

# THE ROLE OF NGO'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *Community Mobilization refers to those activities that prepare communities to accept, receive, and support prevention interventions designed to reduce hesitancy of the community. Communication strategy is the method and line of action developed by NGOs to mobilize the community for getting healthier domino effect. NGOs strategies refer to the strategic use of communication by those seeking to advance a social or public policy initiative. Within the Community Prevention Trial, both of these activities were critical elements. This article evaluates the ongoing practices for community mobilization and suggests some new tools and techniques of communication for community mobilization. Strong communication strategies are also helpful to avoid the communication barriers. A sample of 14 community mobilizer was invited to take part in the study. For this purpose researcher has conducted the in-depth interview with community mobilizer. In Pakistan most of the NGOs have structured communication strategies for community mobilization . However; they would like to indicate some methods before going into the community. Here the authors argue for the need to include both verbal and nonverbal communication skills for the community mobilizer. It was observed that they were in dire need of training and skills development programs to reap better results the study surfaces some important suggestions for NGOs sector to improve their communication strategies for accomplishing win-win outcomes for community mobilization.*

**Keywords:** Communication, Mobilization, NGOs, Community Mobilizer

## 1-INTRODUCTION

Communication plays very important and vital role in all fields of today's life. Effective communication strategy is essential for the success of any project, whether it is started by the Government or any Non-Governmental Organization. Communication strategy is designed around the goals of a project that's why it varies from project to project. Communication always plays an important role in developing strategy for development, as Inagaki explains it: Communication has an important role in the growth of a society at the international level and last 60 years have proven it. Mostly communication cooperate the development efforts in the background and assist it [1]. NGOs have an important role in the existing Pakistani scenario. Government of Pakistan is unable to provide all necessities of life to the whole population of the country, as we have scarce financial resources and a weak economic structure. Whenever we face any natural disaster or tragedy, local as well as International NGOs (INGOs) offers their services to help the sufferers. The study explores the dynamics of communication strategies of NGOs and their role in mobilizing the community. The main purpose of the research is to understand the basic communication strategies that NGOs use to communicate their message and which strategies and methods they find most effective for the public. The research will be a good work for professionals as well as for students to understand the importance of communication strategies in community mobilization and how NGOs are using different techniques to communicate their message to the audience. Importance of communication in our life is obvious, Nancy Morris briefly tells the importance of communication in peoples' awareness as it is to change the living conditions of the people from far-flung and neglected areas, communication is believed to be a key

element. It helps to convey the message to the general public and aware them about the program[2]. Community Mobilization is an activity in which all sectors of a society engaged with each other conducts a collective effort to address a health, social, or environmental issue. It helps to engage policy makers and opinion leaders, local, state, and federal governments, professional groups, religious groups, businesses, and individual community members. Community Mobilization helps the change process by involving individuals and groups of a society; it also gives them a sense of empowerment [3]. Communicating the strategy to subordinates or to the community is also very important. Strategy in simple meaning is where we are going and how are we going there? So a good strategy should be very clear to understand and for understanding there is a need of good communication methods. Communication strategy is communicating change and it should base on strong messages and impressive methods that can adjust the behaviors of the community. While discussing Communication Strategy theories [4], stated that it is a fact that communication is the most powerful tool in social life and business management. It plays the major role to link people together and make the relationships. Effective communication is important for the success in achieving the desired goals and a good communication strategy can help in this regard[4]. According to author[5] the role of communication in the social change process as: "Communication for social change is about people taking into their own hands the communication processes that will allow them to make their voices heard, to establish horizontal dialogues with planners and development specialists, to take decisions on the development issues that affect their lives, to ultimately achieve social changes for the benefit of their community" [5]. Development Communication is designing

