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Role of Information Technology (ICT) Tools in Sustainable Community Development in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

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Abstract: This study examined the Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in Sustainable Community Development in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population of the study comprised Two thousand, two hundred and twenty-eight (2,228) members of Community Based Organizations in the local government area. The proportionate sampling technique was used to select 240 male members and 160 female members of the CBOs making a total of 400. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.80. Three research questions were posed. The data were analyzed with simple percentages and weighted mean. The study revealed that use of information and communication technology tools such as internet services, telephone and the mass media enhance sustainable community development in Obio/Akpor Local Government area of Rivers State. The researcher therefore recommended, amongst others, that Rivers State government should embark on the provision of adequate information and communication facilities to improve communications among community members to enhance sustainable community development.

Keywords: Information, Technology, Sustainable, Community development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every community development initiative as a social development project requires effective communication among various groups of people who are involved in such development project in the participating communities. Aruma (2018) asserts that community development projects require effective communication in order to be very successful in the participating communities. Communication between members of a community and a group; communication between development workers and the people among whom they work; communication between funding agencies and field workers and so on. Communication involves the sharing of ideas - information, of emotions, of hopes and fears - and is part of every human activity.

The implication of this is that communication is very vital for the success of community development in order to provide adequate information to project participants in the participating communities.

Information and Communication Technology

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is technology that is used to handle communications processes such as telecommunications, broadcast media, intelligence, building management systems, audiovisual processing and transmission systems, and network-based control and monitoring functions. Although ICT is often considered an extended synonym for information technology (IT), its scope is, in some ways, broader. ICT is often used to describe the convergence of several technologies, and the use of common transmission lines carrying very diverse data and communication types and formats.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has contributed immensely to social and economic improvements, such as higher employment and productivity, increasing access to a higher quality of life (Pratt and Boyden, 2015).

ICT incorporates electronic technologies and techniques used to manage information and knowledge, including information-handling tools used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ICT can contribute to achieving universal education worldwide, through the delivery of education and training of teachers, improved professional skills, better conditions for lifelong learning, and the potential to reach people that are outside the formal education process. In the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, ICT is highlighted as the means to reach the underserved, to listen and learn from their experience. Online education is essential for students whose physical presence in class is impeded because of work or family responsibilities, geographical limitations, health issues, or other constraints. An instance of this is the period of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, face-to-face interaction in a classroom setting seems to be preferred among education professionals, the numbers of online universities and online courses offered by on-campus universities have risen in the past 10 years (Adedotun, 2008). In order to develop successful online programs, however, it is necessary to understand what the specific ICT needs of an institution are.

To our knowledge, neither studies nor validated frameworks currently exist to establish an integrative approach to ICT needs assessment. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of information communication technology (ICT) tools in sustainable community development in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Concept of Community Development

According to Anyanwu in Kobani and Alozie (2019) Community Development was first mentioned internationally at the 1948 Cambridge Summer Conference, where it was agreed that the compound word 'Community Development' should be used in place of 'mass education' and defined as a movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible, on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forth coming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. Since then, the concept has attracted a lot of attention from other organizations, scholars and practitioners as evident in literature, who have defined the concept in various ways all of which, however, refer to similar and related development activities and situations.

Notable among the organizations is the United Nations Organization (UNO) who in (1963) defined community development as a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of community, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress.

Community development according to Onyeozu (2007) is defined as an educational method in which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities and integrate them into life of national progress.

Similarly, Community Development Exchange (2018) regards community development as a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, kilting society together at the grassroots and deepening

democracy, it involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and impositions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. It starts from the principles that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channeled into collective action to achieve the community's desired goals.

Kobani and Alozie (2019) sees community development as a structured intervention that gives communities control over the conditions that affect their lives.

