Implementing a Development Communication Project: A Descriptive Study of the Communication Support to Health Project in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This article presents a case study of a pilot project in Ethiopia called Communication Support to Health. It expounds on the organizational structure for the implementation of the project, the pilot areas, short- and long-term objectives, and base-line data collection. The article also describes the project orientation and training, media package production and use, monitoring and evaluation, follow-up activities and feedback as well as the short-comings of the project.

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Exécution d'un Projet de Développement de la Communication: Une Etude Descriptive du Soutien de la Communication au Projet de Santé en Ethiopie

Résumé

Cet exposé présente le cas d'une étude d'un projet pilote en Ethiopie intitulé Soutien de la Communication à la Santé. Il passe en revue la structure organisationnelle de l'exécution du projet, les sites pilotes, les objectifs à court et à long terme, et la collection des données. L'article décrit les aspects d'orientation et de formation, le programme médiatique de production et d'usage, le monitoring et l'évaluation, les activités de suivi et de feedback ainsi que les points faibles du projet.

Introduction

In national development, the efforts made by any country should have a good deal of communication input to enhance development activities and help achieve the desired results. This implies the use of what is known as development communication,which, as Berrigan (1977) has stressed, is vital to promote development activities.

Thus, if different media are properly and wisely used to strengthen grassroot communication, they can make a substantial contribution to development in general and population education in particular. In this context, when we talk of the contributions of the media to population education programmes, we mean addressing learners on the nature, causes and consequences of population-related issues and problems. This effort gradually results in changing their attitudes and also enables them to analyse and make correct decisions concerning population-related issues.

This paper describes the experiences of the Educational Media Agency in implementing a pilot project called "Communication Support to Health MCH/FP." It provides details about the process of conceptualising and implementing this communication support development project.

Educational Media Agency

The Educational Media Agency (EMA) is an institution under the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Divided into five divisions, EMA strives to achieve its objectives through disseminating programmes on education and development issues through 11 medium wave radio transmitting stations established exclusively for educational broadcasting. Radio programmes that reinforce curricula and enhance development activities are broadcast to school children and adult audiences.

The formal education radio programmes serve over 90% of the primary schools in Ethiopia. With the help of teachers' guides and other relevant supplementary materials distributed ahead of broadcast, schools make use of these programmes. The non-formal education radio programmes focus on the prevailing problems in the country, specifically on better agricultural methods, family planning, mother and child health, proper sanitation, environmental pollution and conservation. The programmes, which are produced in different local languages are transmitted to men and women who take part in the literacy and post literacy programmes. The main aim is to stimulate

discussion among the adult listeners on the issues raised so that they themselves can take concerted action to alleviate their problems.

In addition to radio, the EMA provides television programmes for junior secondary schools and the adult audience and films, film strips, slides and other audio-visual materials to both the schools and the community.

Background of the Pilot Project

The project, Communication Support to Health MCH/FFP, was formulated at a time when the imbalance between population and resources was very visible in Ethiopia. Because of massive soil erosion and deforestation the country was hit by drought and severe famine. The nutritional and health standard of most of the population was drastically affected, the most vulnerable groups being children and women.

There were well organized and highly motivated adult post-literacy participants in the country who were in need of educational materials and training programmes. Most of these participants were women and men whose children were exposed to malnutrition and disease. Thus, providing these target groups with information and education on health, nutrition, agriculture and family planning was an important input for the literacy programme. The Educational Media Agency, through its network of regional transmitters, was giving nation-wide educational radio programme support to the literacy campaign. What was needed was to combine these resources (the available appropriate medium and the organized groups) and formulate a programme of action that would link up with and build on the literacy education. A tripartite agreement, signed between the government of Ethiopia, UNESCO, and the UN Funds for Population Activity, aimed at implementing such a programme.

Project Objectives

According to the project document, (MOE/UNFPA 1984) the project aimed in the long-term at strengthening the communication capacity of the post-literacy campaign in order to support adult education in general but with particular emphasis on health and population issues. The immediate objective of the project was to demonstrate a planned communication approach to helping newly literate families identify their own health and environmental problems and pave the way for new practices that would eventually lead to improved family life. This was to be done by combining the use of regionally produced educational

radio broadcasts and locally produced low-cost, multi-media packages (audio cassette programmes, posters, slides, filmstrips) together with interpersonal communication at post-literacy classes or reading centres. Another objective was to organize community-based resource centres for localized media package production and use and to train script writers, animateurs, literacy-coordinators, field agents of various development agencies in communication techniques, media programme production and use. The other type of training envisaged was in research, monitoring and evaluation techniques for key staff of the project.

Organizational Structure for Project Implementation

The project which was planned to strengthen the activities of the Educational Media Agency used the existing organizational structure. But for effective management of the decentralized radio programme production, use and evaluation activities and for a better implementation of project activities, the regional Radio Programmes Policy Committees were reactivated and similar committees were extended to districts, sub-districts and communities in the pilot project area. Members of the committees were representatives of development ministries and agencies using the media services. The committees had over-all responsibility to make decisions and set regional priorities regarding the media services.

The project areas were identified and selected on the basis of scores on availability of such government services as health and educational facilities, agricultural extension and veterinary services.

Base-Line Data Collection

A workshop on baseline data requirement was conducted for the project staff and the media supervisors in the four pilot regions who were assigned to carry out the base-line data collection. The workshop aimed at (i) introducing the participants to the project objectives; (ii) getting comments from the group on the instruments to be used in collecting the base-line data; (iii) explaining to the participants their role in the data collection process; and (iv) encouraging them to exchange views and share their experiences about the pilot sites.

