Uganda Journal of Agricultural Sciences, 1999, 4: 27-33
ISSN 1026-0919
Printed in Uganda. All rights reserved
©1999 National Agricultural Research Organisation

Communication as key to effective operationalisation of integrated approach to rural development

Arseni R. Semana
Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Makerere University
P. O Box 7062, Kampala,Uganda

Abstract

Human communication involves exchange or sharing of ideas, facts, information, feelings, opinions and impression in order to create an area of common understanding to accelerate or cause action. This paper cites examples of how communication made projects succeed and how other projects failed due to lack of, or poor communication. It gives models that explain how communication can facilitate the operationalisation of integrated approach to rural development.

Key words: Communication, integrated rural development

Introduction

Wide spread concern over the welfare of rural communities is not new. It is something that has been preoccupying the minds of people of both developed and developing countries over several decades. The need to develop the rural poor led to the idea of rural development. Rural development is now a subject of great concern to most of the developing world. This is so primarily because Governments of the developing world in particular African Governments have realised that no effective national development can be achieved without stimulating and taping the potential and latent resources of the rural areas in support of their national development programmes.

In Africa, development strategies during the two-three decades of political independence have gradually led to the African continent into its present destitution characterised by falling agricultural and food production per capita, severe soil degradation, decrease of national income, deterioration of governments balance of payments and impoverishment that has left the countries with limited sovereignity and dignity. It was imperative to give priority to rural development or to accord it a central position in the national development policies in order to improve the situation.

However, rural development strategy has had many differing approaches particularly in its implementation. As Mumm Von Mallinckrodt (1981) put it; rural development which was invented in sixties, had its meaning differing from country to country and between various organisations active in technical cooperation which emphasized their special competence. He pointed out that many organisations recognised rural development as the wide category of activities with all rural oriented inputs conveniently fitted in. Others engaged in search for a more precise and systematic definition or equated it mistakenly to agriculture. Others limited the concept of community development to feeder roads construction, water supply and village nutrition. He further asserts that absence of efficient, well placed instruments of coordination made it difficult for the governments to develop and activate policies to avoid duplication and to balance interventions from different ministries. This dilemma led to the idea of Integrated Approach to Rural Development (IARP) which has become a talking point. About two decades ago, it was little more than a cry in the wilderness while now it has become a world wide chorus. This is clearly evidenced in the government planning documents, policy statements and proposal for practical action. This is so because of the need to generate, accelerate and sustain rural development in any developing country.

Most of rural development strategies in the past did not yield the desired results in the rural sectors because they focused on limited elements in the rural development process. Therefore IARD has been taken as a national strategy for promoting comprehensive and desirable transformation and improvement in rural communities.

Rural people, by their nature and traditionally are integrated individuals. All their day to day activities are integrated and based on their basic needs namely food, shelter, clothing, health education. It follows therefore that the efforts intended to develop the rural people should utilise integrated approach. However, the operationalisation of IARD is another area which most African counties are now very mush concerned about. Some countries have tried to operationalise the approach with some measure of success while others have failed.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the role of communication in the operationalisation of IARD through examining some case examples of rural projects that have succeeded or failed to achieve their set objectives.

Case examples

Unsuccessful approaches

In order to speed up social and economic development, the Government of Uganda introduced the group farming system. In 1964, about ten group farmers located in about eight districts were started. The farms were to serve as a model of modern farming with all services available. The farms were planned, water supply installed, stores constructed and workshops built. The farms were also supplied with inputs like tractors, seed and insecticides. They were also provided with technical staff. However, the farmers were to build health and community development centers as their contribution. They were also to operate on cooperative basis and governed by cooperative principles and laws.

As usual, people were told through meetings by administrators and the technical staff (extension workers) of the usefulness of group farms and asked them to move and settle on the farms. The people did not want to move completely from their old holdings. So they built small and temporary houses at the group farms from where to operate their farming activities. In otherwords, they moved but they did not stay on the farms and yet the rules stated that the farmers were to stay permanently on the farms. Some group farms never took off while others started but did not leave to their usefulness as the farmers defected. Only one group farm operated well.