Anyanwu (1981) summarized the objectives of community development as follows:

1. To educate and motivate the people for self-help.
2. To develop responsible local leadership.
3. To inculcate among the members of a community a sense of citizenship and spirit of civil consciousness.
4. To introduce and strengthen democracy at the grass root level, through the creation and revitalization of institutions designed to serve as instruments for local participation.
5. To enable people to establish and maintain co-operative and harmonious relationships.

From the above, we can conclude that the main objective of community development is to bring out the best in individuals to meet personal and community needs.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is an organizing principle for meeting human development goals while also sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UNESCO, 2021). It is interlinked with the normative concept of sustainability.

UNESCO formulated a distinction between the two concepts as follows: "Sustainability is often thought of as a long-term goal (i.e., a more sustainable world), while sustainable development refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve it." While the modern concept of sustainable development is derived mostly from the 1987 Brundtland Report, it is also rooted in earlier ideas about sustainable forest management and 20th-century environmental concerns. As the concept of sustainable development developed, it has shifted its focus more towards the economic development, social development and environmental protection for future generations.

There are also several cases of projects which are set up today to provide services to the people which disappear tomorrow due to any or a combination of such factors as poor planning, poor funding or use of low quality materials etc. Our actions or inactions as individuals or group as well as those of development agencies working in communities must be conducted in a way and manner that does not jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their own developmental aspirations. This summarizes the whole idea of sustainable development (Kobani & Alozie, 2019).

Role of Communication Sustainable Community Development

The roles of communication in community development are very enormous in the participating communities. The roles of communication in community development are as follows:

1. Conscientization of members of participating Communities: Communication has great potential to conscientize members of the participating communities to really understand that they have the capabilities to identify their

problems, community needs and prioritize them appropriately. The encouragement of local community initiatives in identifying community problems and proffering appropriate possible solutions, and subsequent prioritization of community needs is based on using communication effectively to stimulate awareness creation among members of the participating communities.

2. **Provision of Relevant Information:** The provision of relevant information is another role of communication in community development in the participating communities. Without provision of relevant information in communication, people will not be stimulated to take action in community development that will improve the living conditions of members of the participating communities in the society. Pratt and Boyden (2015) rightly asserts that the purpose of providing information is, indeed, to enable people to take certain actions. However, such information that will usually stimulate people to take action in promoting community development initiatives as a process whereby the efforts of the people concerned are united with those of governmental authorities, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporate organizations, wealthy individuals among other stakeholders in community development drive must endeavor to be relevant to the target population.
3. **Provision of Opportunities for Dialogue and Discussion:** the provision of opportunities for dialogue and discussion with relevant stakeholders in community development is an important role of communication in community development process. It is obvious that people in various participating communities cannot be engaged in dialogue and discussion with a view to facilitating the resolution of community development issues.

Role of Internet in Sustainable Community Development

Over the last two decades, with the advent of the information and communication technologies (ICTs), the media landscape has been radically transformed and has expanded its reach. ICTs have made communication as well as information and knowledge dissemination accessible and easy. The convergence of computer technologies and telecommunications gave rise to major changes in people's social relationships, in work and business processes and corporate structures (Handzic, 2017). This revolutionary shift has modified the way individuals conceive communication, information dissemination and acquisition, paving the way for other forms of content and its interactivity (Milner, 2011).

Interactivity is one of the major characteristics of ICT tools. An interactive content means that technology actively interacts and interrelates with the social world (Bradley (2007). Dimitrova (2008) argued, instead, that the primary function of the digital technologies is not only to promote awareness on issues of collective interest but also to facilitate communication among and between the various actors: citizens, political parties, non-governmental organizations, the traditional news media, advocacy associations and government officials.

The use of internet alone, the most popular expression of ICTs, is swiftly advancing to the developing countries, bringing connectivity to individuals and groups, fostering the conception, preservation and transformation of communities worldwide (Fernández-Maldonado, 2013). A popular medium according to Milner (2011) that has transformed every existing form of communication, giving way to innovative and engaging communication outlets or tools.