After the workshop, a socio-economic profile of the pilot areas was drawn up, followed by a knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) study involving about 100 people in each pilot area. Media supervisors who served as enumerators were given special orientation and training in interviewing techniques which included pre-testing of the

questionnaires. In addition to the information gathered in the KAP study, case studies were carried out in each pilot area which enabled the media-package producers to know the priority needs of the target people, their educational level, beliefs and practices. In the same process, the project was able to identify local resources that would be involved in the actual production and use of the media packages.

Project Orientation and Training

A series of orientation programmes were arranged by the project staff in the project areas to brief the committees on the aims and objectives of the project and the need for their active participation and cooperation in the activities. Training programmes in communication management and development communication radio courses were also organized for project staff to give them greater exposure to population and communication issues.

For the production of audio cassette programmes and other media packages at the resource centres, 38 local people involved in the project were trained in script writing techniques and use of recording equipment; 20 animateurs were also trained in different methods of leading discussions, the psychology of adult learning and the role of the animateur in non-directive guidance.

Media Package Production and Use

Based on the identified needs of the target group, the production of the media packages started with a series of selected topics in health, agriculture, population and developmental issues. The types of media materials used were (i) radio programmes produced for open broadcasts through the regional transmitters; (ii) prototype audio-cassette programmes with printed and visual material (produced centrally for closed circuit use in the pilot sites); and (iii) audio-cassette programmes with printed and visual material (produced locally at the site level for closed circuit use).

The production of radio programmes was aimed at using existing programmes prepared to support literacy activities. These programmes were in health, agriculture and civics with emphasis on messages dealing with population and development, maternal and child health and nutrition. Support materials such as animateurs' guides and transmission schedules were also prepared. The prototype audio-cassette programmes also covered health, agriculture and population and development. The production was done by senior producers assigned to the project with the purpose of using them for direct

closed-circuit consumption and for training local scriptwriters and producers in the project sites. The audio-cassette package included posters, animateurs' guides, slides and other printed materials.

Based on the feedback from the prototype audio-cassette package, more than 40 specific need-oriented local programmes and support materials were developed at the resource centres in the four pilot project areas.

In accordance with the project implementation strategy, the dissemination of the media packages was done within the time slot alloted for the post-literacy programmes. The organized post-literacy class participants met in reading centres to listen to the radio broadcasts or playback of audio-cassette programmes. After the broadcast, the assigned animateur encouraged the group to discuss the main issues raised in the programme so as to come up with some concrete action or solution. Local extension agents of health, agriculture and other areas, depending on the message content, were invited when necessary to clarify certain issues or offer demonstrations in their field of specialization.

The future plan is that selected programmes produced at the community level will serve as an input for regional transmitters. In this way, the regional stations will be channels through which the communities will air their views and listen to the problems and suggested solutions from their own localities. The pilot project will also be gradually extended and implemented nationwide. It is hoped that the communication strategy of incorporating radio with low-cost multi-media materials can assist in establishing effective communication.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation was built into the project as part of the research component and carried out by the staff of the Educational Media Agency and a research team from Addis Ababa University. Media supervisors and other personnel involved with the project activities provided the necessary information to the project staff, and producers also made a number of field visits to the project areas to obtain feed-back on the delivery and suitability of the messages. The information gathered was used to improve the quality of both the broadcasts and the closed-circuit programmes.

The framework of topic selection for programme production, information dissemination, staff allocation and material provision was formulated on the basis of information and data contained in the

survey. Follow up activities were also planned to ensure the intended behavioural changes and sustenance of project activities. The EMA maintained a regular flow of information about the on-going activities of the project.

A mechanism for continuous flow of information from the grassroots to the centre and visa versa was devised and the cassette programmes were produced and used at the grassroots level with technical assistance from the centre. Each project site had trained script writers and animateurs who wrote scripts, produced and used the programmes. The animateurs used a simple questionnaire to gather information on the content of programmes, their use, and audience reactions. The information so gathered was sent either to the producers or to the centre through the regional media supervisors and used to make changes in the content and use of the programmes.

Project staff periodically stayed at the project sites to work with the producers and animateurs. This served a dual purpose: appraisals of training of animateurs and scriptwriters, and making changes in the content and use of the programmes. The media supervisors played a significant role in the follow up activity by serving as a bridge between the centre and the project sites. They were involved in coordinating activities at the project sites, training field personnel and in mobilizing the community to build listening centres and to procure required equipment.

The regular contact and information flow between project staff at the centre and the field staff helped in ensuring a continued implementation of project activities and in preparing the groundwork for a summative evaluation to be conducted and in expanding the project areas.

But the monitoring and evaluation also indicated several defects in the design and implementation of the project. Some of these short comings were: (i) all but one of the pilot areas were selected from the west of the country; (ii) lack of reading materials which are so crucial for the new literates among the target audience; (iii) inadequate monitoring of the activities of the project sites from headquarters, and (iv) change of resource centres due to the villagization programme of the previous government in Ethiopia.

These problems were discussed during the final tripartite meeting of the funding, executive and implementing agencies and measures were taken to solve them.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined the activities carried out in the pilot project, Communication Support to Health MCH/FP, by the Educational Media Agency. The project benefitted from the Agency's technical infrastructure (regional radio stations), established Regional Radio Programme Policy Committees and the communication strategy of combining radio broadcasts with locally produced multi-media, closed circuit packages for small listening groups.

Since the aim of the project was to create awareness on population issues, maternal and child health and gradually effect changes in the behaviour of the target group, there is still a great need for improvement in media programme planning, production, use, evaluation and for effective coordination with relevant development agencies at various levels.

References

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