

Outreach Communication Strategy in Community Mobilisation for Reproductive Health Education in Niger State of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study looked into operational significance of outreach communication adopted in the community based reproductive health education project in Bida Emirate Council in Niger State, Nigeria. The outreach initiative became imperative given the limitations placed on traditional individual extension methods. Hence, the use of outreach communication that involves extending community services to reach a wider segment of the population collectively. This project being evaluated comprises community visitations and educational campaigns with folk musical performances, videocassette recorder shows, question and answer sessions and drama sketches. A sample of 288 residents from both urban and rural communities assessed the effectiveness of the outreach program in the study area. Findings from the study reveal that outreach programs mobilized, entertained and educated people on the issues raised on the project such as family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, safe motherhood and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Residents from rural areas ranked the outreach highly in the area of social service. Outreach program strategy in various ways promoted participation in the program initiative such as dancing, listening, watching and questioning. It was hence recommended that outreach communication programs should be a virile component in all development programs, particularly, in rural areas where access to other forms of communication support is in short supply.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Recent discoveries in many developing countries including Nigeria, reveal such a dramatic increase in the spread of reproductive health situation, particularly, criminal abortion; maternal mortality and sexually transmitted diseases and the dreaded Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (United State Agency for International Development, (USAID), 1995). This is further corroborated by such alarming data, which indicate that of every 3 new AIDS cases in the world 2 are from Africa (Spore, 1999).

Measures were suggested to address this situation in an effective and efficient manner, preferably reduce the spread to lowest levels before the year 2015 (United Nations Development Program, 1995). To this end, a multi-media communication approach was suggested. However, due considerations have to be given to developing countries like Nigeria that has 70 percent of its population living in rural areas (Federal Office of Statistics, 1999). Hence, intervention approaches must be tailor made to suit the socio-cultural, economic and peculiar characteristics predominant in the rural areas. Further more, local participation is of paramount importance if success is to come out of any development initiative, particularly, in the rural sector.

Outreach communication through the use of film shows, video recorder shows, folk music, drama and puppetry have been discovered to have tremendous impact on the lives of rural people especially the associated advantages of grassroots participation in areas such as singing, dancing and asking questions (Kekovole et al., 1997). According to Kiragu et al. (1996) and Rimon et al. (1994), research findings show that outreach communication of this nature creates an atmosphere of deep interest and motivation on the part of the target audiences. In the same vein, it helps bring to the forefront issues to experts, which before then had not been anticipated. If desirable change in behaviour, knowledge, attitude and practices must be achieved, experts need to harness the numerous potentials of this strategy. It is on record that politicians have used this approach to some measure of success globally (Folarin, 1998; Singhal and Rogers, 1999), even in cases where such outreach campaigns was to their selfish ends.