Internet nowadays is a global and virtual information infrastructure that counts about three billion users, with Asia totaling approximately 1.6 billion users, (Internet World Stats, 2015). Statistic figures showed, on the other hand that as of November 2014 about 73 percent of global internet users were between 15 – 44 years old.

As a conclusion, the internet is becoming the core of the media world. While the internet has not yet substituted TV consumption, it has replaced the printed sources. In this context, it is important for development communicators to learn to make use of internet-based media outlets to relay development messages to the target audience and at the same time make them easily accessible to them.

Role of Television in Sustainable Community Development

Mass media is a term that describes all the communication tools that are to make people of a country, and a society, aware of all that is going on in their immediate and extended environments. Knowledge dissemination is the most important purpose that is connected to the use of mass media. As such, those who engage in the use of such tools do so to educate and to make them aware of all that is happening around them, both the good and the bad. It is for instance by reading a newspaper or by watching a news channel that an individual will be in a position, to understand not only what is happening in the world around him or her, and what is taking place in his or her immediate society as well (Farahani, 2018). Like the newspapers, and like television radio and social media are so popular tools of mass media, with people tuning into radio channels and logging into social media sites and platforms in order, to find out about what it is that is going on in their society and community, what are the ills taking place, how ills are being addressed and what it is that is being done by the state and by civil society to make sure that the lives of the people of a community are safeguard and that they are protected from the threat of harm in every possible way (Farahani, 2018).

Social workers have for instance been using mass media quite extensively in order, to inform people about many of the wrongs and the inadequacies that are found to be present in the society. It is clear, that mass media is one of the most powerful tools that can be made use of by community development practitioners, to further the work that they undertake on a daily basis, because of the outreach that is associated with mass media use (Deloitte, 2011). Social workers, law enforcement authorities, television, and the radio etc., in order to let members of the community know about the work that they are undertaking, the goals associated with the work that they are involved in, and what it is that they have managed to achieve so far, insofar as community development is concerned (Deloitte, 2011). Social media platform such as Facebook, Tiktok and Instagram for instance, are being heavily utilized by community development practitioners, not only to raise awareness about the work that they are taking up, but also to solicit support and even funding for the matter, for the various projects that they are engaged in (Bonn, 2018). With the outreach that is connected to mass media use and the level of support and awareness that community development practitioners are able, to generate through the use of mass media, it can be stated with considerable clarity, and fairness that mass media has an important role to play in enhancing community development work.

Role of Telephone for Community Development

Community development is the process of helping a community to strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential. Communication is a key component of sustainable development. Mobilizing community members for community development purpose is important but members of communities can only be mobilized when communication is effective. Adequate community communication leads to effective collaborative efforts in issue of development. Communication will help engage citizens in development. To bring about social change among the marginalized and vulnerable population groups, participation must be fostered through communication as such will lead to the transformation of the community. This is to say that communication is a central or mediating factor facilitating and contributing to collective change process (Adedokun, 2008).

Mobile phones have already been used widely around the world for activism, social and economic development, and new cultural and communicative forms. Despite this widespread use of mobile phones, they remain a relatively un-theorized and un-discussed phenomenon in community and citizen's media. The specific focus is the use of mobile telephones of all categories for community development, and ensure that life, business and development generally is achieved with ease through communication. It is argued that mobile phones form a contact zone between traditional concepts of community and citizen media, on the one hand, and emerging movements in citizenship, democracy, governance, and development, on the other hand.

However, telephone is what could be regarded as what could be described as easy access to reach out to the people, negotiations and meetings from far and wide that requires urgent attention. Common development process provides the opportunity of involving and motivating people of the community to define, identify, analyze and solve problems that they feel

are important. This is predicated on good communication. Adepoju (2000) supporting the appropriate use of words in communication-believes that words are instruments and tools of trade in community development hence the importance of choosing and arranging words in such a way as to bring out the idea being expressed as exactly as possible out of one mind and into another.

