Participatory Communication for Development: The Perspectives of Agricultural Development Agencies in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Background: Participatory communication for development is an important aspect of development projects, as it enhances the participation of the key stakeholders in the development process. As a result of this, so many development agencies are beginning to adopt it in their development projects to enhance participation and project sustainability. However, the use of such communication approach is dependent on the way it is perceived by the development agencies. Therefore, it becomes important to understand how the development agencies perceive participatory communication for development based on their experience in the area of participatory development. To this end, this study was conducted with the aim of exploring the perceptions which agricultural development agencies in Plateau State, Nigeria have of participatory communication for development. A review of the literature shows that in order to understand how this communication approach is used, insight on how it is perceived must be gained first. Methods: This study was conducted using a qualitative case study approach involving two cases in Plateau state, Nigeria. The two cases were purposively selected based on certain criteria. In order to collect data required for the study, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted among the study participants, and the data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis, which allows the researcher to deduct emerging themes that explain the phenomena under study. Findings: Findings of the study revealed that the agricultural development agencies perceive participatory communication for development as a communication approach that enables two way communication and knowledge co-sharing among farmers, and between the farmers and agricultural development agencies. Conclusion: Based on these perceptions, it can be concluded that in the context of agricultural development agencies, participatory communication refers to a two-way communication approach which enables knowledge co-sharing among farmers, and between farmers and the agricultural development agencies.*

Keywords: Development communication, participatory Communication, Participation, Empowerment, Agricultural Development Programme

1. Introduction

Through participatory communication for development, the stakeholders of a development initiative are carried along by means of dialogue, thereby empowering them in the different areas of the development project rather than leaving them at the receiving end. In recent times, participatory communication for development has been used in the new approach to development, which is the participatory development (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005). The participatory development was born out of the search for a new and different development approach which has the potentials of empowering the beneficiaries of a particular development project. According to FAO's Economic and Social Development Department, when people are fully engaged in their own development process, it enhances the success of development initiatives. Participation has been regarded as an integral part of the process of development, because the people whom the development initiative is meant for are well informed about what they stand to benefit from such development program, thus they will be willing to contribute their quota towards the success of the initiative.

Participatory development sprang up as an alternative approach to development in the early years of 1970 when people started questioning the top-down development approach which was prevailing in the 1950's and 1960's (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005). This approach aims at changing the beneficiaries from passive recipients to active participants which are actively involved in their own development process (Isgren, 2012). Participatory development has been simply defined by World Bank (2011) as the process which enhances the participation of stakeholders, especially the poor in development initiatives; through participation, the stakeholders are able to have control and influence over the decisions and resources affecting them. In this new development approach, the use of participatory communication for development was introduced, since everything about the approach is participatory. Participatory communication for development is viewed as the tool that enhances participation of stakeholders (Mefalopulos, 2005). Through participatory communication, the stakeholders of a development initiative are carried along through dialogue, thereby empowering

them in the different areas of the development project rather than leaving them at the receiving end.

However, given the benefits of this approach, it is expected that development agencies will take full advantage of this approach in order to obtain desired positive outcomes in their development projects. On the contrary, findings of previous research have shown that even though a number of development agencies proclaim this approach (participation) as an objective they do not fully apply this approach as they wish to (Ali & Sonderling 2017; Fraser & Restrepo-Esrada 1998; Imoh 2013; Kilewo & Frumence 2015; Luecke 2012; Sackey 2014). In other words, based on the theoretical assumption of participatory communication for development, which entails the involvement of people in the whole process of decision-making, implementation of programs, sharing in benefits of development and their involvement in the evaluation of such development programs through dialogue (Barasa&Jelagat, 2013), development agencies do not fully implement the participatory communication for development.