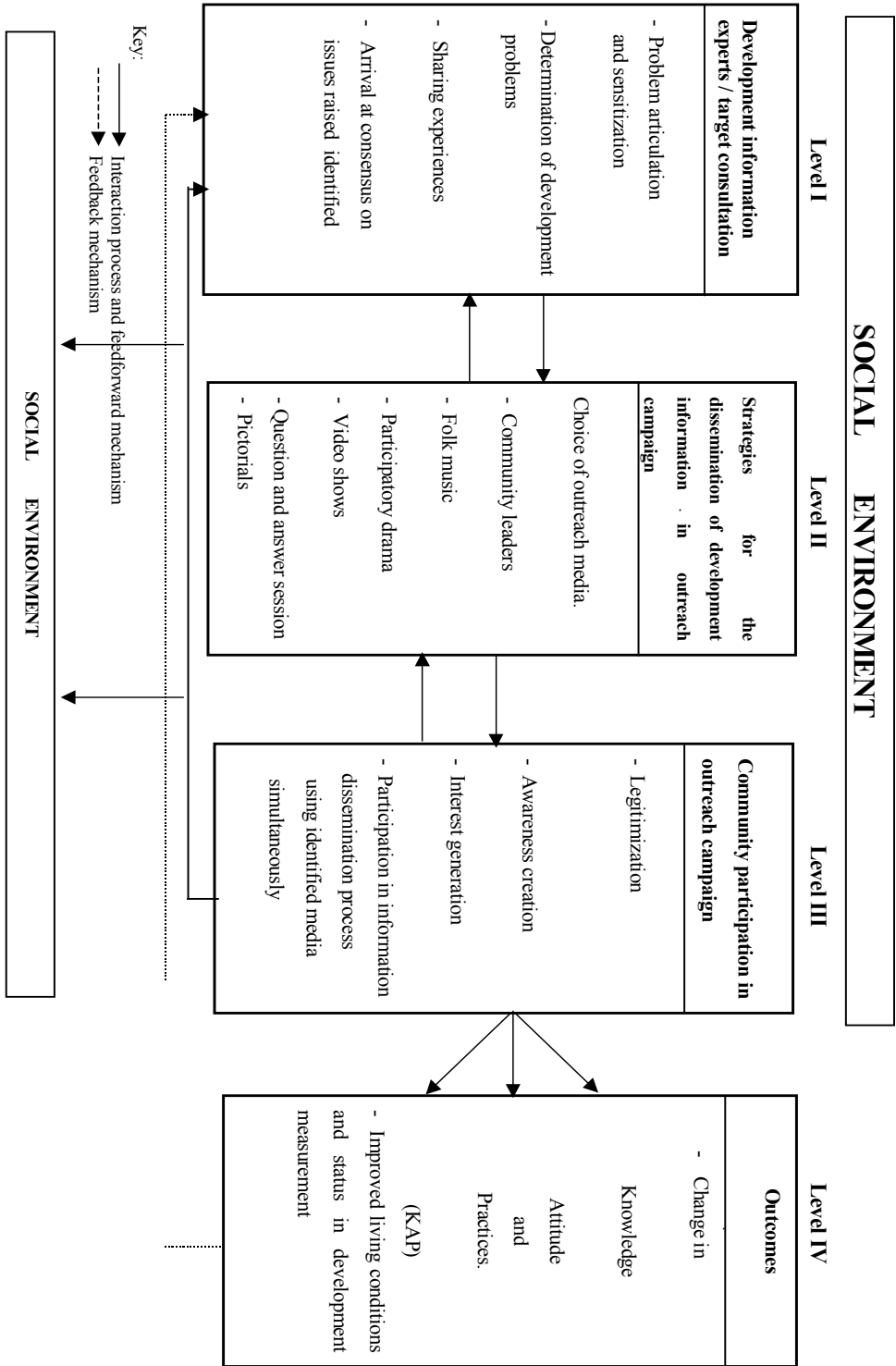


Fig. 1. A framework for participatory outreach communication

1.1 Contextual Information

Outreach communication is a strategy for the dissemination of development information in the areas of agriculture, health, education and community mobilization in social and economic or change related programmes. It is a departure from the top - down information dissemination strategies where experts assume both the problem and solution on behalf of the target population. In this circumstance, both the experts and target population operate at the same level of interaction where they make substantial input into the articulation of the problems and solutions to identified development concern. As shown on figure one, the starting point of outreach communication involves open consultation between target audiences and development experts. At this level, experts hold dialogue and consultative meetings with the audiences to determine specific development problems that require their cooperation. Consequently, they share experiences and arrive at a convergence in meaning on the issues raised by the affected parties.

At the second level, experts design strategies for the dissemination of development information with due respect to the opinions and inputs of target audiences. This is with due recognition of the peculiarities of the social environment and media use pattern that may favour outreach activities and minimize plausible cultural barriers in the implementation of such activities. Thus the choice of outreach strategy is contingent upon economic, social and cultural realities in the target communities.

At the third level, it is obvious that activities at both level one and two are dependent on the participation of the target audiences including their leaders in the programme and acceptance of development experts programmes no matter how beneficial they may be perceived to be to the target audiences.

Finally, the outcome of outreach communication intervention activities may be related to the set goals and objectives in the first instance, while the desired changes in knowledge, attitude and practices the ultimate end of development programmes. Consequently, such changes are expected to translate in to improved living standard of the target audiences. This is with particular reference to reproductive health issues

where majority are information starved (Yahaya, 2002).