Statement of the Problem

Underdevelopment has become a great challenge in Nigeria. Information and communication technology (ICT) by performance and potential, offers numerous options and have been identified as a tool to help realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and is capable of transforming the way people live, work, and communicate. Therefore, the provision of evidence based on empirical data on the roles of ICT on sustainable community development is the problem of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does internet services enable members of community development committee to communicate with community members for sustainable community development of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does Television enable the sensitization of the community members for sustainable community development in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?
3. To what extent does mobile phones improve communication among community members for sustainable community development in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 2,228 members of the Community Based Associations (CBO) in Obio/Akpor local government area, Rivers State. The proportionate sampling technique was used to select 240 male members and 160 female members of the CBOs making a total of 400. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Role of Information and Communication Technology in Community Development Assessment Questionnaire (RICTCDAQ)". The reliability coefficient is 0.80. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentages and weighted mean.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Role of internet services on sustainable community development

S/N	Item	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	MEAN	REMARK
1.	Communities were able to reach distant members of the community through internet on the need for certain projects.	250 (1000)	128 (384)	20 (40)	2 (2)	1,398	3.57	Accepted
2.	Through the use of internet, virtual meetings were possible among indigenes of the community.	242 (968)	124 (372)	24 (48)	10 (10)	1,398	3.49	Accepted
3.	With high speed internet services, residents can quickly get the information they need to stay safe.	240 (960)	136 (408)	18 (36)	6 (6)	1,410	3.53	Accepted
4.	Local government and law enforcement can also send out information quickly over the internet, so all residents remain safe and	270 (1048)	110 (330)	15 (30)	5 (5)	1,445	3.62	Accepted

	informed.							
5.	The internet provides effective communication using emailing and instant messaging to any part of the world.	262 (1048)	124 (372)	10 (20)	4 (4)	1,444	3.61	Accepted

Table 1 shows that the respondents accepted that Communities were able to reach distant members of the community through internet on the need for certain projects; Through the use of internet, virtual meetings were possible among indigenes of the community; With high speed internet service, residents can quickly get the information they need to stay safe; Local government and law enforcement can also send out information quickly over the internet, so all residents remain safe and informed; and that the internet provides effective communication using emailing and instant messaging to any part of the world. Each of the items (3.57, 3.49, 3.53, 3.62 and 3.61 respectively) has a mean that is greater than 2.50 the criterion mean.

Table2: Role of Television on Sustainable Community

S/N	Item	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	MEAN	REMARK
6.	Radio/Television inform people about various things in various ways through a variety of programs.	254 (1016)	124 (372)	16 (32)	6 (6)	1,426	3.56	Accepted
7.	It allows people to reassert themselves and have their voices heard.	245 (980)	122 (366)	18 (36)	15 (15)	1,397	3.49	Accepted
8.	It provides real-time information to the people.	242 (968)	110 (330)	32 (64)	16 (16)	1,378	3.44	Accepted
9.	Radio has the ability to reach across borders and can become a valuable source of information where reliable news is scarce.	240 (960)	124 (372)	29 (58)	7 (7)	1,398	3.51	Accepted
10.	Radio and Television can fast track information such as jingles, announcements, and public notices.	248 (992)	120 (360)	24 (48)	8 (8)	1,408	3.52	Accepted

Table 2 shows that the options: Radio/Television inform people about various things in various ways through a variety of programs; It provides real-time information to the people; It allows people to reassert themselves and have their voices heard; Radio has the ability to reach across boarders and can become a valuable source of information where reliable news is scarce and that Radio and Television can fast track information such as jingles, announcements, and public notices were accepted by the respondents. The items have means of 3.56, 3.49, 3.44, 3.51 and 3.52 respectively that are greater than the criterion mean - 2.50.