research and conveying it to the people who are struggling with economic, social and political problems in developing countries. Communication should be the important part of the development plan and mobilizing the community because its main objective is to create systems, modes and strategies that could provide opportunities for the people to understand the development project easily and they can get maximum benefits from the development project and can improve their lives. Participatory development communication means to involve the local community in development process and procedures using different techniques and at various levels of development research and implementation. It helps to give them a sense of empowerment and also helps to accept them the "change". Without involving the local community and mobilizing it for change process or developmental work it is not easy to implement the development and get the desired goals. To involve and mobilize the community in a development project, NGO or other change agents need solid communication strategies that suit the local settings and according to the need of that very society. The way the researcher or practitioner conveys the message to the local audience will affect the results of a development project. Attitude towards local people, a way of exchanging the ideas, establishing contacts with the community and build a sense of participation in them will help to get the desired results. Mass media tools, interpersonal communication tools, traditional media tools and information and communication technology (ICT) can help to mobilize a society and change their behaviors to accept the change [6]. Communication can play an important role in development, when communities decide their own agenda they can get better results by interacting with different stakeholders and work more independently. CSC has five main phases of the process: community dialogue, collective action, encourage individuals to change their behavior, social impact, getting success in main goals [7]. In the field of communication two models are considered very influential. One is diffusion model and second is participatory model. Both have their own positive and negative points. Communication is an integral part of the social change so we cannot neglect its role in the change process in a society. Communication for social change helps the people to sit together and do a dialogue to identify their needs and make a plan to fulfill those needs through various practical steps. Besides this, participatory communication also engages the people as an active citizen in the society and develops different life skills in them for a better living. Participatory development has four basic stages those are Researches, Design, Implementation and Evaluation stage. Participatory communication emphasizes on involving the local community in not only the implement phase but also in the planning phase so they can work more effectively and feel a sense of partnership and empowerment. Participation of the community is of four types, passive participation, and participation by consultation, participation by collaboration and empowerment participation. Passive participation is considered as least participatory in which local people are not fully involved in the process and most of the times just

informed what is going to happen or has already been happened. Whereas empowerment participation fully engages the people in all phases of the development and gives them the right as an equal partner[8]. Effective communication is considered as a core of development project and according to [9], effective communication is an essential tool for organizing and maintaining a good social and working relationship. It involves constant change of ideas and interactions among people for the solution of their problems and they see effective communication as a necessary part of every aspect of group functioning [9]. Community development involves the people of a particular society in the whole process of the development and this thing helps them to accomplish the community's set goals. Communication process brings all stakeholders together who are involved in a community development and gives them a chance to participate in dialogue of ideas on development needs, objectives and actions [10]. Community development is a complete process of involving and motivating the people. In the community development process, communicator or mobilizer engages the masses in different tasks related to development and they define, identify, analyze and solve problems of their area [11]. In [12] author says that words are the main tools and instruments in the community development and appropriate use of words are important while communicating the message to the audience. Choosing and arranging words in a way so they exactly transfer the basic idea in the mind of the people is the key task of mobilizing.

### 3-METHODS AND MATERIAL

A sample of 14 community mobilizer was invited to take part in the study. The sample was a convenience one and the snowball approach to sampling was adopted. Each respondent was asked to recommend to the researcher another community mobilizer who might be able to articulate their views about community mobilization. It was felt that 14 respondents should be able to supply varied and detailed accounts for the purposes of this study. For the collection of the data an in-depth interview was prepared. All community mobilizer were interviewed by the researcher on two occasions, for between 30 and 45 min. All interviews were recorded, with the permission of the respondents being interviewed. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed into computer files. Care was taken by the researcher to assure the respondents that they and the place of their work would not be identifiable in any subsequent report. Once the final research report was written, the tapes from the interviews were destroyed. All of the interview transcripts were read by the researcher and coded in the style of a grounded theory approach to data analysis. Two independent researchers were asked to verify the seeming accuracy of the category system and after discussion with them; minor modifications were made to it. In the grounded theory, literature, a good category system is said to have 'emerged' from the data. Other commentators have noted that, in the end, it is always the researcher who finds and generates that system.

