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## Lessons from Communication for Agricultural and Rural Development in Selected Asian and Pacific Countries: Implications for Nigeria

Samuel Ayodele Ojurongbe<sup>1\*</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The crucial role of communication in advancing knowledge and forging cooperation towards sustainable agricultural development cannot be emphasized enough. There has always been the need to connect farmers, agriculture industry experts and other stakeholders, and grant them access to veritable information and technical know-how. As a predominantly rural experience in many economies of the world, food and agricultural production require an orientation of the development of the rural populace through the dissemination of information and the introduction of an agricultural-related communication intervention. The quality of knowledge advancement and sustained agricultural development will depend on the quality of agricultural communication. Against the backdrop of identified gaps in the Nigerian experience of agricultural and rural communication, this study conducted a comparative analysis of a tabulation of conducted Rural Communication Studies (RCS) cases covering selected countries from South Asia, South East Asia as well as Pacific Island countries. It also reviewed other available secondary data on state of the art of Communication for Agricultural and Rural Development. Analysis of Rural Communication experience in the selected countries indicates that the selected countries are taking strategic approaches in their quest for rural development in combating poverty, and ensuring sustainability through more involvement of the people. Among salient discoveries from the study are that in many of the selected countries, strategic planning for agricultural and rural communication recognizes the critical place of food security, the management of natural resources, the crucial place and role of the people, as well as governance and institutions. A major implication for the identified gaps in Nigeria is the greater need to involve people as other stakeholders target audience at not only the formulation stages of the policy but also at the implementation stages, to enhance the communication imperatives of agricultural development.

### INTRODUCTION

The searchlight for a quality improvement in living standards, especially in the Global South, has turned in the direction of rural areas in recent times. This is perhaps because the majority of the population dwells in those places. There are also more visible effects of poverty and lack among the rural populace. Most importantly, rural areas remain the food basket or major agricultural production hub for any nation's economy. The rural areas are undergoing obvious changes in family, community, organizations, and jobs. An understanding of these changes, and their implications on the prevalent issues of human development calls for planned and proactive measures to meet the challenges. These growing challenges of rural communities have been linked to poor communications and the lack of a consistent policy on rural development.

Nigeria's rural development policy, like most of Africa's, began under the influence and principles of diffusion of innovations. It was assumed that new technology was needed to transform a hitherto crude and moribund system. It was assumed that this need therefore translated to automatic acceptance. However, over a period of time, the loopholes of the strategy began to show. Many who

looked forward to growth began to observe irregularities and inequalities and the reality that rural stakeholders did not enjoy any benefits.

Among the first observations was a deficient communication network conveying or transferring the technology from the center to the rural areas. In addition to this, the rural areas already had a system that was uniquely theirs. A conflict between their system and the new one was, therefore, unavoidable because the old and the new systems could hardly have any point of convergence.

### Communication for Rural Development

As if authenticating the participatory approach, Acunzo et al, (2014) define communication for rural development as; 'a range of participatory methods and communication tools to address the knowledge and information needs of rural stakeholders, and to facilitate their active involvement in development initiatives...'

According to them, while the old paradigm was based on the need to invest and introduce technology to enhance or upgrade the people's livelihood and the need to put the technology to appropriate use, in contemporary times, other factors have been identified to include human

<sup>1</sup> College of Development Communication, University of the Philippines, Los Banos, (UPLB), Philippines

\* Corresponding author's e-mail: [ayodeleojurongbe@gmail.com](mailto:ayodeleojurongbe@gmail.com)

capacity and access to needed information, knowledge and services. This is with a view to ensuring the participation and effective communication with regards to the rural populace.

While explaining this increasing focus on institutional and social groups as against previous focus on 'purely technological aspects' of agricultural and rural development policy and planning, Acunzo et al quote Leeuwis and Hall, (2010) to reinforce issues and concerns of ineffective rural development policies in terms of:

- Lack of information and knowledge about correct technologies and practices for managing the fragile natural environment,
- Unresolved social and political conflicts that prevent communities from working together to address communal needs and interests,
- Far flung and isolated rural communities with no access to information that could help them prepare for any eventuality,
- Poor skills or capacity of rural actors to undertake development initiatives on their own,
- Weak capacity of local institutions to respond to local needs,
- Lack of physical and social infrastructures support at the local level that would enable to enhance human and social capital.

