable development especially at the grassroots level. Women have been at the vanguard of indigenous environmental movements in Kenya, Costa Rica etc. and the talents and potentials of the Nigerian rural farmer can be maximized through sound governmental policies that are designed to empower them. These policies must not only be initiated but sustained; besides the government through female extension workers in particular must ensure that women farmers have access to agricultural innovations, information on seedlings, pesticides, fertilizers etc. Also issues of adult literacy must be vigorously pursued; if sixty-five percent of the women in Oda (Table 3) have no formal education, exposure to literacy will enhance their contribution to agricultural production and guarantee food security. Finally in order to increase the participation and productivity of Ondo State women in agriculture, the following development communication messages are proposed: using a combination of traditional and modern media, constructing relevant development communication messages and finally adopting appropriate language and a participatory approach.

Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to Kabiyesi, His Highness, Olojoda of Oda Oba (Dr) Bamidele Akosile and all the women and men who took part in this study for their cooperation and assistance.

REFERENCES


