

**INDIGENOUS
COMMUNICATION FORMS AND
THEIR POTENTIAL TO CONVEY
FOOD SECURITY MESSAGES IN
RURAL ETHIOPIA**

**HAGOS NIGUSSIE (PhD Candidate)
The University of Queensland,
Australia**

BACKGROUND

- ❑ 85 % of the Ethiopian population lives in rural areas and the nation relies predominantly on agricultural economy (CSA, 2007).
- ❑ Agriculture accounts for about 50% of the country's GDP, 65% of the total exports and 85% of employment with main exports are coffee, oilseeds, pulses, hides and skins (MoFED, 2007).

CONT...

- However, with the three successive regimes, the Ethiopian Agriculture has undergone through several policy changes in terms of focus and major goals (Kassahun, 2012).

1) THE IMPERIAL REGIME (1930-1974)

The policy focus in imperial regime was to improve exports in line with the modernization of agriculture meant to earn foreign currency (Kassahun, 2012).

2) THE MILITARY REGIME (1975-1991)

- The agricultural policy focussed on the socialist path of development and introduced radical agrarian changes.
- Peasant associations were established as the nuclei of grassroots administration that served as a means for controlling local communities (Kassahun, 2012).

3) ETHIOPIAN PEOPLES' REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC FRONT (SINCE 1991)

EPRDF's rural development policy is guided by Agriculture-Led Development Industrialization (ADLI). ADLI includes:

- Input provision to peasants;
- Promotion of small-scale irrigation;
- Improved livestock herds;
- Environmental protection and natural resource management (Holt & Dessaiegn, 1999).

STUDY SETTING

The study setting was in two rural districts of Eastern Tigray specifically the: Irob and Gulomekeda areas



CONT...

- These districts were battle grounds for most of the wars the country entered into including the 1998 Ethio-Eritrean border conflicts. During these wars, people were displaced from their homes and lost most of their belongings.
- Conflicts may not necessarily cause food insecurity but may result in demolishing infrastructures and loss of personal belongings that severally affect peoples' livelihoods.

WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?

- Gillespie and Haddad (2001) note that food insecurity refers to inability of households to have reliable access to food in sufficient quantity and quality to enjoy active and healthy life.
- Oriola (2009) also states that food security entails producing food that will go round every citizen both in quality and quantity.

CONT...

- **FAO (2012) states that population growth, urbanization and rising incomes seem to have put more pressure on food demand.**
- **Ethiopia is one of the most food insecure countries in the Sub-Saharan region (Ejiga, 2006; Birhanu, 2004).**
- **WFP (2009) indicated that more than 58% of the total population in Tigray live in absolute poverty situation more serious compared to the national average 44.4%.**

RURAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS

Rural food security is based on food security packages provided in the form of loans, directly purchased or through gov't support.

These are:

- Fertilizers
- Animal husbandry
- Bee keeping
- Poultry and also
- Small scale water projects

CONT...

- Development programs in eastern Tigray including food security are undertaken by development agents trained outside of the people with different languages and cultural backgrounds.
- However, the language of communication in itself is becoming a barrier to mutual understanding. Bicker, Pottier and Sillitoe (2002:19) argued that communication facilitated by outsiders does not necessarily accommodate 'cultural diversity.'

CONT...

- Servaes (1999:3) remarks that the culture and communication dimensions of development have long been given a short spot. He links them together and states that “only in the last ten years has it been realized that culture and communication could well have a fundamental impact on the entire question of development.”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Epistemology

- Interpretivist



Paradigm

- Multiplicity
paradigm of
Development



**Design
Frameworks**

- Ethnography



**Methods of
Data Collection**

- Multiple

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Multiplicity paradigm of development (Servaes, 2004) was taken as the basis for this study. This paradigm focuses on people, 'endogenous development' and the attention to power issues (Mefalopulos, 2003; Servaes, 2003; Scott, 2001).

Overall, the focus of this paradigm is that there is no a single path of development for nations as each can devise their own development strategies.

CONT...

- Based on this, a “culture-centered approach” Dutta (2011) was employed to examine how people view the existing food security programs, the significance of interpersonal communication and the social networks in supporting the rural food security initiatives.
- CCA picks up the cultural turn in development communication to foster multiple pathways of development (Servaes, 1999).

WHAT IS INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION?

- Several terms have been used to designate indigenous communication forms. Some of them are:
 - Oramedia (Ugboajah, 1985);
 - Indigenous communication systems (Wang & Dissanayake, 1984);
 - Folk media (Panford et al, 2001);
 - Traditional communication (Ushe, 2010).

CONT...

Kyeremeh's (2005:16) definition best captures the focus of this study. He defines it as:

Any form of indigenous communication system, which by virtue of its origin from, any integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for message in a way and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbols, institutions and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes.

CONT...

- Therefore, the centrality of indigenous communication forms is that they constitute an indigenous communication system determined by interpersonal and social intercourse (Wang & Dissanayake, 1982).

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION FORMS IN EASTERN TIGRAY

- Some of the commonly used indigenous communication forms in eastern Tigray are:
 - Aa'dar (oral poetry)
 - Warsim (traditional information exchange)
 - Goila (traditional songs and dance)
 - Proverbs

WHY INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION TO RURAL PEOPLE?

- **Accessibility** (require no infrastructure and technological advancement);
- **Cost effective** (originate there amongst the public);
- **Credibility** (people trust members of their social networks)

CONT...

- Rogers (2003) argued that innovations (messages) presented by homophilic sources (those who are like the receivers) are better accepted and shared as they are more likely to reflect the communities' experiences and problems as seen through their own cultural lens.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION VS MODERN MEDIA IN EASTERN TIGRAY

- Lack of access to national media outlets
- Illiteracy = 33.8% (CSA, 2007).
- Language competency
- The idea of 'Ourness' and 'Otherness'
- We are the 'Marconi'

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- Obijiofor (1998:162) contends that the “direction of Africa’s development will be influenced by socio-cultural factors and the future mode of communication in Africa.”
- Obijiofor further noted that telephone remains as a future channel of communication in the continent. Yet messages through telephone will hold consequences for certain socio-cultural practices in the continent.

DEVELOPMENT MESSAGES THROUGH INDIGENOUS COMM FORMS IN EASTERN TIGRAY

1) PROVERBS

The case of a dog with fluffy hair



2) AA'DAR (ORAL POETRY)

**Adoha Irob yiiway ohgiina
Miihro nublek daate mamiina
Limaa'tko aa'red masiina**

Dear charming three Irobs;

Despite education, we need to make dialogue amongst us;

And no one should refrain from participating in development programs in our area.

3) SONGS

Adiye maliyoy Danhsa atikile liiyo balasa:

(I won't relocate to 'Dansha' rather I will plant a cactus tree in my backyard).



CONT...

‘Mimihidar birra beto wutsue aynah abito?’

What would be the fate of the poor if government officials use the allocated budget for beer and their personal benefits?

CONCLUSION

- ❑ There is no a clearly stated food security communication strategy in eastern Tigray but food security messages are conveyed through government meetings in similar manner to other political issues.
- ❑ Both rural people and development agents have believed that the centuries old indigenous communication forms can effectively convey food security messages.

CONT....

□ Aa'dar (oral Poetry) and Goila (traditional songs) were found to be more of more preference to the rural people and also more adaptable to convey food security messages.

Despite this potential however, indigenous communication forms are not applied in food security communication strategies to connect people to food security programs.

CONT...

THANK YOU!