Ali &Sonderling (2017) stated that, the application of participatory communication for development can be shaped by the way the concept is interpreted. However, a look at these previous studies showed that despite the proclamation made by development agencies, they have failed to clearly provide their interpretation of the concept of participatory communication for development as practically applied. Although, a number of studies have been conducted in this area, most of such (Aminah 2016; Fraser & Restrepo-Esrada 1998; Kheerajit and Flor 2013; Kilewo & Frumence 2015; Melkote 2006; Servaes & Malikhao 2005; Sackey 2014), have only focused on how this communication approach can be used for supporting development projects by virtue of its dialogic nature. However, only few of these studies have focused on how the development agents interpret this development approach and how their interpretation influences the implementation of participatory communication approach (Mefalopulos, 2003). Examining their interpretation of the concept will help in providing an understanding on whether the partial implementation can be attributed to their interpretation of the concept or other factors. Therefore, it is important to determine how these development agencies interpret the concept of participatory communication for development, because Ali & Sonderling (2017), stated that the application of participatory communication for development can be shaped by the way the concept is interpreted. This is why this study investigates how the relevant stakeholders conceive, define and understand the concept of participatory communication for development. This leads the researcher to ask the question; how do development agencies perceive the concept of participatory communication for development?

2. Methodology

The present study which was carried out in Nigeria, investigated how participatory communication for development has been perceived by agricultural development agencies using qualitative research approach. Merriam (2009) posits that this approach is the best approach that can be used in understanding a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives based on their experiences. It is believed that by using the qualitative approach deeper insights on how participatory communication for development is perceived by agricultural development agencies will be gained.Specifically, case study research design was adopted, because it provides a comprehensive description of a unit; that is when, how, and why questions are being imposed when investigation has no control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context. A case study design was selected in this research in order to provide detailed description of the perceptions which agricultural development agencies have of participatory communication for development.Thus, in this study the use of case study was employed because it focuses on a specific event, phenomenon situation or program, and this makes this method more suitable for investigating practical problems or occurrences. According to Merriam (2009), the outcome of a case study is rich and thick description of the event, phenomenon under study.Two case studies were used in this study so as to obtain more diverse responses since one of them was local and owned by the government of Nigeria, while the other one is an international agency working in collaboration with the Nigerian government to augment the efforts of the government geared towards agricultural development.

In selecting the subjects of this study, the research employed the use of purposive sampling method in order to obtain rich information from the respondents. Purposive sampling technique allows the researcher to contact the most resourceful and knowledgeable people in the area of research. This sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique that is used by researchers to locate respondents that can be inaccessible. The researcher employed the use of non-probability purposive sampling method so as to select the case studies of the study; selection was done based on specific characteristics in order to enhance detailed exploration and understanding of the studied cases (Ritchies, Lewis & Elam, 2003).The study participants were selected based on specific criteria prescribed by the researcher. The criteria are as follows; all project managers that have been working with agricultural development agencies that use the participatory communication approach for over five years based in Plateau state during the study period were eligible for participating in the study. The respondents possessed adequate experience in implementing agricultural development projects using the participatory approach and have been directly engaged with the farmers.

In this study, the researcher employed the use of an in-depth semi-structured interview, documentation and direct observation method to generate naturalistic and insightful information on the subject of study while taking field notes. The purpose of research interviews is to capture and understand the world from the participants view point and experience (Creswell, 2012). The nature of the research open-ended interview led to an interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. The contents of the interview protocol were validated by four experts.

The data which was used in this study was analysed using thematic data analysis method. The main focus of thematic analysis in qualitative research is the examination of themes within data set, organizing the themes and providing a rich description (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman 1997). According to Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2012), thematic analysis does not just involve mere counting of words and phrases within a text, but also involves the identification of explicit and implicit ideas in the data. Scholars have suggested that the process of analysis using this method becomes very interesting as the researcher discovers concepts and themes in the data of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).The thematic analysis performed in this study involved a six-step framework. This means that the thematic analysis involved six steps, which are listed and briefly discussed below:

Familiarizingwith the data: This is the first and one of the important steps in thematic analysis of data, which involves the researcher getting familiar with the data. One of the ways through which the research can achieve this is by transcribing the interview data personally. This way, the researcher is immersed in the data, thereby enhancing the identification of themes in the latter stage (Merriam, 2009). Thus, in this study, the researchers did not ignore any part of the data while taking notes on important codes that could emerge as meaningful patterns at the other stages of the analysis.