It succeeded because of the initiative of the extension workers who at their own discretion relaxed the cooperative laws and allowed some farmers to operate from their old holding. These extension workers wanted the farmers to learn from experience and seeing the usefulness of group farms to decide to move and settle on the group farms. This worked and that is why that particular group farm succeeded.

Another case of lack of effective communication was experienced in Zambia on village regrouping. The village regrouping, which started in 1971, was meant to play a very important role in rural development. It was meant to lead to higher productivity and income through more effective provision and use of social and economic infrastructure in order to reverse the rural-urban migration (Bwalya, 1979).

The idea of village regrouping was started early in 1970 in Serenje District. The councilors of that district communicated the usefulness of village regrouping to the rural people in order to seek their suggestions on the possible sites and by the middle of 1970 about 50 sites were selected for village regrouping. The sites were supposed to be surveyed and planned. The planners and surveyors were sent from Lusaka to Serenje District to do the surveying and planning. However, they did not do the work as they had no transport to move them from the District Office to the sites. This delayed the village regrouping. So the councilors were charged with responsibility of undertaking the village regrouping in their respective areas. The Councilors went ahead and informed people concerned and told them that the Government would finance social services after the villagers had regrouped. However, the people paid no heed and as a result the project failed. One of the major causes for the failure was due to the lack of adequate information on regrouping i.e. lack of communication between the local people and the district (Serenje) headquarters and among the rural people themselves.

The two cases cited above illustrate one way communication (top-down) operating on the traditional way of dealing with people's problems. That is creating the need for the people and furnishing information to explain the need to the people. Such communication rarely works as people do not identify themselves with the need. Thus they do not avail themselves for the implementation of any project intended to meet the need. The decision makers created needs may not necessarily be the felt need of the people. That is why it is important to identify people's problems, needs and priorities with them and supply information as needed.

Successful approaches

Tanzania is an example of a country whose government is committed to a policy of providing essential services for all the nation as soon as possible. As more than 90% of the population live in the countryside, emphasis was on human development in rural areas where the population was scattered. Right after getting independence, the then Tanganyika Government embarked on developing the rural communities. Early post independence people's plan launched by the Prime Minister Rashid Kawawa in 1962 was meant to effect rural development. It was aimed at establishing village development committees whose task was to plan individual village development schemes in belief that a spirit of self-help would develop in every locality. However, this failed due to limited extension manpower, limited involvement of local peasants and some conflicts between old village leaders and new TANU leader. Therefore the Ujamaa village policy was to remedy the situation and included the old and new styles of life. In 1967 the Arusha Declaration set the ball rolling. The declaration placed emphasis on development of the rural people and their work through self-reliance.

So the government proceeded on a course of Ujamaa i.e. bringing people together into planned settlements (Ujamaa villages) so that basic services could be provided and developed more effectively. Nyerere's thesis is that "the traditional African family lived according to the basic principles of Ujamaa. They lived together and worked together because this was how they understood life and how they re-enforced each other against the difficulties. They had to contend with the results of their efforts and the results of their effort were divided unequally between them but according to well understood customs...." (Nyerere, 1968).

This pattern was made possible by three basic principles of life namely mutual respect, holding of all basic goods in common and the obligation of all to work. Despite these three basic principles, however, traditional life was not entirely satisfactory for several reasons. In some provinces, people were being forced to move to the Ujamaa villages some of which had no facilities (basic services). Also, the Arusha Declaration did not state explicitly what economic and social benefits would be

accrued and over what period. So the initial progress was uncharted and haphazardly organised and yet necessitated considerable government direction and investment.

It was on the whole, realised that the Ujamaa goals were not being achieved, resulting in the stranglation of the rural people's inititive and coperation. This was partly due to the bureaucratic difficulties caused by over centralisation that led to decisions taking too long. It was thus decided that its administration should be decentralized. Decentralization gave the regional and area commissioners side responsibilities for planning and implementing activities of Ujamaa including financial and personal control. More importantly it gave room to rural people for full participation in the planning process.