1.2 Outreach Communication Media

It is in line with the proposition that media mix is a viable strategy for development communication support (Yahaya, 2001), that outreach communication strategy recognised grassroots focused media for its multi purpose roles of information, education, entertainment and communication (IEEC). Therefore, the following outreach communication channels were used in this project under review.

1. Community leadership support
2. Participatory drama
3. Folk music
4. Video tape recorder shows
5. Question and answer sessions
6. Visual support materials.

1. Community Leadership Support: Before embarking on outreach trip to any community, advance notice is sent to the community through their leaders. Such a notice is to propose a date, time and purpose of the communication campaign. Given the topmost or relevance of reproductive health in development agenda in Nigeria, most of the communities are always eager and anxious to receive the outreach communication team.

It is very important to keep to time and date of visit because of the nature of their schedule especially farmers who are the majority in rural areas. On arrival at the village or community in focus, the outreach team as a matter of respect and protocol, the first place of call is the residence of the community leader whose title may cover that village alone in the case of a village head or of a wider stretch of villages for a District Head. The community leader welcomes members with all his council members in attendance. After exchanging pleasantries, the team leader provides further insight into the mission and purpose of the outreach campaign to enlighten the people about topical issues in reproductive health that include:

- Prevention of maternal mortality and morbidity,
- Child spacing (family planning),
- Prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and the latest dreaded HIV/AIDS,
- Child development (education of children for

a better future).

At the end, the community leader gives his blessing and acceptance of the team and encourages all members of his council to go round and invite people to come and listen. The community leader takes a special seat at the venue of presentation while others are encouraged to listen with rapt attention. In fact the town crier who goes round the village/community to announce the arrival of the visiting team invites members to the village square on the directive of the community/leader. Consequently, members of the outreach team are able to execute their programmes without hindrance but with maximum support and cooperation under such a peaceful atmosphere. Hence, both the audience and team members are in close working relationship that will ensure acceptance and adoption of recommendations.

2. Participatory Drama: In an attempt to disseminate information on reproductive health as identified above with particular reference to topical issues in reproductive health that drama concept was introduced into the outreach campaign. In this strategy, a very popular comedian who is a household name in Bida Emirate for his humorous radio drama series for over ten years became the central figure in this campaign. In fact the villagers expressed gratitude not only for the educational benefits of the package but for the singular honour of seeing live a rare gem in radio drama. To them it is a memorable development. Hence, the comedian popularly known as "Ndayagi" which translates to "Mr. Yoruba man" who cannot speak the Nupe language fluently. His language tone is faulty and comedy on its own. He was the central character whose actions speak volumes and lessons from his performances always leave behind humor and memories of positive value system or intended changes expected of the target audiences.

This drama concept is participatory in many ways. First of all members of the host community are requested to present volunteers who are willing to take up simple roles particularly young boys and girls. They are usually assigned roles in the drama, which they take up with seriousness and commitment (additional attraction) to the entire exercise. During such performances, members of the audience are usually invited to

comment on certain issues as the proceeding progresses.

3. Folk Music: Music is part of Africans' way of life. In Nigeria, life is incomplete without music. Considering the pervasiveness of folk music in communal life in Nigeria, it is significant to find out how music can consciously be used to bring about desirable social effects. It was in realisation of the entertainment and educational roles of music that experts are beginning to advance frontiers in the use of music for development purposes. As a popular, pleasurable and persuasive medium in Nupe traditional society that folk music was used to enlighten people at outreach campaigns. The folk music comprises local instruments made of three drums and other four singular wooden types wrapped with treated animal skin that is beaten using specially made sticks to produce a variety of sounds and accompanying songs in a tune that provides for listening as well as dancing.

In the end messages on the thematic areas highlighted are given prominence especially HIV/AIDS. Due to the interest this concept generated a sixty minutes audiotape was produced and distributed free in the community. The clamor for more of the tapes by the general public makes it one of the most attractive and interest generating aspect of the outreach communication. Subsequently, the audiotape message has become a common song among young people especially the track on the dangers of sex promiscuity and consequences of HIV/AIDS.