The participatory approach is therefore derived from the sustainable human development school of thought. Among other things, it addresses the dependency issue, encourages decentralization as well as cross-cutting perspectives to planning and decision making.

Its focus is therefore on self-reliance for people, improvement of the quality of life, conservation and enhancement of the values, beliefs and cultures of the people in a way that emancipates them and grants them justice. It recognizes the distinct history and conditions of a society and upholds that there is no 'one size fit all' model. (Yoon :2003)

In the words of Uzoagu and Oriji(2022)

. . .The traditional method of passing information has been largely ineffective in addressing the needs of developing the rural community's population in recent times. Presently, the methods of passing information to and from rural communities have gone scientific, more open, more participatory, and more demand-driven. Also, there is a new emphasis on the acquisition of information and communication technologies to enable rural poor communities to meet the present realities. . .

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Results from Internet search from April 4 2017 till June 12, 2019 revealed a number of studies related to use of development information (Unagha & Ibenne, 2011), information access, needs, and sources (Aboyade, 1985; Opara, 2008; Nwagwu, 2008), audience's communication behavior and preference (Okwu & Daudu, 1985; Momodu, 2002), use of information and communication technologies (Adekoya, 2006; Harande, 2009), and

television content (Oso, 1993; Gleason, 1990) in Nigeria. Also, literature showed that Odunola and Kolade (2012) looked into appropriate national communication policy for development in Nigeria. Olaniyi (2002) analyzed the e-readiness for information and communication technology of development practitioners and research and extension personnel.

An analysis of reviewed literature reveals that the growing challenges of rural communities are linked to poor communications and the lack of a consistent policy on Rural Development.

In Nigeria, narratives on Rural Development have included new challenges of globalization, urbanization as well as increasing diversity of rural environments which have necessitated the need for new and more dynamic approaches to tackling the growing concern of rural development.

It is believed that the building blocks will need to include special attention to the growing diversity of livelihood strategies; rural poverty in low potential areas; the urgent need for stronger social protection, as well as several disaster risks.

Even though there were indications of relatively improved understanding of rural development among policy makers in Nigeria beginning in the late 1980s, such understanding however, surprisingly did not translate into corresponding improvement in rural development practice because of several factors including weak institutional arrangements, corruption and absence of coordinated practice among competing agencies.

Several social conflicts and political instability have interrupted many of Nigeria's national development goals over the years. Even though a lot of information is disseminated in Nigerian rural communities, with the more constructive types coming from community development workers, agricultural extension officers and the mass media, they had not been effective in sustaining the interest of the people and therefore been unable to achieve desired benefits and results of development.

Information service policy of the country was never implemented in favor of rural dwellers. Emphasis had been on government activities and propaganda with no positive impact on the rural community. Policy implements succeeded in misinforming rural inhabitants on so many issues that had no relevance with their daily activities and are consistently making these communities an 'information hunger community' Rural radio booster stations and community rural television stations were not effective. Rural communities are dispersed in nature and the nomadic ones in nature have poor reading habits, and lack access to information. The absence of amenities in these areas does not encourage or attract suitable personnel to the areas. There is also a low rate of unemployment since virtually everyone is self-employed either in agriculture, fishing, trading or blacksmithing, mining, weaving and small scale industries.

Youths want to develop their personal capacities through education in order to integrate into production activities.

There is the need for information for them on how to participate in income generating activities. Government should provide appropriate forums for the youth to articulate their information, educational and social needs. Agricultural programs are limited in focus and range of issues treated. These programs have been mainly concerned with the transfer of technology and ideas to the neglect of other crucial socio-structural issues. The policy of commercialization has been responsible for the lack of agricultural programs. It has therefore been difficult to get sponsorship for agricultural programs unlike entertainment programs which enjoy the patronage of sponsors.

Also, the structure of media ownership reflects pro-urban concentration and bias. The media of mass communication is also not used by the masses themselves to talk with each other. There is therefore a state of 'mass in-communication' in Nigeria calling for more urgent democratization of the mass media.

Community news has been found to be lacking in development context. National or regional media have been found to be unable to cater for the development information needs of Nigeria's divergent urban-rural populace. In addition, leadership is fraught with many challenges that have impinged on its efforts at transforming the rural communities despite their abundant human and material resources. Faulty planning from above, rather than bottom-up approach has led to failure of rural development efforts.

