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Examining the Effectiveness of Indigenous Language in Climate Change Communication in Selected Communities of Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract
Effective communication that will enable the people particularly the rural dwellers to better understand Climate Change issues, continues to be a challenge confronting mitigation and adaptation action. In a sample representation of estimated 141,116 populations in the Jiwa and Barangoni communities of Federal Capital Territory FCT-Abuja, north-central zone, adopted as case studies, the study examined the effectiveness of indigenous language in Climate Change communication. Using participatory communication theory and primary sources of data gathering and analysis methods through Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), the study found that using English as a language for communicating Climate Change does not lead to the locals' understanding of Climate Change messages. This is mainly because a huge rural population does not have English literacy, but understands only Hausa and Gbagyi languages. Therefore, the study concluded that the use of English as a language of Climate Change Communication affects the rural dwellers understanding of the issues. Hence, the study recommended the use of indigenous language for effective Climate Change communication.

Keywords: Communication, Climate Change, Indigenous, Language, Rural Dwellers

Introduction

Borchert (2007), chronicles how in 1827, Jean Baptiste Fourier, was the first person to explain how the earth can remain warmer using the greenhouse comparison. Also, in the 1890s periods, Svante Arrhenius a Swedish scientist worked jointly with Thomas Chamberlain to explain how the increase of carbon dioxide by human activities can keep the earth warm. However, when the United Nations (UN) held its first Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, it admitted that Climate Change is likely to be a challenge facing mankind in years to come.

Having identified Climate Change as a challenge that will confront mankind, in 1988, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) worked together to put in place the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC's role was to appraise and aggregate scientific and socio-economic studies on Climate Change and global warming (Toulmin, 2009).

The IPCC in discharge of its responsibilities has produced reports showing how Climate Change is impacting the environment (IPCC, 2023). Also, scholars such as Dow and Downing (2007) explained how Climate Change is impacting Africa and the world.

The search for interventions that will guarantee effective communication to enable people to understand Climate Change issues and encourage them to embrace mitigation and adaptation action led the United Nations (UN) through its Department of Global Communication to develop communication guidelines targeted at educating and mobilizing the people toward addressing the issues (United Nations, 2003). It is within this context that Sian et al. (2017), urge states across the world to design Climate Change communication strategies that will enable people to

understand the issues that will encourage them to take mitigation and adaptation action.

However, Nye and Rydin (2008), in their explanation of challenges facing effective Climate Change communication, observe that state and non-state actors are unable to design communication strategies that will enable people to understand the issues and encourage them to pursue mitigation and adaptation actions. Also, Depoux et al. (2017), point out that the extent the state and non-state actors will go in addressing climate change is largely dependent on how they communicate it to the people which plays a key role in how they perceive and respond to the issues.

This is in line with Nerlich et al. (2010), postulations that the inability of state and non-state actors to simplify Climate Change issues makes it difficult for scientists to communicate them to people. And, people's lack of understanding of the issues has become a big challenge to mobilizing them for mitigation and adaptation action.

Climate Chang impact across communities in Nigeria is increasingly manifesting in flooding, desertification, and changes in rainfall patterns. Some of the impacts are resulting in poor agricultural yield and loss of livestock farming, just to mention two examples. The Federal Ministry of Environment, Climate Change Department 2011 report shows how Climate Change is impacting Nigeria. It shows that if effective mitigation and adaptation action is not done, the country will lose about 11 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to Climate Change and may likely rise to a 30 percent loss by the year 2050. It estimated the loss to be between N15 trillion and N69 trillion

Also, Nigeria's Ministry of Environment (2010), points out that although the Nigerian state is facing Climate Change impact, the state is yet to put together reliable information that will enable effective Climate Change communication that will mobilize the people for mitigation and adaptation action. The ministry argues that the Nigerian state needs to put a comprehensive Climate Change information management system in place that will enable effective communication and policy formulation on Climate Change issues. Climate Change has become one of the major environmental challenges facing mankind globally. It is affecting many ecosystems and habitats and contributing to changes in temperature and rainfall patterns with rural farmers being among the most affected in the Sub-Saharan Africa (Tarhule, 2005). However, humans' ability to respond to Climate Change by embracing mitigation and adaptation action is dependent on how they understand the issue, and that is largely dependent on how it is effectively communicated (Mawa, 2023). The United Nations has recognized the importance of effective Climate Change communication, hence through its Department of Global Communication put in place communication guidelines for climate change, targeted at educating and mobilizing the people to take action toward addressing the challenges it poses to the environment that is affecting human existence (United Nation, 2003).