4. Video Tape Recorder Show: During the proceedings of the outreach campaign a special session of about 15-30 minutes is dedicated to watching reproductive health messages on video tape recorder. The aspects shown covers health talks by experts and display of the dangers of sex promiscuity with particular reference to how victims' genitals and body system do break down as a result of infections from HIV. In fact the exclamation of "God forbid" is what everybody shouts with the sight of dying AIDS victims. Hence, the messages are assimilated and this generates more questions during the question and answer session.

5. Question and Answer Session: At the end of the campaign exercise, the audience is given the opportunity to ask questions on the

messages delivered using the various outreach media. A team of interdisciplinary experts made up of medical personnel, sociologists, communication experts and psychologists provides answers. This period offers the experts the opportunity to have first hand information about their feelings, aspirations and emerging attitudes. In the end they are encouraged to consult with their community health workers or are free to come over to the project office for further information and support.

6. *Visual Support Materials:* At the end of proceedings before the departure of the team from the outreach campaign location, the team leader publicly hand over a package of visual support materials to the community leader for fair distribution to all the households. Also, those present at the venue expresses desire to go home with some of these items too and they are given.

These materials include different posters with various reproductive health messages, handbills, stickers (for their cars, motor cycles etc.). The posters are paste in front of their houses and strategic public sites like town hall, market squares and central relaxation points among others. The good news is that the children of non-literate members read and interprets messages on the handbills to their parents. Many of them kept on asking about the visuals especially posters that they consider close to reality in educating them. What then can communication experts do to effectively use and sustain the unique aspect of outreach strategy?

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study was designed to investigate the roles of outreach communication strategy in reproductive health education in Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- (i) Determine the appropriateness of the outreach strategy in information dissemination
- (ii) Ascertain the effectiveness of outreach communication in development support
- (iii) Determine the influence of outreach communication strategy on community mobilization for reproductive health education.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Study Area

The study was carried out in Bida Emirate Council of Niger State, Nigeria. The program being evaluated adopted the outreach communication campaigns that took the form of community visitations and display of educational programs starting with courtesy call on the traditional leaders within the councils and each community visited. Entertainment folk music, participatory drama, video recorder show, distribution of visual support materials (posters, stickers and hand bills) as well as question and answer sessions were the principal components of the outreach communication strategy adopted. According to the proponent of the strategy, the entire community is usually informed ahead of the visit through the community leader. This is in accordance with the cultural expectations and traditional protocol, which has been in use in the emirate over centuries (Yahaya, 2002). This experiment took place between January 1999 and October 2000.

2.1.1 Target Audiences

The target audiences in this study are spread across the entire Bida Emirate. It is a predominantly Nupe speaking community. It has more rural population of about 60%. Literacy level is very low (36%) far below national average of 57%. Life is generally communal and strictly guided by social networks in terms of religious practices, norms, beliefs and inter-generational relationships especially social hierarchy and extended family ties which are very strong and relevant in the scheme of daily affairs. Prominent activities that were positively used for the outreach campaign are community market days especially on a Friday (general worship day for Muslims) which usually attracts large crowds and widespread of information beyond the very point of outreach campaign is evident as people from neighboring villages will spread the message further.

2.2 Sample Size

In this study, a total of 288 respondents were

randomly selected from both the urban and rural communities in the emirate. Data was generated from the interviews held with respondents in their homes between October – December 2000 with the aid of a well structured and experts validated questionnaire. The content of the questionnaire cover areas related to the study objectives.

Table one show that the sample comprises 61.1% and 38.9% of urban and rural respondents respectively. Also, 53.8% and 46.2% are male female respondents respectively. Only 14.23% are below 25 years of age, majorities of the respondents in this study are between 26-45 years (77.7%). Similarly, higher proportions (83.3%) are married. This is the typical distribution of social and personal characteristics of people in many communities in northern Nigeria where this experiment took place.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Social and Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of respondents social and personal characteristics

<i>Demographic variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Location	Urban	112	38.9
	Rural	176	61.1
Gender	Male	155	53.8
	Female	133	46.2
Age	< 25	41	14.23
	26-35	144	50.00
	36-45	80	27.7
	46-55	14	4.86
	56-65	7	2.43
Marital	Married	240	83.3
	Single	40	14.0
	Widowed	3	1.0
	Separated	5	1.7

3.2 Appropriateness of Outreach Channels to Respondents

Distribution on table 2 shows that 80% and 91% of respondents are aware of the use of folk music and drama respectively. Also, 62% and 67% are aware of video tape recorder (VTR) shows and question and answer sessions respectively. Over 40% of the respondents are often exposed to drama and folk music while about 28% are often exposed to VTR shows and question and answer sessions. About 25% are

moderately exposed to VTR shows, folk music and drama shows.

