

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

Abstract: Communication strategies involve taking the time to think about a communication problem or issue and determining the best approach for communicating the message or information. Communication strategies is an essential tool for effective public engagement. The study investigates the impact of communication strategies on local government performance. The findings of this study revealed that, the communication strategies of the local government promotes a stronger accountability and transparency culture within local councils through open communication and regular feedback and also promoting faster and easier alternatives for provision of service delivery.

Keywords: Communication strategies, local government performance

1. Introduction

Local government is governance at the grassroots level with constant contact with their local people. The local people or local citizens actively seek more opportunities and better mediums which can sustain communication between them and the local government. The local government are enshrined by the Local Government Act 1993 (Act 462) to provide citizens with timely information about the changes in laws that affect them, aware about their civic responsibilities, taken onboard in the decisions taken and briefed about the allocated against spent budgets. Communication strategies play a definitive role to enable local government to bring it works close to their citizens.

Communication is defined as the interaction between two or more people in order to achieve some goals. According to Littlejohn (2010), communication is the process that aims to pass and exchange information between people. People communicate for a variety of reasons one of which is to create common understandings. Communication has crucial impacts on the performance

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

among work groups in an institution. Communication is a channel used to flow information, resources, and even policies at the local level. Therefore, there is the need to plan the way communication at the local level to improve local government performance.

Communication strategies are plans for communicating information related to a specific issue, event, situation, or audience. Communication strategy can be defined as the step-by-step approach towards setting, organizing and practicing communication related plans and priorities of an institution. Communication strategies process starts with the assessment of the communication needs and concludes with action plan that may require adjustments from time to time. The communication strategy of a local government establish the objectives of the communicated project, which also carries the communication vision, mission and priorities of the Local Government. Therefore, communication at the local level serve as the blueprints for communicating with the public and stakeholders of local government.

Communication strategies according to Richard et al (2009), promote better understanding of local government role in the community and its contribution to the life of the local people or citizens and stakeholders. Communication strategy supports the implementation of the programs strategy, thereby achieving the results sought by the programs. Communication strategy contributes to the development of high quality project applications, good governance of the programs, and an active coordination with other programs at the local level. Therefore, communication strategies ensure that policy, programs, etc are well communicated and implemented to informed, and motivate communications at every level.

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

2. Literature Review

Communication strategies are plans for communicating information related to a specific issue, event, situation, or audience. Communication strategy can be defined as the step-by-step approach towards setting, organizing and practicing communication related plans and priorities of an institution. Communication strategies process starts with the assessment of the communication needs and concludes with action plan that may require adjustments from time to time. According to Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (2015), communication strategy has the ability to regroup the vision and objectives of an organization's communication into an implementable action plan with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Rioplus (2006), defined communication strategy as a holistic planning approach to engaging a brand's audience to ensure greater effectiveness. Communication strategy provides understanding and guidance on building a brand image which displays consistency and continuously by all the employees of the organization. This brand image is a reflection of the organization's integrity, innovation and initiative approach. Communication strategy sets high-quality standards in providing essential public services. These allow institutions or organizations to remain responsive, open, transparent and accountable with respect to our roles and functions towards our stakeholders.

According to Wertheim (2008), communication strategies develop a culture of proactive approach within the department or institution which is characterised by utilising available resources in swift and sustainable ways for the welfare of the citizens. Communication strategies urbanisation trends, rural expansions, technological changes, demographic shifts and scores of other newer phenomena

THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PERFORMANCE

inspire us to look out for unique solutions to address multifarious public sector development challenges. Communication strategies simply involve taking the time to think about a communication problem or issue and determining the best approach for communicating the message or information. Communication strategies:

- Outline the objective/goals of the communication,
- identify stakeholders,
- define key messages,
- pinpoint potential communication methods and vehicles for communicating information for a specific purpose, and
- specify the mechanisms that will be used to obtain feedback on the strategy.

Communication strategies approach is especially true for simple issues that need to be conveyed about low-risk sites that have not generated a high level of public concern. However, the high levels of public concern or issues that are expected to be controversial, a more formal written strategy may be needed to ensure that all stakeholders are reached and all key messages are communicated effectively. A communication strategy can help organize the information that needs to be communicated, identify concerns that may be raised, and ensure the proper audiences are reached. Rashid et al. (2013), communication strategies determines the reason why the communication is necessary and defining the desired objectives. They further mentioned the following objectives of communication strategies: providing information; increasing awareness; encouraging action; building consensus; changing behavior; promoting community participation; resolving conflict, or asking for input.

THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PERFORMANCE

3. Methodology

The research design used in this study was descriptive survey. Descriptive survey simply describes what is or what the data shows. Descriptive survey helps to simplify large amounts of data in a sensible way. The descriptive survey reduces lots of data into a simpler summary. According to Avoke (2005), descriptive surveys are designed to portray accurately the characteristics of particular individuals, situations or groups. A purposive sampling technique was used to obtain a sample size of 100 within targeted population. This sampling technique is used where the sampling units are chosen because they meet set criteria of importance. The technique proved too effective because numbers of people who served as primary data sources due to the nature of research design and aims and objectives were limited. Unlike some alternative sampling techniques, purposive sampling technique do not allow; highly vulnerable to selection bias and influences beyond the control of the researcher and high level of sampling error, which lead to little credibility of the studies.