This means that efforts targeted towards addressing Climate Change must consider how well it is being communicated to the people and how well they understand the issues. It is within this context that Tarhule (2005), points out that Climate Change communication must be mutual and symbiotic with both parties being able to clearly understand the message. He argues that many Climate Change communications are one-sided with the intended beneficiaries not being able to understand the message.

However, the lack of effective communication that does not enable the people to have a better understanding of the Climate Change issue is one of the major challenges confronting interventions targeted at mobilizing the people for adaptation and mitigation action. This challenge has continued because Climate Change communication from state and non-state actors has not been able to effectively educate a good number of people to have a better understanding of the issues. It is in line with this that Mawa (2023), points out that the state and non-state actors are yet to effectively communicate Climate Change which is responsible for why many people particularly the rural dwellers do not take mitigation and adaptation action seriously. Also, that is why some

rural dwellers do not believe that Climate Change indeed exists.

The use of English as a language of Climate Change communication and the disregard for indigenous languages has contributed to the people particularly the rural dwellers not understanding the issues. This also contributes to reasons Climate Change communication does not resonate with the people, hence the importance of decolonizing Climate Change communication and narratives. Furthermore, the use of English as a language of communication has continued to impact Climate Change communication mainly because the Nigerian state has continued to adopt it as an official language across all the regions (Bamgbose, 1971 & 1991).

Farmers in rural communities across the six Area Councils of Federal Capital Territory (FCT-Abuja), Nigeria's capital city, continue to recount how Climate Change is impacting them with some of them having gory narratives of how they are losing their yam, grain, and livestock to Climate Change. In their narratives, Climate Change is resulting in the hotness of weather and changes in rainfall patterns that are making their yams decay in storage facilities, poor grain yields, and dryness of streams and ponds that are hugely impacting their livestock (Mawa, 2023)

However, effective Climate Change communication targeting rural communities in FCT-Abuja and other parts of Nigeria continues to be a challenge because a huge number of the rural population rely on the indigenous language as a language of communication and do not have English literacy. Therefore, within the context of the study, it is safe to say that communication interventions targeting rural people should be crafted using indigenous languages. This will enable the rural people to understand Climate Change issues better. Also, their proper understanding of the issue will guide their participation and drive their perception and motive over the community mitigation and adaptation plan. Although, some persons may not agree with this, however, key lessons from investigating the effectiveness of indigenous language in Climate Change communication in the selected communities, will provide a footprint analysis in Nigeria on the effect of indigenous language in understanding Climate Change, especially among rural dwellers.

The study adopts Participatory Communication Theory: This is a theoretical approach that illustrates the necessity of people's involvement and their contributions to remedies for solving issues impacting them through the communication process (Freire,1996). Also, the participatory communication theory enables knowledge diffusion and facilitates a procedure that allows members of the community to put in place local solutions that are suitable to address their unique issues and do not allow the imposition of external readymade remedies on the people (Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso 2008).

Likewise, Mishra (2017), observes that participatory communication theory believes that active participation of people through dialogue on issues affecting them is one of the most effective approaches to addressing them. Correspondingly, Mefalopulos (2008), observes that participatory communication theory puts people at the centre of development and their active participation empowers them to contribute ideas targeted toward addressing issues impacting them.

It is within the context of the theory support for the active participation of people on problems impacting them through a communication process, that it serves as a theoretical framework of analysis in the study.

