



Full Length Research Article

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN POVERTY REDUCTION IN KENYA: A STUDY OF MURANG'A COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The first 50 years of independence in Kenya have been a period of rapid changes and progress but 33% of the citizens of Murang'a County continue to be trapped in poverty. There is need to reduce these statistics and this research sought to find out the role of participatory communication in poverty reduction in Murang'a County. The objectives of this study were to identify the communication channels used to reach out to local communities in the milk coolers project, the participation level of local communities at the implementation stage of these development projects and to establish the effects of participation on the success of poverty reduction efforts. The study was guided by the participatory communication paradigm and Social Cognitive Theory. This research studied three constituencies where the project has been implemented: Kiharu, Kangema and Gatanga. Cluster sampling method and simple random sampling techniques were used and a sample of 400 respondents was obtained. Data was collected using quantitative and qualitative methods using questionnaires and interviews. It emerged that a majority of the beneficiaries had relied on the radio, consultative meetings and interpersonal methods. The study concluded that there was minimal participation by the intended beneficiaries during the implementation of the project, adopting an anti-dialogical banking model to development. A high majority of the beneficiaries did not consider the project to have been successful. The study therefore recommends that change agents should take participatory development and participatory communication to improve the living standards of its citizenry.

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INTRODUCTION

In Kenya the section of the population living below the poverty line increased from 52.3 per cent in 1997 to an estimated 56 per cent between 2000 and 2002. By 2005/06, it had dropped to 45.9 per cent (Kenya Economic Update, 2013). This means that during the first medium term plan of Kenya's Vision 2030, poverty rates reduced by 10.1%. According to the Kenya Economic Report (2013) given the multidimensional nature of poverty, there is no single channel of reducing macro and socio-economic performance poverty but it argues that the ultimate goal is to reduce the number of people living in poverty. However Kenya has made significant progress towards reducing poverty through interventions discussed in this paper. To tackle poverty, the government has come up with interventions that focus on revamping the economy to create an enabling environment for citizens to access basic services. Kenya Vision 2030 (2006) is a vehicle for accelerating transformation of the country into a rapidly industrializing middle-income nation by the year 2030.

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The Constituency Development Fund Act (2013) however has provision for the implementation of participatory development. In article 24 (6) the law that within the first year of a new parliament and at least once every two years thereafter, the constituency development board shall convene open forum public meetings at in every ward in the constituency to deliberate on development matters in the ward and the constituency. Each ward shall come up with a list of priority projects to be submitted to board. However it can be argued that this exists only in law because the boards at the ward and constituency levels are dominated by the elites and development needs of the ordinary people are not represented. Agricultural activities that support the county's economy include dairy farming and macadamia farming. Among main farms for Macadamia nut are in Murang'a and Maragua town. This study will focus on the milk coolers project and introduction of dairy cows project by the county government. In line with the Murang'a County growth and empowerment agenda, Governor Mwangi Wa Iria has initiated a programme that will see Murang'a farmers access the best of the dairy breeds that there is in this country at an affordable rate. So far 300 High breed dairy cows were procured and distributed to

farmers. The Murang'a County governor has led and initiated this milk cooling and bulking programme for the Murang'a people. The County Government has procured 35 milk coolers. Each ward in the milk producing regions will receive a cooler to be used by the farmers' group in the area. In the identification of the development needs of the people, the county government disregarded participatory communication as a likely development communication paradigm. The beneficiaries of development projects meant to alleviate poverty are often bystanders and regarded as passive shareholders in the development process. According to Smith (2000) the lack of involvement of the beneficiaries at all stages of development often leads to poor needs assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This study looks at participatory communication and how it could be a catalyst in poverty reduction efforts in Murang'a County. Lack of participation among target groups or community members in either the planning, implementation or decision making process of development initiatives is one of the main reasons for the failures of some programmes (Chambers, 1997; cited in Mefalopulos, 2003). This study will examine participatory communication as an important catalyst in poverty reduction efforts.

Objectives of the study

- Identify the communication channels used to reach out to local communities in the milk coolers project in Murang'a County.
- Determine the participation level of local communities at the implementation stage of the milk coolers project.
- Establish the effects of participation on the success of poverty reduction efforts.