## METHODOLOGY

### Communication for Agricultural and Rural Development in Selected Asian and Pacific Countries

This study conducted a comparative analysis of a tabulation of conducted Rural Communication Studies (RCS) cases covering selected countries from South Asia, South East Asia as well as Pacific Island countries. It also reviewed other available secondary data on state of the art of Communication for Agricultural and Rural Development. Analysis of Rural Communication experience in the selected countries. Torres and Tirol (undated,) provide a Rural Communication Studies (RCS) with cases covering South Asia, South East Asia, and Pacific Islands. South Asia includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri-Lanka. South East Asia covers cases in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. While Pacific Islands, highlights cases from Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, and Vanuatu.

Each country case is divided into title and source, issues and problems addressed, goals or objectives, key messages, channels/media and approaches, benefits, implementation and management strategy monitoring and evaluation method, budget and logistics, results effects, outcomes or impact, sustainability of experiences, best practices, as well as needs or gaps.

### Bangladesh

In South Asia, Bangladesh addressed the issue of untimely and inaccurate market information to farmers, wholesalers and retailers so that agricultural traders can get valuable information on comparative market prices. In this way, while farmers are able to maximize profits by making informed decisions about market situation. Information can be disseminated to farmers through TV and radio while policy-makers and researchers can discover trends and impacts. The result has been that the web portal provides both static and dynamic information relating to commodity-wise, variety-wise daily prices, and arrival information of more than 1000 varieties and about 326 commodities from the wholesale markets spread all over the country. One thousand (1000) markets have been provided with Internet connectivity.

The uniqueness of this project is that the Portal is interactive while site provides prices and arrival trend reports for important commodities, commodity and market price search and generates reports with charts and trends by location, date, daily, weekly, yearly, comparison, increment and decrement. The project has been technically up-to-date, while failures have resulted in adaptation to new findings.

However, the needs or gaps to be addressed include that of information because despite standard level of interactivity and capacity of generating reports, information was not effective due to absence of native language.

Also, in the area of technology, there is a lack of internet connectivity and maintenance. Many computer systems in the rural districts were also said to be down most of the time while the portal is down because of systems administration problems which were not expected initially. Only a few stakeholders were aware of the project objectives. The value of disseminating agromarket information through the modern technology was not well understood. Perhaps another major gap is the autocratic, hierarchical and centralized mind settings and leadership which isolated the management system and structure.

### Bhutan

Bhutan is recorded as attempting to reduce climate change-induced risks of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) in the Punakha-Wangdi and Chamkhar Valleys. The country is doing this by looking at potential risks to lives, livelihoods and development brought about by climate change via Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

Among the benefits of this drive is that the project integrated climate risk projections into existing disaster risk management practices and implemented corresponding capacity development measures on different levels (national, district and community). She also demonstrated a practical approach to reduce GLOF risks from Thorthormi glacier lake.

It is believed that lessons learned in this climate change risk reduction project can help facilitate replication of GLOF risk reduction in other high risk areas, both within and outside Bhutan and also enable up-scaling of early warning systems in other disaster-prone areas downstream of potentially hazardous glacier lakes.

Among gaps observed are the need to pursue the review/update of GLOF risks in Bhutan; particularly pursuing the monitoring of GLOF risks of the 25 identified glacial lakes and the need to remove the misconception of “No GLOF Risk in Winter” when conducting public awareness campaign. It is also recommended to conduct research on lake water level variability and explore possible measures to regulate water flow for hydro-electricity production.

### India

India tackled the lack of agricultural experts who can conduct extension services to farmers and reduced huge travelling time and costs involved in expenses involved in extension services. The country did this by establishing a working relationship with various project stakeholders and also by identifying a set of case studies which provided the basis for an Integrated Action Research Strategy (IARS) based on a community of a practice framework. It also included workshops with government and NGOs; rapid prototyping method involving a number of campaigns or mini-projects. The country also looked into the findings from IARS and reflected on the findings with constructive criticism. She also adopts the strategy of technology stewardship or identifying leaders in the community or within organizations working loosely with communities to promote inclusive innovation through the use of its partnership with Rangiri Radio which broadcasts three farm programs regularly. Rangiri Radio adopted Radio+ which involved the use of Free Open Source Software or FOSS initially for song dedications and requests but later on for audience asking questions or participating live with the radio broadcast program. Impact and outcome of this project include dramatic increase in responses from farmer listeners with questions via SMS which were answered live on-air. This enabled follow-up and effectively delivered current market related information to farmers. Radio broadcasters were able to connect with specialists and farmers in order to research and produce feature programs while youth listeners became more interested in agriculture work. However, not all farmer listeners were knowledgeable about the Internet hence there was the need to get help from the listening club leader.