Study objective

The study objective is to examine the effectiveness of indigenous language in Climate Change communication and to assess whether the use of indigenous language can help rural dwellers to better understand Climate Change issues.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted Jiwa community located along Gwagwa – Dei Dei area of Abuja Municipal Area Council and Barangoni community located along Jere - Kaduna Road in Bwari Area Council of Federal Capital Territory FCT-Abuja, as case studies. Qualitative methods of Focused Group Discussion (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used for data gathering and analysis. The FGDs and

KIIs discussions were focused on how effective is indigenous language to Climate Change communication in line with the research objectives. Also, desktop research was employed to review relevant literature.

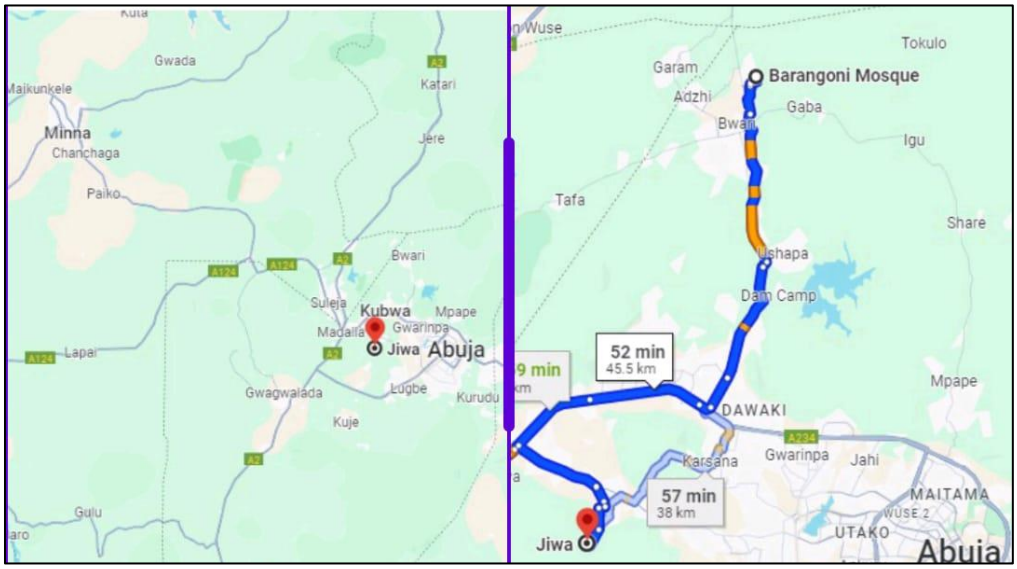

Figure 1: The Study Area

Study sample

FCT-Abuja has an estimated population of about 3.6 million covering 7,650 kilometers of land mass with six Area Councils. The study held Focused Group Discussions among 22 participants, 11 from each of the two selected communities. Key Informant Interviews among 20 members, 10 from each of the selected communities, 15 Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives, 11 Journalists, and 12 Area Council officials. Overall, 80 participants took part in the study.

Results and Discussion

The case studies examined do not represent the whole FCT-Abuja communities and the Nigerian state, nonetheless, the study gives an understanding of primary accounts of the effectiveness of indigenous languages in Climate Change communication. The study found that the use of English as a language of Climate Change communication affects rural dwellers' ability to understand Climate Change messages. This means that part of the challenges towards addressing Climate Change largely depend on the inability of the state and non-state actors to effectively communicate the issues to the people, particularly the rural dwellers, using the language they understand.

40 out of the 42 community members who participated in the study say the use of English as a language of Climate Change communication is largely a reason the locals do not understand the issues. According to them, the locals will understand Climate Change information better when communicated in Hausa or Gbagyi languages that are used for social interaction among them. 39 out of the 42 of them, said that English which is the current language of Climate Change communication in Nigeria limits the understanding of the rural dwellers of the issues. Also, a huge number of rural dwellers do not understand the English language but have a better understanding of indigenous languages, hence when Climate Change issues are communicated using indigenous languages, the entire communities will understand what is being said. For them, the understanding of the issues through indigenous languages will make it easy to mobilize them for mitigation and adaptation action.