Today, at each administrative level, village, district, regional and national, committees include elected representatives of the people as well as departmental officials. The people in the rural communities are being involved not only in planning but also in implementing projects. The people of the rural community are being helped to create their own basic services. Trained development workers assist the villagers and the villagers choose from amongst themselves those who should become health workers and village teachers. These are now being trained and retrained in formal and informal educational techniques. Basic education is regarded as an essential component of other services and helps to coordinate them at village level and promoting Ujamaa development activities. Success has been realised particularly in the provision of water supply, distribution of cattle medicine and bus services.

Bolivia is another example (in Latin America) where success has been realised and basic services are being developed in rural areas. The government aims at bringing the rural population, who form two thirds of the nation, into development.

In 1972, the government chose Chuguisaca (one of the provinces) to carry out the first regional economic and social development programme. Mortality was high caused by malnutrition, lack of drinking water and lack of sewage disposal system. The province lacked schools; of 235,200 school age children, only 85,857 were enrolled in school. Unemployment particularly affecting youth, was the approximately 25%. Although agriculture was the main economic activity in place, 45% of the land suitable for farming remained unused (UNICEF, 1976).

Social Development Division was set up to help the committees at provincial, district and village level deploy, in mutual supporting day, the activities of the departments dealing with works (mainly roads and water) agriculture and animal husbandry, education and health.

Through the committee, the people in the communities were brought into the development process. The realities of the villages, i.e. the needs and problems of the rural people were the basis for the agreement on how to proceed. That is, through involvement in the planning process, the rural people identify their problems, choose community priorities of the solutions to the problems and set the sequence for implementation. Inter-sectoral approach is being furthered using "nuclear school" as a community centre. Villagers of varying ages are being trained in the techniques of how to participate actively in development. Basic instruction is being given in health education, agriculture, community development and education, in order to improve the rural economy and living conditions.

The province succeeded in constructing access roads, producing more fruit and vegetables through irrigation, erecting community crop storage, raising sheep and starting handcraft workshops. Efforts are underway to improve rural housing and the community participation is being stimulated to provide health services, water supply, sanitation and building schools.

Having gained some insights in the case of what led to the failures or successes of certain rural development projects, let us now see how communication facilities accelerates operationalisation of development projects.

Communication's role in the operationalisation of integrated approach to rural development

Human communication involves the exchange or sharing of ideas, facts, information, feelings, opinions, impression between two groups of people or institutions in order to create an area of common understanding for a particular purpose (Semana 1997).

The exchange of ideas takes place when two or more people get involved in the communication dialogue as illustrated in figure 1.



Fig 1. Communication dialogue
Source: Sereno and Bodaken (1975)

This model is similar to Semana's (1987) illustrating the sharing of information among researchers extension workers and farmers. Planers, implementers and rural people can share information on rural development following this model.

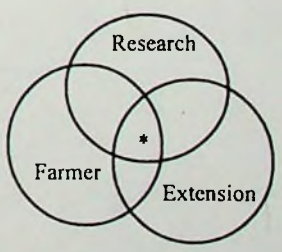

Figure 2. Research-Extension-Farmer linkage

In Fig. 2, the situation is brought about by liaison (interaction among researchers, extension workers and farmers).

Handle (1979) points out "empirical research suggests that the probability of rural development project success is significantly raised by such factors as effective two-way communication between project staff and farmers, and organisational arrangements that give farmers a voice in project decision". The problem facing project designers and administrators is the need to identify and develop contextually appropriate mechanisms to promote communication and share decision making.

Blair (1980), in sharing the above view, says "development cannot be planned on the basis solely of studies or ideas put forward by technical or economic agencies. To do so would be to impose a future perspective on the communities that would conflict with the way the members see their own future. Community participation calls for information and organisation, for a commitment by the whole of the peasant population, it calls for reflection, for a knowledge of available resources and of development possibilities. Good programming is the expression of a strategy for development of a set of communities. They share a common communications network and common cultural root. It is obviously essential in these cases to try to formulate strategies for the integral development of the entire system".