Also, Rangiri Radio was not using Freedom Fone, a voice response system that pre-records information for listeners to access at their convenience, although the staff already received training and downloaded the software.

### Pakistan

Pakistan also grapples with ineffective extension services for agricultural development. However, despite efforts

at tackling this issue, full process has not yet reached all the districts. Delivery of demanded services was weak as there were no private companies in the region interested in the provision of services.

There is also the lack of monitoring and evaluation method, funding issues for sustainability, as well as the need to have appropriate exit strategy including sustainability arrangements. It was also observed that individual staff of some departments did not appreciate the importance of training. Also, members from some rural communities which were far located faced difficulties in reaching the training site hence the need to consider suitable arrangements. There was also a lack of coordination among several public departments which were supposed to provide services.

### Nepal

In Nepal, soil fertility and crop productivity are declining. There was farmer empowerment in terms of having increased opportunities for food security and cash income in remote areas. The country embarked on the Sustainable Soil Management Program (SSMP) to increase participation and empowerment of farmers to ensure ownership of the promoted sustainable soil management practices and also to improve livelihoods of the people from the rain-fed Bari (up-land) dominated hill farming system. To implement this, the country established Agriculture, Forest and Environment Committee (AFEC) to mobilize the Experienced Leader Farmers, ELF, in response to demands from the local farmer groups and communities within that Village Development Committee, VDC. It also developed the ELF in each district to deliver agriculture services in all VDCs, both those in more accessible areas, and those more remotely located.

As part of SSMP, 50 active ELFs were developed by the programs' partner NGOs through identification of the best farmers and subsequent targeted training and coaching. The best practices recorded in this program include the promotion of the use of local resources (e.g. farm yard manure) in crop production. The project also emphasized building technical capacities of farmers to manage sustainable agricultural soils, while participant farmers improved their knowledge in modern agricultural practices and generated income from the program participation.

Some women farmers also gained social prestige because the community had begun to acknowledge their agricultural knowledge and experience. However, despite being joint implementers, DADO Kavre and SSMP (Lalitpur) had different aims on farmer participation. Many participants did not know about SSMP activities. Extension staff did not practice a 'truly participatory' approach because they were mainly concerned with implementation and not with design.

It was observed that focus was on meeting the targets rather than on involving and assisting farmers to solve problems. Extension staff saw themselves as experts and

assumed that programs will automatically be taken up by farmers. SSMP participants did not transmit the principle and practices learned to non-participant farmers. Also, no invitation to join was delivered to other farmers. In Nepali social custom, community members feel uncomfortable in attending any event without a formal invitation even when attendance may be useful to them.

### **Sri-Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, there is a lack of information and knowledge about farming for smallholder producers. The goals and objectives was therefore for a broadcast station, Radio+, to promote the use of low-cost information and communication technologies for knowledge mobilization among agricultural communities in Sri Lanka.

The benefit was that Radio+ has a participatory component that puts people's needs for and use of the technology first, which can be used by extension workers to reach out to farmers more often and provide dedicated information channels as the need arises. It was to also leverage the knowledge resources of experts such as public sector agricultural extension workers or scientists. The needs and gaps observed include the reality that the gap between the two impact evaluation surveys done was too short to evaluate longer term impact because it only compared immediate outcomes. There is also the need to identify which factors may influence the strength of the impact of IT on the final outcome of intervention such as welfare, after which appropriate policy can be done.

### **Cambodia**

In South East Asia, Cambodia attempted to investigate the feasibility and viability of establishing an electronic marketing communication system or EMS using SMS technology. They believe this can help facilitate communication and exchange between farmers and traders in remote regions of Cambodia. This was aimed at solving the problem of poor communications between different levels of the agricultural supply chain.

Among the major results and impact was that as an initial project, EMS provided an important starting point for understanding some of the issues related to linking farmers to markets. Also, various NGOs expressed their interest in future collaborations while the donor agency allowed extended funding for the second phase. Observed gaps included restriction of the pilot project to the research team. Some traders and silo managers / farmers were however excluded.