Assigning of preliminary codes in data/Initial coding: This step is the second step in thematic analysis of qualitative data. In this step, the initial set of field notes were first read, because it one of the methods through which initial codes can be systematically obtained from the dataset. The researcher ensured the codes are related to the research questions. More so, the process also involved the search for reoccurring pattern, and then the process stopped when there were no more new patterns to discover. This is because the process is a cyclical one because codes continue to emerge throughout the process of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher searched for initial codes through this cyclical process by going back and forth between phases of data analysis as required until the final themes could adequately describe the phenomenon.One of the major aims of coding is to reduce data through the allocation of labels to portions of data that makes meaning. Through this process of data reduction, which is also referred to as data simplification, the researcher is able to further analyse the data by creating relevant categories that are often smaller units.

Searching for themes in codes across the different interviews: This step involved the search for themes from the initial codes obtained in the second step. Through the process in this step, the data was further reduced by going through the initial codes and jotting them down at the margins of the interview transcript to enable the discovery of differences and similarities in the initial codes. During this process, categories were obtained through the patterns and regularities found in the data.This process is sometimes referred to as axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The terms themes and categories are interchangeable and are used as such in this explanation. When the themes have been

identified and extracted from the codes, a concise explanation is given for the themes.

Review themes: it is expected that a set of themes obtained in the last stepped are reviewed. This review involves the merging of overlapping themes or subthemes found in the last step. The merging of such themes was done based on the possession of common roots or homogeneity by the themes. In other words, similar themes were merged together. Moving further in the analysis, the researcher, through a deductive process tested the tentative category scheme against the data by checking for more evidence that support the final set of categories.

Define and name themes: at this stage, the researcher is required to label the categories using names that define them well. Simply put, the researcher explains what each theme is all about, and the areas of the data that covers them. This is a systematic and intuitive process that is influenced by the orientation and knowledge of the researcher, the purpose of study and meanings which the participants explicitly make.

Report Writing: in this step the report is produced using the final themes obtained in the previous stage. The report was written such that it showed the relationship and network of the themes. It is at this point that the researcher made the decision on the relevant points that provide answers to the research questions. In this step, a rich and thick description of the phenomenon was given by connecting the themes to form a story that is capable ofconveying the complicated story in a manner that convinces the reader about the validity and quality of analysis.

3. Results

In order to understand how agricultural development agencies apply participatory communication for development in their ADPs (agricultural development projects), it is important to understand what it means to them. Based on the interview held with the two case studies (CS1 and CS2), some themes emerged, and these themes are discussed in this subsection. In CS1 (case study 1), two major themes emerged; 1). Participatory communication is a two-way communication and 2). Participatory Communication is a knowledge co-sharing approach. In this study, the first case study is referred to as "IADA", while the second case study is referred to as "PSOADA'.

Participatory Communication for Development is a two-way communication
In describing how CS1 perceive participatory communication for development, one of the participants stated that the IADA perceives participatory communication for development as a two-way communication approach to development, because participatory communication for development involves hearing from the stakeholders at the bottom. She said, for her, communication has to be both ways, because for the communication chain to be complete, the message she is passing must be understood, and she can only know if the message is understood when she gets feedback from the bottom (farmers). The participant highlighted this in her statement "*for me participatory communication has to be both ways, in that it's not just me*

passing info, but the people I am passing the info to should be able to understand what I mean, accept it and use it the way it is; then I know that there is a complete chain of communication".

She placed more emphasis on this point as she explained that participatory communication for development helps in getting feedback from the farmers. This feedback in turn, enables the production of needed crops; the participatory communication involving all stakeholders (marketers, farmers, input dealers and consumers) helps in bridging the communication gap which can lead to the production of unwanted crops by farmers. This point was captured in the statement below:

"So we start from top; what is the market demanding for? What does the consumer want? then we now work it down to the person producing and back to the seeds, because if people produce what the market does not want, then it means there is a gap in communication. So, for it to work, we have to produce what is demanded for in the market; not just to produce anything. And we can only know what the market is demanding for through participatory communication with stakeholders.