#### **4-RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

The majority of community mobilizers used both verbal and nonverbal communication. However, some were strict in using specific communication method while mobilizing the community. Six out of Ten said they used both verbal and nonverbal. Three said they used mostly verbal and only One respondent said that he used nonverbal communication mostly. It shows that verbal communication is more effective and helpful in mobilizing a community. According to one respondent "It is very important to talk to the community in their own language and in their common accent". While discussing this matter with a representative of an NGO, It is found that they used "Dars e Quran" (Quranic lecture) as a mean of communicating to the community. He said "Message of the Quran is very easy and has impact on the people, so we use these messages to mobilize the community". Usually mobilizers used lectures and face to face discussions to convey the message and interpersonal communication is more successful and used in community mobilization. People gave more attention to the word of mouth than the written literature. One reason of using more verbal communication was that the majority of people belonged to poor areas and they were illiterate, so they could not read the written brochures and other material. Other than verbal and nonverbal techniques, almost all respondents were agreed that soft behavior and polite manners were essential for community mobilization. One respondent replied "It is the basic requirement of our work that we should adopt good manners and talk politely with the community, even in difficult situations. This attitude helps to win the hearts of people and to convey the message more effectively". Another mobilizer told that motivational skills were very important in mobilizing a community and helped to engage the community in the program. Major communication barriers in community mobilization were language, understanding level of the audience and illiteracy. Low literacy rate and little understanding of the issues caused the barrier of trust; often people took community mobilizer of NGO as a negative person and behaved rudely. A respondent told "If the message is not matched with the mental level of audience, it can create problems. We try to avoid miscommunication so they can perceive the message easily". Another mobilizer expressed "sometimes we have to face the rude behavior of the community, they perceived, as negatively and think that we have our own hidden agenda. This is because of their low level of understanding the new ideas". All community mobilizers were agreed with the importance of making the communication strategy for community mobilizers. They considered it as a key element and the heart of the community mobilization. A bad or weak communication strategy could not convey the message properly and it could create problems for the mobilization process. A respondent said, "Communication strategy has a key role. There should not be any gap between community and mobilizer; a good communication strategy can fill this gap". All community mobilizers were agreed with the importance of training programs for communication strategy. Community mobilizers considered that training programs related to communication strategy could help them

to learn new skills and effective use of the technology for communication purpose. The majority of respondents said that they collected the information related to a particular community before developing the communication strategy for community mobilization. Only Two respondents said that they did not need to collect the information before. Usually data related to language, living style, habits of the people, cultural aspects, norms and values, traditions, customs and trends of the people were collected before going into the community for mobilization. This data helped the NGOs to develop communication strategies according to the needs of the community. A respondent told, "Collecting information is very important and it depends on the nature of the project and we collect information that can help us in making the strategy. We try to take helpers from the same community for our guidance and it is more beneficial for the program". A respondent who said that he did not collect information before making communication strategy said, "We specially do not collect the information or send any survey team. We use our observation skills when go to any area and perceive the things. Mostly we know that in which area of Lahore what are the trends of local community and what their culture is. So it is not necessary to collect information for making communication strategy". Usually NGOs did not have a proper communication strategy to eliminate community crisis if it occurred by their weak communication strategy or because of people's low level of understanding. A respondent told, "A community mobilization can fail due to bad communication strategy or if you do not succeed to let the people understand you. Once we went to a family to tell them that their child was in a jail and we could provide free legal services. They thought we have kidnapped their son. It was a difficult situation happened because of low understanding level of the family and our communication was not matched with their mental level". Involvement of local communities in the planning phase of the program provides them a feeling of self-respect and honor. They feel good and participate actively in given tasks. Involving local community from initial stage can reduce the chances of resistance and increase the participation. Making different teams or committees and assigning tasks to the local community is helpful to collect required data.

#### **5-CONCLUSION:**

Community Mobilization is a nice effort to engage the public for their development and NGOs are doing this job on a regular basis, but there is a strong need to conduct these efforts in a systematic way. Especially developing appropriate communication strategy for each mobilization program is essential and they should be developed with proper structure. Community mobilizers think that they should get proper training to know the different elements involved in making and launching the communication strategy and their NGOs should arrange some training programs. These trainings can also help the mobilizers to know the latest technologies used for mobilization of a community.

While going for the community mobilization, NGOs should keep in mind the local setting and culture of the area. It can help them to make more effective and useful communication strategies. Norms and Values, Habits and Views of prominent personality of an area have strong influence on the living style of that area, if NGOs go for mobilization with proper information based communication strategies, chances of the success will be more.

#### **Recommendations and Suggestions:**

The study recommends following points on the role of communication strategies in community mobilization. It is important to raise awareness and understanding of communication strategies to the management of the NGOs. Community immobilizers are familiar with the concept, but need more attention from the management of the organizations. NGOs should develop some structured Standard Operating Procedures to develop communication strategies for community mobilization. Loose structure strategies cannot fulfill the modern requirements. Nonverbal communication is less effective according to the majority of mobilizers, this thinking should not be promoted. Nonverbal communication can play an effective role in mobilizing a community if it is used intelligently, NGOs should consider it seriously and develop some smart strategies to use nonverbal communication for community mobilization purposes. It is suggested that short courses related to human psychology can be helpful for community mobilizers to understand the individuals and change their communication strategy if it is needed.

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