Table 3: Role of mobile phones on sustainable community development

S/N	Item	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	MEAN	REMARK
11.	The use of mobile phones lead to effective collaborative efforts on issues of development.	250 (1000)	120 (360)	22 (44)	8 (8)	1,412	3.53	Accepted
12.	Social media is used for social interactions and access to news, information, and decision-making through the phone.	240 (960)	122 (366)	32 (64)	6 (6)	1,396	3.49	Accepted
13.	It has become an easy access for dissemination of information among citizens who are important.	248 (992)	124 (372)	15 (30)	11 (11)	1,405	3.51	Accepted
14.	It is a valuable communication tool with others locally and worldwide as well as to share, create, and spread information.	240 (960)	126 (378)	25 (50)	9 (9)	1,397	3.50	Accepted
15.	Mobilizing community members has been a lot easier through telephone.	242 (968)	128 (384)	26 (52)	4 (4)	1,408	3.52	Accepted

Table 3 shows that the options indicating that the use of mobile phones lead to effective collaborative efforts on issues of development; social media is used for social interactions and access to news, information, and decision-making through the phone; It has become an easy access for dissemination of information among citizens who are important; It is a valuable communication tool with others locally and worldwide as well as to share, create, and spread information and mobilizing community members has been a lot easier through telephone. Each of their means 3.53, 3.49, 3.51, 3.50 and 3.52 respectively is greater than 2.50 – the criterion mean.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Results of the study showed that the respondents were mainly members of CBOs and are in better position to understand and express the true feelings and sentiments of the people on issues relating to the scope of the study.

The findings revealed that the use of internet services by community development committee enhanced communication with indigenes for sustainable community development in Obio/Akpor local government area, Rivers State. Communities were able to reach distant members easily through the use of internet, virtual meetings were possible among indigenes of the community, with high-speed internet service, residents can quickly get information they need to stay safe, local government and law enforcement agents can also send out information quickly over the internet to enable residents remain safe and informed.

This finding is in agreement with Fernández-Maldonado (2013) who averred that the use of internet alone, the most popular expression of ICT, is swiftly advancing to the developing countries, bringing connectivity to individuals and groups, fostering the conception, preservation and transformation of communities worldwide. A popular medium, according to Milner (2011), supported the view that internet has transformed every existing form of communication, giving way to innovative and engaging communication outlets or tools.

The finding also revealed that the use of Radio/Television enabled the sensitization of community members for sustainable community development. Radio/Television inform, entertain and educate people. It allows people to reassert themselves and have their voices heard, provides real-time information to the people, radio has the ability to reach across borders, can become a valuable source of information where reliable news is scarce, and can provide the most recent updates to listeners.

This findings are in agreement with Farahani (2018) who noted that newspapers, television radio, and social media are so popular tools of mass media, with people tuning into radio channels and logging into social media sites and platforms in order, to find out about what it is that is going on in their society and community.

Result of the study also revealed that the use of telephone leads to effective collaboration efforts on issues of development, social media is used for social interaction and access to news, information, and decision-making through the phone, it is a valuable communication tool with others locally and worldwide, as well as to share, create and spread information,

The findings are in agreement with Adepoju (2000) who opined that mobile phone is what could be regarded as what could be described as easy access to reach out to the people, negotiations and meetings from far and wide that requires urgent attention. Common development process provides the opportunity of involving and motivating people of the community to define, identify, analyze and solve problems that they feel are important. This is predicated on good communication. He also supporting the appropriate use of words in communication-believes that words are instruments and tools of trade in community development hence the importance of choosing and arranging words in such a way as to bring out the idea being expressed as exactly as possible out of one mind and into another.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusion made so far, the researcher therefore, recommended the following:

1. Rivers State Government should embark on the provision of adequate ICT facilities in the communities to enable communication among members' in order to improve their participation for enhanced community development.

2. Community development committee should always ensure that the use of the mentioned forms of information and communication technology should be properly utilized to enhance adequate and sustainable community development.
3. The community members should ensure that most of the broadcast put up by the government, non-governmental organizations, security agencies and CDC are strictly adhered to so as to create awareness on security and other related matters.

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