So the points highlighted by the participant 1 in her statements reveal that participatory communication is perceived as a two-way communication approach which helps in providing feedback that is used in improving agricultural-related situations. Without this two-way communication, there will be a bridge in communication which could be detrimental to farmers by causing huge loses.

Participatory Communication as a Knowledge Co-sharing Approach

In expressing how it perceived participatory communication for development as used in its agricultural development, CS1 stated that through participatory exchange of ideas between development agency and stakeholders for problem-solving is enhanced, and the exchange of ideas occurs when the farmers that are directly affected by a problem are consulted and invited to participate in the needs assessment stage. The participant noted that in CS1, participatory communication is not perceived as a communication approach that merely disseminates information through extension workers, rather it involves the sharing of views and knowledge between stakeholders and CS1. This expression is captured in the following statement: *"So, I also learn a lot from them; a lot of the things are discussions; sometimes I ask because I want to know and sometimes I ask because I know probing deeper helps to provide solutions to problems. So that has been helpful. Generally, our approach has been to teach people how to fish rather than give them fish".*

The above comment also indicates that the knowledge derived from the interaction between CS1 and the famers is used in providing solutions to problems affecting farmers. Asides from knowledge co-sharing that occurs between CS1 and the farmers, this knowledge co-sharing also occurs among the farmers as they are able to share their ideas and knowledge with other farmers. In other words, through participatory communication for development knowledge is

shared between CS1 and farmers, as well as within farmers. The farmers share knowledge based on evidences, i.e, what they have done and the results they got. She further added that this knowledge co-sharing makes things easier for the farmers and CS1. This can be observed in the comment below made the participant 1 in CS1:

So the next time you sit together and another farmer says it didn't work for me, then you can say "can you talk to this person and ask him what he did that made his own to work". So the farmers share these kind of things and they have evidence; its not us saying that we did this and it worked, no, hear from the people that are like you are on the farm and doing things. So, it makes it a lot easier.

To buttress this point, she further added that "*it's not always rosy, but then we learn from them despite having our own expertise. We learn from them, share ideas and make changes where necessary".* This statement also indicates that the knowledge they gain from the farmers helps them to make the necessary changes required in the agricultural development project. This participant 1 also used an example to describe how participation enables knowledge co-sharing. She described this saying

When using the participatory approach it helps when you sit together and start together; they see the result. So it's more like we put our hands together and work to improve something together, and not me coming to say that this what I did and this is the result and it works. We all do it on the farms and everybody comes with his/her result and then we discuss, what is your result? and how did you do it? There was a time we were talking about what could preserve potato from getting spoilt and one farmer told me that what he did was that he sprayed ash on the potato, but what I saw generally was farmers using chemicals; pextox powder to spray on the potato, but he used ash and it worked. I have never been aware that ash can be used, but at least I learnt from him that it works and then other people tried it. So that's how we do, we help each other and then help each other grow.

So, it can be seen that CS1 perceives participatory communication for development as a communication approach that is two-way and enables knowledge co-sharing.

Based on the interview conducted in CS2 (Case Study 2), two major themes emerged. These themes are the same as those that emerged in the first case study; 1) Participatory Communication is a Two-way Communication and 2) Participatory Communication is a Knowledge Co-sharing Approach.