This study will inform the efforts of change agents and influence a paradigm shift in the approach taken by both local and national governments to alleviate poverty. Often the vision of the change agents (the outsider) is blurred and they see action starting from where they are (Chambers, 1983). This study sought to change that vision of the outsider, from one distorted by top-down approach to one that is inclusive of the beneficiaries. Therefore, it will inform the key stakeholders in the government (National government and County government), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), local leaders and local people. The diffusion model and the participatory communication model have stood out over time as the two main approaches of communication for development. The diffusion model aimed at solving problems due to a lack of knowledge and information. Change is thus driven by the change agents and provides little room for the involvement of the beneficiaries. Despite being the dominant paradigm in the 1940s and 1950s, the diffusion of innovation model and the communication model it adopts has since been replaced by the participatory communication model that appreciates horizontal communication as opposed to downward communication for development. This study will be guided by two theories, participatory paradigm and the Social Cognitive Theory. The participatory paradigm of development stems from the dependency theorists who were looking for a new way to development. The model sought to counter earlier beliefs in the diffusion of innovations model developed by Everett Rodgers. It emphasizes the empowerment, cultural reality and multidimensionality in the approaches of development (Servaes, 2008).

The model is also founded on empowerment and participation and posits that development cannot be approached from a linear perspective. This paradigm views the beneficiaries of development as active participants in the attainment of their development goals while previous paradigms viewed them as passive. This approach is grounded in a two way dialogic mode but it also incorporates the monologic approaches and methods (Mefalopulos, 2008) Within this approach, participatory communication becomes the essential tool, as it offers away to tap into the knowledge of citizens and participants in the change process. The Social Cognitive Theory of Albert Bandura posits that people learn from each other through observing, imitating and modelling others while being guided by their proactive, self-regulating, self-organizing and self-reflective nature (Bandura, 2009). This theory is a behavioural change theory and argues that people observe actions and adopt those actions if they result in the desired behaviour. In the present study it can be argued that the beneficiaries learn from the actions of the change agents through their interaction in the needs assessment and implementation and in their interaction with other intended beneficiaries, they adopt those practices they deem highly productive. According to Bandura the perceived or real rewards and punishments attracted by an action taken by a few people will serve as a detriment or motivation for others. In the present study, the involvement of a few dairy farmers at the needs assessment and implementation stages of the projects will influence others positively into taking part in the participatory action.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed an exploratory research design. The study targeted the beneficiaries of this development project within Murang'a County, where three constituencies namely, Kangema, Kiharu and Gatanga were studied. To obtain the desired sample size, this study adopted a model proposed by Yamani in Keyton (2001) as follows:

$$N = \frac{n}{1 + N(e)}$$

When n is the sample size, N is the population size, e is the degree of tolerable error and 1 is constant

Using this formula therefore and allowing 5% error margin, the study sample was

$$n = \frac{421661}{1 + 421661(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 400$$

The study adopted cluster sampling method where the three constituencies were the desired clusters and samples were obtained from the clusters using simple random sampling techniques depending on the population size. Using this technique, there were 172 respondents from Kiharu constituency, 73 from Kangema constituency and 155 from Gatanga. The chief data collection techniques were questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were in English with a Kiswahili translation for respondents who may be unfamiliar with the English language. The use of interviews helped obtain detailed information about the project from both large scale and small scale farmers in the county. The interviews were semi-structured and therefore used an interview guide. The data collected was integrated for analysis. After administering the questionnaires the researcher coded the

information and converted it into numerical codes for statistical analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed for all the variables to ensure quality of data. These statistics were used to show the relationships between variables.

RESULTS

The research was conducted on a sample of 400 respondents and six interviewees from Murang'a County who are the intended beneficiaries of the poverty reduction efforts and to whom questionnaires were administered. The statistics analysed were used to show the relationships between variables. Out of the 400 questionnaires, 340 questionnaires were duly filled and this represents a response rate of 85%. It emerged that 85% of the respondents were aware of this project representing 290 respondents of the total 340. However 15% of the respondents had no prior knowledge of the existence of the project, this represents 50 of the total 340 respondents. From the findings it is clear that there was an awareness of the project among its intended beneficiaries. The same results were obtained during the interviews where it was observed that they had received scanty details through the media.