To operate as suggested above, IARD would call for joint Planning and programming which involves agreeing on what has to be done, who is responsible for doing it and when each operation should start and finish. Each member of the agencies concerned should have a copy of the programme to facilitate coordination and communication when necessary. Figure 3 below illustrates this and shows vertical and horizontal communication network that facilitates coordination and cooperation between agencies concerned with rural development. Such system promotes cohesion, minimizes duplication and confusion.

Operationalisation of integrated approach to rural development

The arrows represent the vertical and horizontal interactions between all the people involved in the development process.

For example, Liberia realised during the 1970s that

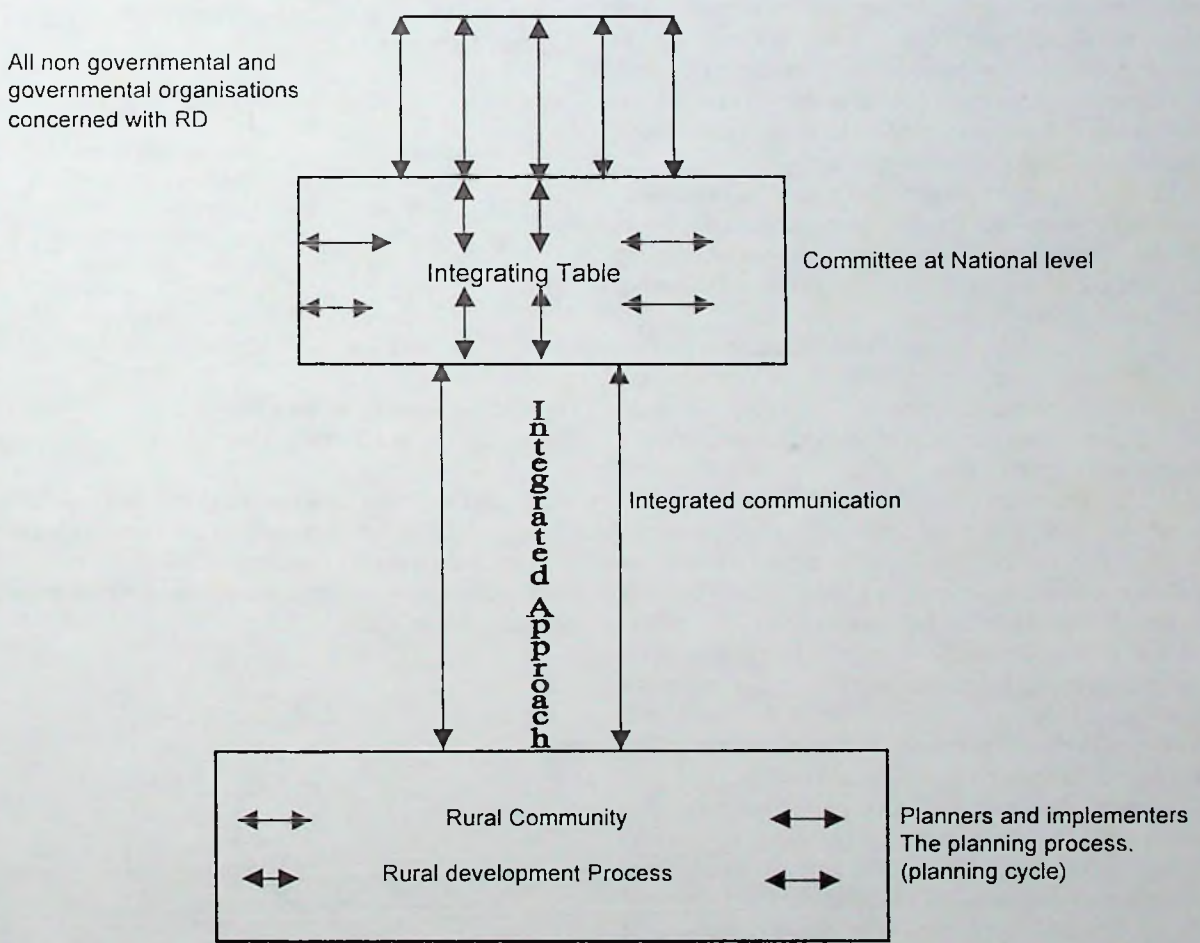

Figure 3: Planning, implementing and evaluation utilising two way communication.
The arrows represent the vertical and horizongal and interaction between all the people involved in development