On table 2, respondents also indicated the effect of various channel in their understanding of message content. For instance, results indicate that messages were highly understood as provided by VTR shows (31.3%); drama (56.2%); folk music (39.9%); and opportunities created during question and answer time (36.5%). These findings suggest that the entire outreach package was well understood and very meaningful. Hence, it has proved to be another potent communication strategy for development support particularly the rural sector that is often excluded from conventional media channels.

3.3 Effectiveness Rating of Out-reach Channels by Respondents

The distribution in table 3 shows that 30.9% of the respondents considered Video Tape Recorders (VTR) shows highly influential in adopting reproductive health practices, drama (53.5%); folk music (44.8%) and question and answer session (44.1%). Channels respondents considered moderately effective include VTR shows (30.9%); drama (33.3%); folk music (31.9%) and question and answer session (24.3%). On the other hand a lower percentage of the respondents considered same channels not influential, particularly, VTR shows (19.4%); drama (7.3%); folk music (14.6%) and question and answer session (10.4%).

Furthermore, respondents rated their preference for outreach channels for receiving reproductive health messages. The channels highly preferred by respondents are drama (52.8%); question and answer sessions (41.0%); VTR shows (38.5%) and folk music (37.5%). These findings suggest the significance of entertainment education in change programs as well as the relevance of opportunities offered to respondents to participate in the program by asking questions and seeking clarification where necessary. As regards delivery of messages during outreach communication campaigns, about 37% considered VTR and question and answer forum (56.9%) highly effective in message delivery. In a similar manner, over 40% opined that drama and folk music as highly effective in discharging the same responsibility. Therefore, these channels offer towering promise in development support communication. Organisa-

Table 2: Distribution of appropriateness related variables

<i>Measure of channels appropriateness</i>	<i>Outreach components</i>	<i>Aware</i>	<i>Not aware</i>			<i>Total</i>
Awareness through Outreach components	VTR shows Drama	179 (62.2)*	109 (37.8)			288 (100)
	Folk music Question & Answer	264 (91.7)	24 (8.3)			288 (100)
		232 (80.6)	56 (19.4)			288 (100)
		193 (67.0)	95 (33.0)			288 (100)
Exposure		<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Total</i>
	VTR shows Drama	73 (25.3)	82 (28.5)	70 (24.3)	63 (21.9)	288 (100)
	Folk music Question & Answer	42 (14.6)	129 (44.8)	72 (25.0)	29 (10.1)	288 (100)
		54 (18.8)	128 (44.4)	72 (25.0)	34 (11.8)	288 (100)
		84 (29.2)	85 (29.5)	54 (18.8)	65 (22.6)	288 (100)
		<i>Not effective</i>	<i>Highly effective</i>	<i>Moderately effective</i>	<i>Lowly effective</i>	<i>Total</i>
	VTR shows Drama	66 (22.9)	90 (31.3)	92 (31.9)	40 (13.9)	288 (100)
	Folk music Question & Answer	21 (7.3)	162 (56.2)	88 (30.6)	17 (5.9)	288 (100)
	45 (15.6)	115 (39.9)	101 (35.1)	27 (9.4)	288 (100)	
	45 (15.6)	105 (36.5)	56 (19.4)	82 (28.5)	288 (100)	

• Percentages in parenthesis

tions involved in change programs design and implementation in developing countries should consider this strategy as a viable option to fading conventional face-to-face strategy that has its target mere passive recipients and ill motivated in adopting recommended practices.