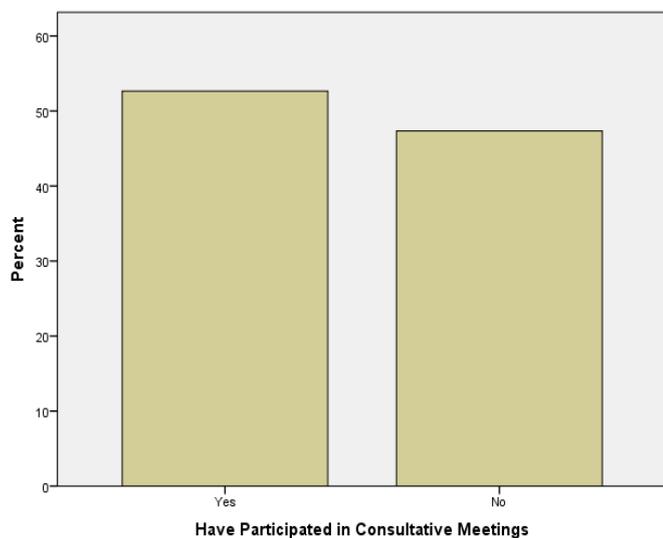


Figure 1.

Table 1.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	27	7.9	7.9	7.9
Valid No	313	92.1	92.1	100.0
Total	340	100.0	100.0	

Milk Coolers Project Success

These findings concur well with the arguments advanced by Gumicio-Dagron (2006) that for people to participate they must become conscious of their own dignity. This means that they must be able to express themselves and be given an opportunity to have their say, based on the individual reality that infuses each person's life. In shaping their own reality, beneficiaries of development must become conscious of the world around them. The study further found that a majority of the respondents had obtained information about the project from the radio i.e. 152 of the total 293 were knowledgeable about the project, representing 52%. There were only 9 respondents who had obtained information about the project

from the newspapers representing 3%. 23% of the respondents indicated that they had received information about the project through consultative meetings with the change agents. This augurs well are consistent with the arguments advanced by Oriakhi and Okoedo –Okojie (2013) on the preference of sources of information. They point out that sources that are easily accessible, cheap and user friendly are preferred. The radio is a cheap media channel to acquire information and according to Oriare (2010) a majority of Kenyans (90%) listen to the radio. However the arguments of Sarvaes (2008) differ with the dominant use of the radio a communication vehicle in participatory development approaches. He argues that in development communication the radio must be integrated with a number of other efforts so as to nurture new behaviour in people. Once motivated with information and awareness about a new practice, people need to learn and master new skills to enable them to apply it. The radio presents a top-down approach unlike other interpersonal efforts such as the word of mouth and consultative meetings. The communication approaches proposed by Sarvaes conform to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which holds that people learn through modelling and imitation (Bandura, 1971).

The question on preferred communication channel presented to respondents who had no prior information on the project, representing 15% of the respondents. 48% chose the radio as a likely communication vehicle to be used by the change agent to reach out to them while a further 30% wanted to have consultative meetings with change agents. 2 respondents wanted to get information on the project through public service announcements while 4 respondents opted for billboards. When the prominent farmers were asked whether they felt that the channels used to reach out to the intended beneficiaries were sufficient, they reported that there was need to adopt channels that were more inclusive and interactive as opposed to just messages on the media. These findings however differ with Blanchet-Cohen (2014) who observes that aside from creating awareness and interest among citizens, organizations focused on giving voice to citizens' problems and solutions, proposing for more interactive communication forms rather than the top-down methods. In order to find out if the intended change agents had perceived the beneficiaries as equals in the development process as is premise in the participatory communication paradigm, the respondents were asked to indicate if they had been consulted in the identification of the project.

The findings indicate that 73% of the respondents were not consulted in the identification of the project while 27% were consulted. This means that whereas a significant number of respondents were consulted, the change agents did not consider consulting the intended beneficiaries as a prerequisite in the success of the project. Those who participated indicated that they took part in public forums and consultative meetings with the change agents. Jihandra (2014) argues that development approaches developed with little understanding of local contexts may yield no incentive to participate. A total of 51% of the respondents indicated that the change agent (Murang'a County Government) encouraged the public to participate in the implementation of the project while 49% of the respondents indicated that the change agent did not encourage the beneficiaries to take part in the implementation of the project. 53% of the respondents said they had participated in consultative meetings on this project. This finding is shown in table (i). The findings indicate that 179 of