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia tackled weak tsunami resilience due to lack of prevention, preparedness and awareness among populations. The benefits included better knowledge of the tsunami propagation mechanisms ashore, as well as the most-threatened areas. TSUNARISK and ATIP-NRS scientific facts were incremented with adapted prevention actions among populations.

The project also highlighted educational needs regarding

tsunami resiliency. Since this was the first tsunami education program in Indonesia, the project created various preventive tools such as Tsunami Hazard Map of Indonesia and tsunami database. Specific educative actions also complemented the scientific research, while the campaign allowed for increase of the population's awareness in southern Java coast.

### **Laos**

Laos has also concentrated on improving the ability of the poor to effectively use natural resource services for their own social and economic development. However, in Laos -Environmental sustainability: project design did not adequately address environmental aspects while in the area of household and community resilience, there is a lack of emphasis on risk management. There are also challenges in linking components to insure that project interventions promote sustainable improvements in the planning process.

### **Myanmar**

In Myanmar the major challenged already being addressed is poverty. This was brought about by unsustainable agriculture. To counter this, the Sustainable Agriculture Training Center (SATC), has five objectives:

- To disseminate skills and knowledge on farming technologies through training
- To demonstrate and apply new appropriate farming technology
- To create training opportunities for farmers in Myanmar and Southeast Asia
- To improve food security regionally and,
- To demonstrate agricultural practices that are environmentally sustainable.

However, there is no mention of a concrete monitoring and evaluation method in this project.

### **Philippines**

In the Philippines, focus has been on vulnerability and food insecurity. To this end, Northern Mindanao Community Initiatives and Resource Management Project or NMCIREMP aimed to reduce vulnerability and enhance food security of approximately 58,500 low income households (310,000 individuals). The objectives are to promote or strengthen community institutions and self-help groups or SHGs by transforming them into self-reliant groups capable of undertaking their own development initiatives.

It also includes the conservation of and improvement in the natural resource base, improvement in local and village infrastructure, representation of IPs in local councils and the issuance of certificates of ancestral land titles/domain titles and improved responsiveness of Local Government Units or LGUs and other service providers to the needs of communities.

In line with best practices, the project was very responsive to the expressed needs of communities and worked closely with communities in the planning process. It

also recruited local staff and Indigenous Peoples, (IPs) for work with strict guidelines, documented for project and staff to use, along with ‘measured flexibility. In coastal communities, the project has successfully engaged communities in natural resource assessment by bringing together diverse stakeholders and facilitating joint review and planning.

However, it still requires strengthening in terms of monitoring and evaluation, natural resource management and capacity-building at the LGU level. Institutional support for marketing was seen to be lagging behind while slower progress was recorded in upland areas in terms of natural resource assessment. Also, many project staff were not familiar with the local languages. This created great difficulties in social mobilization, conveying project messages and encouraging the adoption of project sponsored interventions.

### **Thailand**

In Thailand, stringent requirements and documentation was seen to be needed for Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) certification. Benefits derived from confronting this challenge include the observation that it solves complicated procedures and paper work which have proven to be costly and time consuming. It works on both mobile devices such as mobile phones, tablets with Android OS and also works on notebooks and PCs. Farmers regardless of their location can apply for GAP certification by using the Mobile GAP application, while officers are able to provide services instantly by using real-time information being fed into the system. As reports and recommendations are uploaded constantly into the system after each farm assessment, farmers can check them and use the recommendations to improve their farm practices in order to meet the GAP requirements. However, it was observed that old farmers were unwilling to learn how to apply new technology. Also there were no clear national agenda on precision agriculture while no mention was made of any monitoring and evaluation, as well as of plans for sustainability.

### **Vietnam**

The major issue being addressed in Vietnam is the destruction of vulnerable biodiversity systems. The objective is to educate and motivate rice farmers to restore biodiversity and ecosystem services by reducing insecticide use and growing nectar-rich flowering plants on the rice bunds and margins using the Ecological Engineering TV Series locally known as Cong NgheSinh Thai.

Results included the observation that farmers’ attitudes towards ecological engineering practices were favorably improved among the viewers. Also significantly, more viewers had favorable attitudes towards insecticide reduction and growing of nectar-rich flowers. The TV series had a stronger effect on farmers’ beliefs in insecticide use, this was reflected in significant reductions in insecticide use. Some beliefs related to the growing of flowers on the bunds were also favorably modified.