Participatory Communication is a Two-way Communication

Some of the participant in CS2 described participatory communication for development as a communication approach that is two-way, involving interaction between extension workers and farmers as well as researchers. The participants believed that through participatory communication for development, CS2 is able to send information to farmers and the farmers are also able to send back their feedbacks to this agricultural development

agency. Participant N1 explained that the system which is used by the agency is referred to as Visit and Training (T&V). According to him, it is during the T&V that information about a new technology is passed to the farmers through the village extension agents. When the information about the new technologies gets to the farmers, on the day that the use of the technology will be demonstrated, farmers ask any questions they have regarding the technology. He explained this saying:

"We do adopt the T&V system of extension in the ADP (AgricDev Programme), and in the T & V system you train the extension workers in classrooms; we call it forth nightly training. This is where we give them the technology that they will pass to the farmers and when the collect this technology…….they have their contact farmers and the have their operating cells and sub-cells; these contact farmers are found in the cells and sub-cells. The farmers are usually a group of 10 people. The 10 contact farmers are trained on how to use the technology, and these 10 people will go and demonstrate the technology on the farms where other farmers will come to see and ask questions and the 10 contact farmers will tell other farmers about the technology. That is how we communicate with the farmers".

Participant N1 further explained how feedbacks are gotten from the farmers in respect to the information they receive about a new innovation. He stated that during their interaction with the farmers in the field, the farmers report any specific problems they are encountering with the new innovation. Based on this report, solutions to this problems are proffered:

"In the course of our interactions, if they have some specific problems in the field, after we have given them our technology then they will present their problems. If we are able to proffer solutions to their problems then fine and good, if you are not able to do so. Then we will take the problems back to researchers to try to find solutions to the problems. After the researchers have found the solution to the problems, the researchers will give the solution to the extension worker who will take the solution back to the farmers.

It can be seen from the above expressions that CS2 perceive participatory communication for development as a communication approach that is two, involving interaction between the agency and farmers. The agency sends out information on new technology through the extension workers, and feedback is sent to the development agency through the same village extension agents that bring the information about the new technology.

Participatory Communication enables Knowledge Co-Sharing
In CS2, it was found that CS2 perceives participatory communication as a communication approach that enables the co-sharing of knowledge between the stakeholders. The kind of knowledge co-sharing that occurs here is the one among farmers, and not between farmers and the development agency. Here, farmers share knowledge with each other through the forums which are organized by the CS2. Even though, the researchers and extension agents

attend the forum, there is no form of knowledge co-sharing that occurs between them and the farmers. According to participant N2 the cross-fertilization of ideas only occurs between the farmers, who challenge each other through their interactions with one another. While describing this, he said:

"I will add to that, you see when a case is being reported, when a VEA reports a case be it an epidemic or emergency, a team of researchers visit the field immediately, thereby giving the farmer the opportunity to meet with researchers, experts and resource persons. We always make sure we create that kind of forum from time to time, and even with input dealers when we organise agricultural shows, input dealers, farmers and researchers can meet one-on-one; that one there is no barrier".

Participant N1 further elaborated on the kind of knowledge co-sharing that occurs in the forum saying "*even the farmers themselves cross-fertilize ideas, and it opens their scope of understanding more and they get challenged by themselves; from their interactions with one another they go home with these challenges*".

In addition to knowledge co-sharing which occurs during the forums organized by CS2, another platform arranged by this agency for the use of participatory communication for the purpose of knowledge co-sharing, is the sponsored media interaction. In this sponsored media interaction, farmers are invited for radio and TV programmes to come and interact with other farmers and share knowledge based on results they have gotten on their farms. Participant N4 explained this saying *"sometimes when we have the radio and TV programmes we invite farmers to come and tell other farmers what they have done in the field and tell others. So there is communication from the farmers to other farmers"*. Participant N3 also added that on field days organized by CS2, knowledge co-sharing occurs between farmers, as farmers are able to share new innovations with fellow farmers". This, he explained saying "*on field days it is the farmers that explain to fellow farmers how he/she got some new innovations and the result he has gotten*".

It can therefore, be seen that even though participatory communication for development is perceived by CS2 as a communication approach that enhances knowledge co-sharing, this knowledge co-sharing only occurs between farmers who exchange ideas with each other, during agricultural forums, sponsored media interactions and on field days.