the total 340 respondents said they had participated in consultative meetings with the change agents on this project while 161 respondents said they had not participated in the consultative meetings. Respondents indicated that they had participated in consultative meetings on the project. 33% of them, which represents 59 respondents, said took part in decision making meetings, 30% took part in training and skill building and 23% took part in information oriented meetings while 14%, representing 25 respondents took part in problem solving meetings. This study found that 81% of the respondents indicated that they had not been involved in the implementation of the project, representing 275 of the total 340 respondents. 19% of the respondents indicated that they had been involved during the implementation of the project. This can be interpreted to mean that there was less participation by the intended beneficiary during the implementation of the project, adopting an anti-dialogical banking model to development. In a community, participation can help promote improvements in efficiency, accountability and transparency of resource allocation and development (Fung and Wright, 2001). Chambers (1983) observes that participation is the key to genuine and sustainable poverty alleviation, as increased participation can enhance ownership and commitment among the 'local and poor' people. The study sought to establish whether the respondents perceived the project to have been a success depending on their previous responses. On this question, 8% of the respondents considered the project to have been successful while a majority 92% considered the project to have been unsuccessful as indicated in the table (ii). This can be interpreted to mean that the beneficiaries did not perceive the project to have been successful. As proposed by Tosun (2000), the more engagement there is in the process, the more self-reliance/ less dependence on others.

DISCUSSIONS

From the finding of this study, several key things can be deduced. It is evident that majority of the beneficiaries of the Milk Coolers Project are not without information on the project. Majority of the beneficiaries had information about the project and had received the information from a variety of communication forms. It emerged that a majority of the beneficiaries had relied on the radio as a communication vehicle on information about this project. This finding is in line with previous research by Oriare (2010) that a majority of Kenyans 90% listen to the radio. The radio thus became a successful tool in reaching out to the intended beneficiaries on information about the project. This means that the radio has a major role in reaching out to the majority of Kenyans on matters of national significance, development being among them. Participatory communication however does not envision a communication paradigm where the intended beneficiaries of development would be receivers of top-down communication but promotes horizontal communication between the change agents and the beneficiaries as opposed to a banking model to development. Consultative meetings were also influential in reaching out to the beneficiaries. Interpersonal face to face communication methods that adopted the word of mouth were also used in reaching out to intended beneficiaries. Among those who said they had no prior information about the project, a majority like those who had information proposed the radio as a likely communication channel to reach out to them on the project but this does not discard the place of consultative meetings between the stakeholders. This study thus found out

that the radio, consultative meetings and interpersonal methods were the communication methods used to reach out to local communities. The participatory development paradigm proposes a view of development where the beneficiary takes an active role throughout the development cycle. It proposes that the beneficiary and the change agent join hands in participatory action research in identifying the development needs and the implementation of the project to foster sustainability.

This study found out that a majority of the beneficiaries had not been consulted in the identification of the project. This explains why majority of the beneficiaries had received information about the project through channels that propagate a banking model of development. Whereas a significant number of respondents were encouraged to participate, the change agents did not consider consulting the intended beneficiaries as a prerequisite in the success of the project. Those who participated indicated that they took part in public forums and consultative meetings with the change agents. The study also found out that the change agent (Murang'a County Government) did not sufficiently encourage the public to participate in the implementation of the project. The participatory development paradigm pegs the success of development initiatives on the role of the beneficiary throughout the project. This study observed that the beneficiaries were not involved in the ex-ante evaluation of the project but were passive receivers of information on the project. The findings indicate that a high majority of the beneficiaries did not consider the project to have been successful while very few beneficiaries considered the project was a success. It also emerged that there was little information about the project as well as outsider bias on the local people.

These findings proves true the basic postulates of the participatory development paradigm as advanced by Chambers (1980) that poverty reduction efforts must enhance increased participation which also enhances ownership and commitment among the 'local and poor' people. The study concludes that a majority of the beneficiaries of this project had information about the study but they had received information through communication vehicles that promoted the banking model view of development (Freire, 1970). This means that efforts in identifying this project as a development need for the people of Murang'a County did not involve the target groups and the change agent adopted an outside bias, perceiving to understand the contextual reality of the local people without involving them in the identification of their development needs. The study also concludes that the involvement of the beneficiaries during the implementation stage of the project was very low and whereas majority of the respondents felt that through holding meetings with the people, the change agent had encouraged them to take part during the implementation, the change agent created no avenue for the local people to participate during the implementation phase of the project. Like in other phases of the project, during implementation, the beneficiaries were mere by standers, perceive receivers of development and this could have devastating consequences on the sustainability of the project.

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