Source : Semana 1984.

despite increased efforts and large budget allocation, it simply was not possible to train and support enough field workers (extension workers, teachers, nurses etc) to reach all of rural people with information and essential services in health, agriculture, nutrition and education. So a Rural Development Task Force was established to coordinate the planning of Liberia's development ministries. Ministry programmes in rural development had traditionally been highly centralised with little interministrial cooperation and with little thinking about the ways rural people could become more involved in their own development. So the Rural Development Task Force worked out a decentralization plan including development councils, committees and action groups at national, district, county and village levels. In their meetings and discussions the members (agencies) concerned with rural development agreed that coordinated planning (joint programming) and the communication of information were essential elements of any integrated rural development programme. Liberian officials have come to recognize that planning and systematic approach to communication can yield increased benefits to rural Liberians in knowledge, attitude change and improved practices in health, nutrition, agriculture and family life (Burke 1980).

This is supported by the results of an interview carried out at the Pan African institutes for development Kabwe, Zambia with three categories of respondents Managers of small scale enterprises, Women Extension Officers and Senior Officers (Postgraduate participants of project planning, management and evaluation training programme) in 1984. The results revealed that communication is very essential at every stage of development activities as illustrated in Table 1.

It was also found out that project like multipurpose products and projects under SIDO industrial estates in Tanzania as well as Dairy project, small scale sugar production, Zenzele women project, farmers cooperatives and adult education (Seventa) in Swaziland succeeded because of effective communication throughout the project cycle. Projects like demonstration houses, afforestation programme and primary school and teachers' houses project in Malawi failed due to lack of effective communication.

Table 1: Distribution of response in the role of communication in rural development

Statement	Response								
	Agree			Undecided			Disagree		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Communication is the key to all human activities	20	29	54	1	1	5	-	-	1
Communication helps decision makers make better decision	20	29	54	1	3	7	-	1	3
Integrated rural development cannot succeed without effective communication	21	29	50	-	-	6	-	1	-
Communication is very necessary at planning, implementation and evaluation stages of projects.	20	28	54	1	2	3	-	-	4
Communication without feed back is good in disseminating development ideas.	-	2	53	2	2	9	19	25	49
It is not necessary to have information about rural people when planning projects.	-	-	2	1	3	9	20	27	51
Projects are based on the needs and priorities of rural people and their communities.	19	23	-	2	2	8	-	9	52
National plan do not usually consider needs and priorities of rural people but the needs of the nation.	12	20	38	1	3	9	9	7	13

Key: A Small scale enterprises managers and entrepreneurs, B.Female Extension Officers,
C. Postgraduate Diploma students in project planning, management and evaluation.
Source: Semana 1984

It follows therefore that operationalisation of IARD should utilise effective communication to maximum. It should aim at discussion and problem solving. Specifically, rural Development follows a cycle of procedures i.e. planning, implementation, and evaluation. So there should be communication within every stage and between the stages. Different communication channels (educational approaches) should be used for this cause. For example radio can help create awareness and remind people about rural problems and arriving at solutions to these problems. Personal contact through consultations between development agents and the rural people and among all the people concerned with rural development can help sustain development . Training village leaders in formal and informal education techniques, as it is done in Tanzania and Bolivia, helps the rural people become conscious of their developmental problems and priorities so that they may be more involved in the development activities. So there is need for the decision makers to get together with the planners and the implementers to discuss national priorities, needs, and goals before the planners go to the rural communities to survey for project. The planners and implementers should initiate dialogue with decision makers before planning and implementing stages. This discussion (communication within a stage) facilitates understanding among those in the discussion and guarantees recognition. This means that when the planners go to rural communities to carry out surveys and plans, the chances are that the information they obtain and plans they make will be recognized and get attention. Turning to implementation stages, when implementers (development officers) are involved in the planning and understand the plans, the chances are that they will be encouraged to implement the projects more efficiently.