### **Papua New Guinea**

From the Pacific Islands, apart from Papua New Guinea grappling with low literacy rates and the consequent marginalizing of some farmers from agricultural extension activities, the other countries such as Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu are facing challenges of climate change adaptation, climate change resiliency and climate change adaptation respectively.

The major challenge observed in Solomon Islands also include low literacy rates and the marginalization of some farmers from agricultural extension activities. In Papua New Guinea, observed needs and gaps include logistical challenges in implementing the methods.

There was no observation or not mention of any monitoring and evaluation method while there was no mention on how to sustain practices. No concrete monitoring and evaluation method was discussed in Kiribati while for Vanuatu there was also no plan for sustainability of experiences as well no monitoring and evaluation method.

Climate change adaptation and resiliency took the front burner of issues in the Pacific Islands except for Papua New Guinea which also contended with low literacy rates and marginalization of some farmers from extension activities. Goals were observed to be scanty in each Island except for Kiribati that had detailed expression and objectives. There was no indication of messages in their interventions. Information and knowledge sharing cut across all country approaches. Except for Kiribati with a monitoring and evaluation framework, monitoring and evaluation is not reflected in the other countries under this region. However, as earlier mentioned no concrete monitoring and evaluation method is discussed.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Overview on Selected Countries**

An overview of the South Asian experience indicates that the featured countries are taking proactive steps in combating poverty and ensuring sustainable approaches through specific interventions. There are reliable indicators that many of the countries are no longer at the level of deciding appropriate tools and methods of agricultural and rural communication. Their projects demonstrate attention to detailed and goal –oriented objectives.

Some however seem unclear about specific choices of appropriate media strategies to deploy in achieving these objectives. Key messages in the projects are still obscure or non -existent. Majority of featured countries are also already reaping some benefits of interventions except for India. There are also detailed and promising outline of implementation and strategic management thrust of the projects in this region. They appear detailed enough to give direction especially in cases when there is a need to fall back on the master-plan for compliance.

Derailment looks almost impossible or rare from the clarity of the master-plan of implementation and management. Four (4) out of six (6) countries featured

in this region have clear records of monitoring and evaluation except for Bangladesh and Pakistan with no record of monitoring and evaluation. In terms of sustainability of experiences, there are indications that much effort went into the interventions to ensure the sustainability of the projects. Best practices are also seen to be well observed for most projects.

Rural Communication experience in selected countries of South Asia, Southeast Asia and Pacific Islands indicate that the featured countries are taking strategic approaches in their quest for rural development. They are adopting agricultural and rural communication approaches in combating poverty and ensuring sustainability. There are reliable indicators pointing to the reality that the countries in review are no longer at the level of a search for appropriate tools and methods of agricultural and rural communication.

For South East Asian countries, it is observed that poor communication, the environment and agriculture dominate issues addressed. Key messages are not visible in featured projects for all the counties except for Vietnam. Channels/media and approaches appear specific and tailored to suit each intervention and their target for each intervention. The media are very much visible and seem to take a lead as channel approaches. All countries in this region applied monitoring and evaluation method except Thailand for which it is not indicated.

Results and outcome appear robust in all countries, in terms of better education, empowerment/capacity building, and attitudinal /behavioral changes. Sustainability of experiences are not evident in Thailand as this is not indicated.

Many countries observed best practices in terms of providing a controlled and flexible system requirement, server accessibility, accurate and timely information as well as visible participatory approaches in developing pretesting of materials, public debate to discuss possible adaptations suitable for local contexts, responsiveness to expressed needs of communities in planning process. Some degree of engagement and participation was observed to be very strongly applied in this regard.

### **Implications for Nigeria**

The findings from the selected countries seem to align with Imoh, (2013) quoting (Imoh 2003) in which he highlights inherent gaps in the communication strategies used for rural development especially in Nigeria as follows:

Communication plans and policies are not a perfect fit for the existing technical and operational arrangements of grassroots development programs. The plans still do not make room for people's participation.

Getting financial, human and political support or commitment at the grassroots level especially is tough because no effort is being made to combine the efforts of relevant institutions and organizations in charge of rural development at the grassroots level.

Rather than concentrate on more explicit functions and

critical role of adoption and massive promotion, the mass media has become more like a propaganda tool for government.

Extension officers have not been accessible to the majority of rural populace and this has affected the needed interpersonal interaction that may have triggered the needed results of adoption. Coupled with this factor was the fact that many in the rural areas had no access to mass media messages.