4. Analysis

Reliability Analysis

According to Joppe (2000), reliability data test is the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study. A questionnaire is said to be reliable if someone answers the statement consistently or it is stable over the construct variable or the time variable. According to Cooper and Shindler (2007), 0.70 is an acceptable reliability coefficient. Thus, when the value items are more than alpha ($\alpha=0.70$) value then it indicate that the scale can be considered consistent, sound and reliable. The figures below show test reliability;

Table 4.4.1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.891	3

From the table 4.2.1, the reliability values 0.891 is greater than the prescribed threshold of

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

($\alpha=0.70$) and in comparison Cronbach's Alpha values are compatible to reliability test of the conducted pilot study with Cronbach's Alpha value ($\alpha=0.891$), hence the scale is sound and reliable.

5. Discussion

Communication strategies involve taking the time to think about a communication problem or issue and determining the best approach for communicating the message or information. Local governments run communication activities entirely on ad hoc basis and only rely on communication messages and mediums in a reactive manner. The actions or inactions of local government are subjected to close scrutiny by the local people public, and considering the level of exposure and experience of most residents at this level, especially those in the rural areas, their assessment of the administration may be based on very wild and, sometimes, completely false assumptions. The ability of the local government to appropriately communicate and relate with them is a major problem at the local level. Based on these backgrounds, the following were the findings of the study:

Communication strategy is the step-by-step approach towards setting, organizing and practicing communication related plans and priorities of an institution. Communication strategy set high-quality standards in providing essential public services. These allows institutions or organizations to remain responsive, open, transparent and accountable with respect to our roles and functions towards our stakeholders. The finding of the study revealed that communication strategies plays a role in raising awareness on the added value of cooperation for achieving the specific objectives and results sought on the performance of local governance. According to Northern Periphery and

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

Arctic Programme (2015), communication strategy has the ability to regroup the vision and objectives of an organization's communication into an implementable action plan with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. The study finding further revealed that the local government use communication strategies to increase their capacity for high quality applications and effective project implementation and thereby facilitate the development of viable project outputs. However, the findings revealed that the local government do or do not rely on the efficiency and effectiveness supports of communication strategies when cooperation their programs with its partners, enabling them to engage with the potential stakeholders of the program in order to build a trust relationship with beneficiaries and also, coordinate with other programs and funding instruments operating, by informing them about specific profile and supported projects, and to stay informed about them.

Communication strategy provides understanding and guidance on building a good image which displays consistency and continuously by all the employees of the organization. Communication strategy set high-quality standards in providing essential public services. According to Steyn (2005), communication strategies sets the tone and direction so that all communication activities, products and materials work in harmony to achieve the desired change. The findings revealed that, communication strategies of the local government establishes a collaborative approach through regular interaction with local administration in the course of performing their duties. Communication strategy set high-quality standards in providing essential public services. According to Wertheim (2008), communication strategies develops a culture of proactive approach within the department or institution which is characterised by utilising available resources in swift

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

and sustainable ways for the welfare of the citizens. The findings of the study revealed that, the communication strategies of the local government promotes a stronger accountability and transparency culture within local councils through open communication and regular feedback and also promoting faster and easier alternatives for provision of service delivery. Communication strategies allows institutions or organizations to remain responsive, open, transparent and accountable with respect to our roles and functions towards our stakeholders. Also the findings of revealed that communication strategies does not necessarily strengthen internal and external communication management of the local government. Communication strategies urbanisation trends, rural expansions, technological changes, demographic shifts and scores of other newer phenomena inspire us to look out for unique solutions to address multifarious public sector development challenges. However, the findings revealed that communication strategies of the local government does not promote the utilization of communication technology as an influential medium in augmenting the work of local councils and also, does not promote the spirit of information sharing with, citizens, line departments and development partners.

Communication strategy provides understanding and guidance on building a brand image which displays consistency and continuously by all the employees of the organization. According to Wertheim (2008), communication strategies develops a culture of proactive approach within the department or institution which is characterised by utilising available resources in swift and sustainable ways for the welfare of the citizens. Communication strategies simply involve taking the time to think about a communication problem or issue and determining the best approach for

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

communicating the message or information. The findings revealed the following challenges of the local governments' communication strategies;

- Their communication strategies lacks transparency when it comes to undertaking programs and causes the delays in the release of the funds for the programs.
- Their communication strategies does not provide the local people and local council standardized information sharing.
- Their communication strategies does not projected or disseminated matters relating to local council among audiences who may be keenly interested and highly relevant.
- The communication strategies of the local government is weak allowing the central government to interfere on how the funds are used in developing programs.
- Also, the local government have weak coordination structures between them and the local citizen.

6. Recommendation

Base on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made; the local government must develop a technological medium to utilized communication strategies to influence the spirit of information sharing with, citizens, line departments and development partners; the local government must develop an efficiency and effective communication strategies that support the cooperation of their programs with its partners. These will enabling them to engage with the potential stakeholders of the program in order to build a trust relationship with beneficiaries and also, coordinate with other programs and funding instruments operating, by informing them about specific profile and supported projects, and to stay informed about them and finally, the local government must develop a better structures that coordinate their communication

**THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PERFORMANCE**

strategies between them and the local citizen to prevent the central government interfering on how the funds are used in developing programs.

7. Conclusion

This study has been conducted to investigate the impact of communication strategies on local government performance. The communication strategy of the local government is developed as an organic document which provides orientation and reference on how to go about the internal and external communication practices in supporting other fundamental departmental functions. Through proper monitoring, review of communication impact will be carried out in order to seek opportunities for any adjustments and further improvements. Communication strategies use a systematic process to design and implement communication activities that encourage sustainable social and behaviour change. Communication strategies promote better understanding of local government role in the community and its contribution to the life of the local people or citizens and stakeholders.