The distribution in table 3 shows that the channels played significant roles not only in educating and entertaining people but having the strength to influence respondents to adopt

reproductive health practices. The channels were moderately effective in respondents understanding of message contents with specific reference to VTR shows (31.9); drama (30.6%); folk music (35.1%) and question and answer session (19.4%). This distribution shows that the entertainment components (drama and folk music) remain the highest discovery in the entire program. The probable explanation for this development may be as a result of the strong

Table 3: Distribution of respondents rating of outreach channels effectiveness

<i>Measure of effectiveness</i>	<i>Outreach Channels category</i>	<i>Not influential</i>	<i>Lowly influential</i>	<i>Moderately influential</i>	<i>Highly influential</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Influence on Decision to adopt practices	VTR shows Drama	56 (19.4)	52 (18.1)	91 (31.6)	89 (30.9)	288 (100)	
	Folk music	21 (7.3)	17 (5.9)	96 (33.3)	154 (53.5)	288 (100)	
	Question & Answer	42 (14.6)	25 (8.7)	92 (31.4)	129 (44.8)	288 (100)	
		30 (10.4)	61 (21.2)	70 (24.3)	127 (44.1)	288 (100)	
Preference rating		<i>Not preferred</i>	<i>Lowly preferred</i>	<i>Moderately preferred</i>	<i>Highly preferred</i>	<i>Total</i>	
	VTR shows Drama	47 (16.3)	71 (24.7)	59 (20.5)	111 (38.5)	288 (100)	
	Folk music Question & Answer	31 (10.8)	11 (3.8)	94 (32.6)	152 (52.8)	288 (100)	
		50 (17.4)	25 (8.7)	105 (36.5)	108 (37.5)	288 (100)	
		35 (12.2)	49 (17.0)	86 (29.8)	118 (41.0)	288 (100)	
		<i>Not effective</i>	<i>Lowly effective</i>	<i>Moderately effective</i>	<i>Highly effective</i>	<i>Total</i>	
	Effectiveness rating in information delivery	VTR shows Drama	45 (16.6)	69 (24.0)	66 (22.9)	108 (37.5)	288 (100)
		Folk music Question & Answer	22 (7.6)	21 (7.3)	81 (28.1)	164 (56.9)	288 (100)
		39 (12.5)	24 (8.4)	105 (36.5)	120 (41.7)	288 (100)	
		36 (12.5)	67 (23.3)	88 (30.6)	97 (33.7)	288 (100)	

• Percentages in parenthesis

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on interaction pattern

People	Very often	Moderately	Rarely	Never	Total
Friends	200 (69.4)*	53 (18.4)	16 (6.6)	19 (6.6)	288 (100)
Spouse	81 (28.1)	78 (27.1)	59 (20.5)	70 (24.3)	288 (100)
Health workers	140 (48.6)	121 (42.0)	10 (3.5)	17 (5.6)	288 (100)
Pharmacist/chemist retailers	58 (20.1)	104 (36.1)	51 (17.7)	75 (26.1)	288 (100)
Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs)	67 (23.2)	61 (21.2)	80 (27.8)	80 (27.8)	288 (100)
Others	155 (39.9)	97 (33.7)	44 (15.3)	32 (11.1)	288 (100)

*Percentages in Parenthesis

cultural appeal of folk music in the community and comic format adopted in the drama series. Also, the participatory consideration with members of target communities actively involved at each point of the program in addition to the fact that most of the actors and folk musicians are notable personalities of repute from within and outside the locality was additional advantage.

3.4 Interaction Pattern

Distribution of respondents in table 4 shows the interaction pattern of respondents in addition to the outreach consideration. Such interactions are very frequent with friends (69.4%) and health workers (48.6%). On the whole interaction pattern showed that almost all the respondents interacted with someone based on messages they received from the outreach packages. This type of interaction pattern is a follow up to the levels of participation, which is facilitated by the entertainment, and educative elements of the outreach program. These findings led credence to outreach communication as a viable strategy for rural development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study sought empirical evidence to confirm the efficacy of outreach communication in development support. Findings in the end are quite overwhelming and it is clear that community outreach program is not only able to effectively inform, educate and mobilize the target audiences but offers promise of sustainability through the participation of the grass roots population. Consequently, the success of the strategy in reproductive health development has prospects for its utilization in other areas of development concern particularly in agriculture

and other change programs.

People oriented programs should explore the potentials of this strategy and those inter-peer and Intra-spousal interaction be enhanced in addition to the well established interaction with health workers.

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