4. Discussion of Findings and Cross-Case Analysis

In order to understand how agricultural development agencies apply participatory communication for development in their ADPs (agricultural development projects), it is important to understand what it means to them, as Ali & Soderling (2017) argued that the application of participatory communication can be shaped by the way the concept is interpreted. Thus, this research question. Based on the interview held with CS1 and CS2, two major themes emerged in both cases; 1). Participatory communication is a two-way communication and 2).

Participatory Communication is a knowledge co-sharing approach.

Participatory Communication is a two-way Communication

In both CS1 and CS2, it was found that participatory communication is perceived as a two-way development communication approach.

In describing how CS1 perceived participatory communication for development, the participant N1 stated that the CS1 perceives participatory communication for development as a two-way communication approach to development, because participatory communication for development involves hearing from the stakeholders at the bottom. She said, for her, communication has to be both ways, because for the communication chain to be complete, the message she is passing must be understood, and she can only know if the message is understood when she gets feedback from the bottom (farmers). The participant highlighted this in her statement "*for me participatory communication has to be both ways, in that it's not just me passing info, but the people I am passing the info to should be able to understand what I mean, accept it and use it the way it is; then I know that there is a complete chain of communication*".

Similarly, some of the participant in CS2 described participatory communication for development as a communication approach that is two-way, involving interaction between extension workers and farmers as well as researchers. The participants believed that through participatory communication for development, CS2 is able to send information to farmers and the farmers are also able to send back their feedbacks to this agricultural development agency. Participant N1 in CS2 explained that the system which is used by the agency is referred to as Visit and Training (T&V). According to him, it is during the T&V that information about a new technology is passed to the farmers through the village extension agents. When the information about the new technologies gets to the farmers, on the day that the use of the technology will be demonstrated, farmers ask any questions they have regarding the technology.

Basically, from the responses obtained from the two cases, it can be said that the process of participatory communication for development cannot be complete without feedback from the local farmers. Through a two-way flow, there is interaction between the farmers and the agricultural development agencies. This two-way communication is very important in both organizations, as it allows the organizations and the farmers to be on the same page; they are able to work together towards achieving a common goal. Two-way communication flow which has been identified as one of the basic principles of participatory communication for development (FAO, 2011), because it allows the sharing of knowledge must be used by any development project that claims to be participatory in nature (Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010).

Participant N1 of CS1 placed more emphasis on this point as she explained that participatory communication for development helps in getting feedback from the farmers. This feedback in turn, enables the production of needed crops; the participatory communication involving all stakeholders (marketers, farmers, input dealers and consumers) helps in bridging the communication gap which can lead to the production of unwanted crops by farmers. This point implies that, for any reasonable action to be taken in a development project that claims to be participatory communication there must be two-way communication, because it helps in providing better understanding of the situation to be addressed. So, it is important to for the facilitator to encourage two-way communication rather between relevant parties, rather than just dish out information to interest groups using the one-way communication flow (Jooste, 2014). However, it is also important to note that the use of the two-way communication may not be suitable for use in every situation, even if it is used in a development project that claims to be participatory. This is so, because sometimes there is also need for one-way communication if the aim is just to pass a simple message across to relevant parties.

So the points highlighted by the participants in CS1 and CS2 1 reveal that participatory communication is perceived as a two-way communication approach which helps in providing feedback that is used in improving agricultural-related situations. Without this two-way communication, there will be a bridge in communication which could be detrimental to farmers by causing huge loses. Participant N1 in CS2 further explained how feedbacks are gotten from the farmers in respect to the information they receive about a new innovation. He stated that during their interaction with the farmers in the field, the farmers report any specific problems they are encountering with the new innovation. Based on this report, solutions to this problems are proffered.