To prepare for full commitment to project implementation by the target groups, first of all the rural people should be made aware of the projects sanctioned by the decision makers. The secret behind this lies in giving priority to the wishes of the rural people, and educating them on their role in implementation of rural project so that they develop in themselves the sense of pride in what will be achieved. This means that the front line workers (extension workers) should prepare the rural people for programmes.

This is possible where there exists an organisational structure that permits smooth flow of information vertically and horizontally. Uganda is a case in point where exists a well organised structure built around local councils. The structure of the councils is represented in Fig. 4.

This organisational set up brings relevant people together at every level at agreed upon dates and time to discuss issues and matters affecting them and their environment. It follows therefore that if decision makers and planner utilized such set up they would get ideas, issues, opinions, problems and needs from the people concerned and people would get the same from decision makers and planners. Such dialogue would bring about an area of common understanding that would facilitate smooth flow of information necessary to accelerate development.

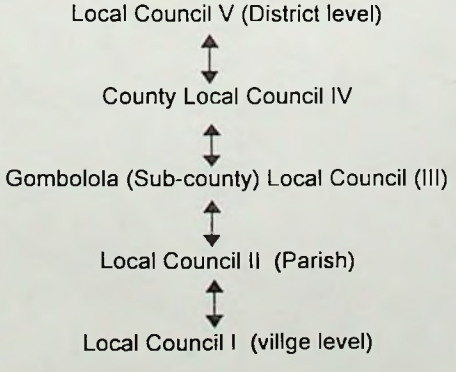

Fig. 4. The organisational structure of the councils in Uganda

Conclusion

In conclusion, to ensure IARD success, purposeful meetings, discussions, seminars and workshop should be arranged as part of the approach in a given project. This will give chance to the decision makers, planners, the implementers and the rural people to know and share each others views, opinions, ideas, impressions, attitudes, interest, problems and needs. The rural people should also be taught how to develop their communities through mass media e.g. radio, educational video, and courses. This facilitates understanding and promotes development, and hence the usefulness of communication as an accelerator of change.

It is hoped that the case examples cited in this paper will offer some lessons to those who are involved or interested in similar developmental undertakings.

A Chinese saying says that important ideas are useless unless communicated, communication is useless unless it has important ideas hence the importance of utilizing communication in IARD.

References

Blair, H., 1980, The Pider Rural Development Project in Mexico, *Rural Development Participation Review,* Winter, 2.

Burke, R., 1980. The Pider Rural Development Project in Mexico, *Rural Development Participation Review,* Winter, 2.

Bwalya, M. C, 1979. Problems of village regrouping. The case of Serenje District of Zambia communication No.15.

Handle, G., 1979. Beneficiary involvement in project implementation in the Bicol, *Rural Development Participation Review,* Summer, 1:1.

Mumm Von Mallianckrodit, 1981. *Rural Development in Africa Development and Corporations.* Germany Foundation for International Development, p16.

Nyerere, J. K., 1968. *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism.*

Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, p 106.

Semana, A. R.,1997. Communication as a tool for effective technology generation and transfer. In: J. Aluma, F.A. Ojacor and P. Padde (Editors), *Proceedings of Technology Generation and Transfer Held at International Conference Centre, Kampala, Uganda 4th – 7th December 1995,* pp. 119-110.

Semana, A. R., 1987. The need for establishing a Research - Extension linkage in CIAT African workshop series number 2: *Workshop Proceedings of Bean Research in Eastern Africa, Mukono District Farm Institute, Kampala, Uganda.*

UNICEF, 1976. *A strategy for Basic Services.* United Nations, NewYork, p 19.