13 out of the 15 NGO representatives that participated in the study agree that indigenous languages and not English is the best way to communicate Climate

Change to the people especially when targeting the rural population. According to them, many rural dwellers do not understand English and rely on indigenous languages for communication and social interactions. Therefore, the use of indigenous languages and not English for Climate Change communication will enable the rural dwellers to understand the issues better and take action. 11 out of 15 of them, say the use of English as a language of Climate Change communication by the state and non-state actors has not enabled us to effectively communicate issues around Climate Change to the people particularly the rural dwellers. According to 10 of them, technical terms such as emission, ozone layer, decarbonization, etc, need to be simplified in indigenous languages to be able to effectively communicate their meaning to the rural dwellers. Also, the state and non-state actors in their communication interventions, should use the indigenous languages to explain to the rural dwellers what Climate Change means, and that is the only way to effectively communicate the issues to their understanding and encourage them to take action. However, 8 out of them, said that indigenous languages are firmly ingrained in local culture, hence using them makes it easier to connect and communicate Climate Change information in a way that connects with their culture and languages. Also, indigenous languages encourage inclusivity and ensure no one is left out of Climate Change discussions while it empowers them to participate in adaptation and mitigation action actively.

10 out of the 11 journalists that participated in the study, said the use of indigenous languages is the most effective way to communicate Climate Change, especially to the rural population. According to them, the use of indigenous language helps rural farmers understand Climate Change information better. They gave examples of how the translation of Climate Change information into Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo languages by the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMET) is helping rural farmers to easily understand the issues and act on them.

All the 12 Local Council officials who participated in the study, blamed the inability of the rural dwellers to understand Climate Change on the use of English by the state and non-state actors as a language of communication. According to them, Climate Change communication is full of concepts that need to be simplified using indigenous languages to make them meaningful to the rural people. They linked Climate Change issues to COVID-19 example where they said the state and non-state actors could not effectively communicate it to the locals and that prevented the people from embracing preventive action. For them, the rural people must have a better understanding of Climate Change before encouraging them to embrace mitigation and adaptation action. Hence using indigenous languages and not English for Climate Change communication is one of the effective ways to make the locals understand the issues and mobilize them for mitigation and adaptation action.

Conclusion

The objective of the study is to provide insight into the role of indigenous languages in Climate Change communication using selected FCT-Abuja communities as case studies. However, the study found that the people's understanding of Climate Change especially the rural dwellers is largely dependent on how it is communicated to them. And that the inability of the state and non-state actors to use indigenous languages as a language for Climate Change communication is a major reason a good number of people especially the locals do not have a better understanding of Climate Change issues. Also, understanding Climate Change issues through indigenous languages will make it easy to mobilize the locals for mitigation and adaptation action.

However, many of the technical terms such as, emission, ozone layer, decarbonization, etc, that are used in Climate Change communication need to be simplified in indigenous languages for the locals to understand them. Also, indigenous languages are firmly ingrained in local culture, hence using them makes it easier to connect and communicate Climate Change information in a way that connects with their culture and languages. That brings about inclusivity that ensures no one is left out of Climate Change discussions while it empowers them to participate in adaptation and mitigation action actively.

Furthermore, the rural people must have a better understanding of Climate Change before encouraging them to embrace mitigation and adaptation action. Hence using indigenous languages and not English for Climate Change communication is one of the effective ways to achieve that and mobilize them for mitigation and adaptation action.

Recommendation

The study provides the following recommendations

(1) State and non-state actors should deploy indigenous languages as a language for Climate Change communication and advocacy, that way people especially rural dwellers will have a better understanding of the issues.

(2) Interventions targeting mitigation and adaptation action should prioritize people's understanding of Climate Change issues as their participation largely depends on their understanding of the issues.

(3) Active community participation in all Climate Change communication targeting the rural dwellers should be encouraged, which will enable the people to contribute to solutions towards addressing problems impacting them, build trust, and guarantee sustainability.

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