In the present study, it was observed that two-way communication is used in CS1 as a means of getting feedback that can be used as a means of understanding the farmers' problems so as to avoid gap in communication, while in CS2 it is used to collect feedbacks about the reaction of farmers on a new innovation that has been passed to them through the extension workers. It is also clear that the two-way communication which occurs in CS2 is mediated; the VEAs serve as mediators who collect the feedback and report back to the key players in the CS2, while in CS1, there is no mediator as the two-way communication is directly between the farmers and the key players in CS1 (CS1). A mediated form of two-way communication may be harmful, as it may result in distortion of information as well as refining of messages by VEAs with the aim of presenting a positive report. Therefore it is crucial for the local people to meet directly with the key players in the development agencies so that the key players can get first hand and authentic feedbacks that can help them make tangible decisions that can lead to sustainable agricultural development. In 1999, when the World Bank asked 40,000 people what they desired the most, one of the most frequent replies they got was "to have a voice". The World Bank realised that a significant element of poverty was not allowing the local people have a say in decisions related to issues affecting their lives. This highlights the

significance of two-way communication in any development initiative which aims at empowering people.

Despite the little differences observed in the way both organizations use the two-way communication, it is still clear that both of them perceive participatory communication as a two-way communication that can be used to gather feedbacks from the farmers. These feedbacks are used by the organizations to proffer solutions to the agricultural-related problems faced by farmers.

Participatory Communication enables Knowledge Co-Sharing
In both agricultural development agencies, participatory communication for development is perceived as a development communication that enhances knowledge co-sharing between the relevant parties. In CS1, it was found that through the use of participatory communication, ideas are being exchanged between the agricultural development agency and the farmers for the purpose of problem-solving. In the current study, it was further found that in CS1, the exchange of ideas occurs when the farmers that are directly affected by a problem, are consulted and invited to participate in the needs assessment stage and decision-making process. Here, the farmers are involved in the decision-making process, because the CS1 has realized that the local knowledge of the farmers is as important as that of CS1. Melkote and Kandath (2001) noted that local knowledge of people at the grassroots must be given priority in the process of decision-making in any participatory development.

Jooste (2014) in a study carried out to explore the nature of participatory communication between stakeholders of the bhive university incubator, highlighted that having more opportunities, which is one of the outcomes of participatory communication for development, is only achieved when the community is involved in the decision-making process. The involvement of the local farmers in the decision-making process gives room for knowledge co-sharing. This implies that, knowledge on how to solve a problem is only created through the exchange of opinions and ideas between the two parties. White (1994) maintains that the approach to the creation of knowledge has been changed from that led by well-educated to an approach that is based on indigenous knowledge, thereby making the process of knowledge generation a reciprocal process.

In CS1 it was also noted that participatory communication is not perceived as a communication approach that merely disseminates information through extension workers, rather it involves the sharing of views and knowledge between stakeholders and CS1. This expression is captured in the following statement: *"So, I also learn a lot from them; a lot of the things are discussions; sometimes I ask because I want to know and sometimes I ask because I know probing deeper helps to provide solutions to problems. So that has been helpful. Generally, our approach has been to teach people how to fish rather than give them fish".* According to Servaes (2001), communication must be perceived as an equal information exchange between all stakeholders of the project by means of bottom up and horizontal structures. Without using the communication structure prescribed by

Servaes (2001), knowledge co-sharing between all stakeholders cannot take place.

The above comment also indicates that the knowledge derived from the interaction between CS1 and the famers is used in providing solutions to problems affecting farmers. Asides knowledge co-sharing that occurs between CS1 and the farmers, this knowledge co-sharing also occurs among the farmers as they are able to share their ideas and knowledge with other farmers. In other words, through participatory communication for development, knowledge is shared between CS1 and farmers, as well as within farmers. The farmers share knowledge based on evidences, i.e, what they have done and the results they got. It was noted in this organization that knowledge co-sharing makes things easier for the farmers and CS1. Likewise, in CS2 it was also found that participatory communication for development is perceived as a development communication approach that facilitates knowledge co-sharing between farmers.