There has been no notable recognition of the crucial place of tradition, religion women and elders in the community especially on decision at the grassroots level because they were left out of development messages.

These identified gaps have subsequently brought about new approaches to agricultural and rural development. The new approaches recognize the urgency to satisfy the needs of the people by involving them not just at the planning level but also at the implementation, monitoring and evaluation levels as well.

### **Policy Implications**

When Nigeria had her first National Communication Policy Strategy, (NCPS) in 1987, the country was already 17 years late. In one of efforts to review the country's communication policy, attempts geared towards making Nigeria 'a communication nation,' propelled by an inclusive, constructive and development –oriented vision did not materialize. In 2016, recommendations at a stakeholders' conference on fashioning a NCPS for Nigeria included;

- returning public media to the people, as well as
- need for a national communication policy that will be locally and culturally relevant especially because a link has been identified between communication and development needs for social change. This underscores the importance of a national communication policy. Uwom and Alao (2013) quoting Nnaemeka (1989) opine that the basic purpose of a national communication policy is using the mass media to achieve accelerated growth and transformation of the society in different spheres and at different levels of national life. They believe that a deliberate and coherent mass communication policy is important for the media to play a distinguished role in the establishment and furtherance of a desirable new social order in Nigeria.

### **CONCLUSION**

To fashion out a new social order through communication, there is a need to understand the Nigeria population in its diversity and various interests and needs and a sincere commitment to meeting those needs. Change messages should address these unique needs in a way that target particular audience. Media strategy should seek to explore a mixed method that includes traditional folk media with modern ideas. Efforts should be made to involve various social groups in media and encourage a participatory approach that brings rural dwellers into critical stage of policy making. There should be continuous monitoring

of specific indicators of change and performance. Rural communication must be research driven.

In Strategic planning there are implicit references to communication tasks and concerns in rural development especially in the areas of agricultural and agrarian reform, natural resources, education and manpower development, health, nutrition and family planning, social services and community organizations as well as in Science and technology. The roles are predominantly those of consulting with farmers and encouraging their active participation, providing research extension system, carrying out intensified information campaigns, upgrading technical skills of personnel in resource conservation, and community development and providing alternative training opportunities by non- formal education. Concerted efforts should be made in capacity building for both information makers and information users to be able to take full advantage of advances in ICT. The urban based development process should be reversed for rapid and sustained rural development to take place. Overall, policies and planning targeted at ensuring effective communication of agricultural and rural development concerns and issues remain the veritable tools for positioning Nigeria's search for a way out of poverty. This explains why the following observations and recommendations become pertinent.

Policies and programs must directly reflect available human and natural resources, cultural realities, and political persuasion. They must also be rooted in deep democratic norms of accountability and overall discipline. Community development initiatives should be geared towards preserving the quality of life and productive ability of citizens. Nigeria also needs to shield its community developments from external shocks by basing its development plans on natural resources found within each community. This makes for easier access and also guarantees more affordability for community dwellers.

### RECOMMENDATION

According to Quebral, (1988) six types of communication required to make the Rural Communication Plan operative include:

- Consultation with farmers and other rural residents to find out their needs for information and to encourage them to be involved in the planning and carrying out of development projects,

- Preparation and dissemination of easily understood information on agricultural results, conservative values, wise use of resources, health, nutrition, family planning, participatory values and appropriate technologies,

- Collection and dispersal of data to aid administrators in planning, implementation and coordinating programs,

- Training of field personnel,

- Expansion of outreach and non- formal education programs by using non- traditional delivery systems and

- Harmonizing of perceptions of needs and problems at the local and national levels of government.

While explaining communication development's role

in Agricultural and Rural Development, Acunzo *et al.*, (2014) describe it as;

“a crosscutting approach to address key interrelated issues such as natural resource management, agricultural innovation, food and nutrition, security, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management and a host of others such as can only be addressed in an integrated manner through collective decision-making and collaboration among different actors”

They believe that rural stakeholders must be deliberately involved to have a say and dialogue with other sectors of the economy through four (4) phases of the Communication Development, (COMDEV) planning process which are about studying the context where project is being implemented including key issue at stake, defining clear stakeholder specific communication objectives and intended results, actual implementation of planned communication activities and ensuring monitoring as a continuous process to assess whether or not COMDEV strategy is being implemented according to plan.

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