However, the kind of knowledge co-sharing that occurs here is the one among farmers, and not between farmers and the development agency. Here, farmers share knowledge with each other through the forums which are organized by the CS2. Even though, the researchers and extension agents attend the forum, there is no form of knowledge co-sharing that occurs between them and the farmers. They are just there to supervise. This position taken by the CS2 is that of expert, who believes he/she knows more than the local people. This is not supposed to be so in a development project that claims to participatory in nature. The responses obtained from this development agency indicated that cross-fertilization of ideas only occurs between the farmers, who challenge each other through their interactions with one another. One of the study participants explained that the kind of knowledge co-sharing that occurs in the forum saying *"even the farmers themselves cross-fertilize ideas, and it opens their scope of understanding more and they get challenged by themselves; from their interactions with one another they go home with these challenges".*

In addition to knowledge co-sharing which occurs during the forums organized by CS2, another platform arranged by this agency for the use of participatory communication for the purpose of knowledge co-sharing, is the sponsored media interaction. In this sponsored media interaction, farmers are invited for radio and TV programmes to come and interact with other farmers and share knowledge based on results they have gotten on their farms. Another participant in CS1 added that on field days organized by CS2, knowledge co-sharing occurs between farmers, as farmers are able to share new innovations with fellow farmers. This, he explained saying *"on field days it is the farmers that explain to fellow farmers how he/she got some new innovations and the result he has gotten".*

The findings of the current study shows that participatory communication for development is perceived by both development agencies as a communication approach that facilitates knowledge co-sharing in both organizations. However, the manner of use was found to be different in both agricultural development agencies. While in CS1 knowledge co-sharing occurred between the farmers and

development agency, as well as among farmers, in CS2, it was found that knowledge co-sharing occurred only among farmers. Based on the findings of the present study, the purpose of knowledge co-sharing is to exchange ideas and information that can help in solving the agricultural-related problems of farmers. A study carried out by Holm, Brødsgaard, Zachariassen, Smith and Clemensen (2017) with the aim of planning and developing a clinical telehealth service for neonatal homecare, used a participatory design to gather information from Participants, who were current and former parents of preterm infants and clinical staff. These group of researchers used participatory communication, so that the clinical staff and parents could share knowledge with them based on their experience; this knowledge was used in developing the clinical telehealth app. It is clear that knowledge co-sharing which is enabled by participatory communication is crucial to development projects that seek to truly meet the needs of the people.

Knowledge co-sharing is an important part of participatory communication that cannot be underestimated, because right from the inception of this alternative approach to development (the participatory approach), the leading scholars in development communication argued that participatory communication should allow the relevant stakeholders to equal chance of influencing each other. These scholars placed emphasis on knowledge-sharing instead of top-down teaching and transmission of information (Ascroft & Masilela, 1989). McQuail (1983) argues that this new approach is basically, interactive, two and participatory at all levels of a development project. Access to the reservoir of useful ideas and information of people at the grassroots, is only obtained when a symmetrical exchange of ideas between senders and receivers is allowed. Therefore, development agencies operating within the same context in which this study is conducted, can take advantage of participatory communication which enables knowledge co-sharing. More so, development agencies that claim to be participatory in nature should encourage the sharing of knowledge in their development projects. In line with this thinking, the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) (2006) stressed that the participatory approach to communication which became a major feature of sustainable development projects, creates a favourable atmosphere for sharing of knowledge. According to this congress, participatory communication brings about sharing of knowledge and information that can be used in achieving development goals set by all stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

This study was carried out with the aim of exploring how agricultural development agencies in Plateau State, Nigeria perceive the concept of participatory communication for development in relation to how they use it in their agricultural development projects. It has been noted that without having an understanding of how the concept is perceived by the development agencies, it will be difficult to understand how it is applied, as the application is influenced by the way it is perceived. Thus, this study explored the perception of participatory communication for development by agricultural development agencies in Plateau State.

Findings of the study revealed that the two case studies in this research perceive participatory communication for development as a communication approach that enhances two-way communication, and knowledge co-sharing among farmers, and between the framers and the agricultural development agencies. Based on the findings, participatory communication for development creates a platform where the key stakeholders are able to come together and share ideas and knowledge that can further enhance agricultural development in Plateau State, Nigeria. More so, enables two-way communication between the stakeholders.

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