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Communication Management: Sustainable Development-A Communication Challenge

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development (SD)with social, economic and environmental dimensions and considerations for the present as well as for the posterity needs to push effective and efficient strategies related to numerous fields i.e. finance, marketing, governance, communication for management and implementation of schemes, projects and policies. The paper focuses on one underpinning strategic area: Communication management. The SD programme involves multi-stakeholders – national, international agencies, government, policy makers, implementers and real practitioners; but clarity of concept and awareness among most of the stakeholders is still missing. Besides, sustainable development is a communications challenge because it is difficult to promote, persuade and convince people for action and practice in day to day life. To translate the great futuristic vision into specific short and long-term actions at various levels, integration of and interaction among different stakeholders is inevitable. The success requires active participation of all and sundry throughout the process. The paper tries to explore the need of effective communication management for a successful sustainable transition and considers numerous aspects of communication management: Communication objectives, Audience analysis, Communication flow, communication tools for bridging various gaps, information dissemination, action orientation, solving barriers and over all synchronization of sustainable development and communication management. The discussion finds that effective communication management can play a crucial role at all stages and has enough potential to meet various challenges associated with the implementation of sustainable development programme and thus recommends making Communication management an integral part of action plan. The paper focuses on the implementation and success perspective.

KEYWORDS: Communication Management, Sustainable Development, Communication Challenge, Success.

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.i. Definition

The term Sustainable Development(SD) has broad connotations. Let us consider a few definitions, defined by scholars, scientists, researchers and policy makers. Harlem Brundtl and report 'Our common future', published towards the end of the twentieth century defines that "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need". It is well said that " Sustainable development focuses on economic development that goes hand-in-hand with ecological integrity and social equity".2Further, As regards business perspective, sustainable development can be defined as " business working together with each other sectors of society to identify and progress towards ''sustainable future.''3Andrew Griffiths opines that SD concerns not only ecological and environmental but also social and economic aspects.4Some scholars go beyond this and take the word sustainability as an umbrella term which can help connect with the society, broaden the customer base, lower operation costs and benefit the community in general, and thus , can finally lead to a competitive advantage in the market through communication.5Thus, we can summarize that sustainable development with its multiple dimensions- economic, ecological and social; is meant to take care of the present and the future generation by maintaining a balance among all these.

1.ii. Background:

The rapidly increasing population and consequent demand of natural resources have posed a serious challenge to the availability of basic needs of survival for the coming generation. Today, "humanity overall requires 50 percent more resources than the nature can produce.6This resulted in the emergence of the concept of Sustainable development which came into existence mainly to solve 'various problems raised by demographic growth, the planet's limited capacity, and social inequality'.7

The problem is further aggravated by fast depleting resources and day by day their deteriorating quality. For instance - deforestation to fulfill various requirement of increasing population; Greenhouse gas emission – an outcome of irreversible industrial and technical growth; have contributed to problems like global warming, diminishing biodiversity and increased natural calamities. 'There is an increasing appreciation that Earth's ecological systems cannot indefinitely sustain present trajectories of human activity. The nature and scale of human activity is exceeding the carrying capacity of the Earth's resource base, and the resultant waste and pollution streams are exceeding the assimilative capacity'.8

1.iii. Evolution of the Concept:

All these may endanger the existence of species on this earth in future. 'In order to be sustainable, therefore, development must be harmonious'. In 1972, the Club of Rome, a private international organization published 'the Limits to Growth' where it highlighted the shocking fact that "If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years."9

Initially, the concept was known as 'eco development'. The term sustainable development was coined in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm In nineteen seventies and the concern for social equity and ecological caution were incorporated into the economic development models. The term 'sustainable development' became popular with Harlem Brundtl and report 'Our common future', published in nineteen eighties.

2. OBJECTIVES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

The main objectives of SD are to:

- Find a realistic, rational, regular and enduring solution to maintain a balance between development activities and environmental protection and social welfare
- Take care of basic needs of human beings – water, food, health, education, employment etc.
- Fight against poverty, starvation and undernourishment.
- Discover new sources of energy like biomass energy, hydrogen energy and solar energy.

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:

These objectives form the basis of a sustainable development strategy and a strategy is not a 'grand plan or set of plans, but rather a set of instruments and ways of working which enable sustainable development challenges to be tackled in a coherent and dynamic way.10The SD strategy comprises 'the cogent management of various resources : human, natural, and economic that are inevitable requirement of human existence in the long run'. Sustainable development strategy includes numerous components. The focus here is on communication management only.

4.SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT-A COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE:

Sustainable and development are very heavy words with multiple dimensions and multitudes of theoretical underpinnings which often lead to ambiguities and may affect development process. The wide range of interpretations of key terminology have led researchers to consider that sustainable development is a communication challenge because it is difficult to 'sell'.11

For this an integrated sustainable development and communication mechanism is required. 'This is why OECD and UNDP regard communication and awareness raising as one of nine core mechanisms to support strategy processes for sustainable development. Related core mechanisms that cannot be but analytically separated from communication are participation, negotiation and conflict management."12

5. MECHANISM:

- Governance: Planning, decision making and Policy framing
- Frame and follow rules and regulations
- Stakeholder Analysis: to identify life style, attitudes and requirements of stakeholders to plan strategy accordingly.
- Awareness Programmes: Through education, training, media, Interpersonal communication, involvement and pilot activities for practical comprehension
- Persuasion and Consensus: Of all stakeholders
- Delegation: Of responsibilities
- Chain of Miscellaneous Activities: Collaboration among agencies, Information dissemination, coordination, ownership, action, monitoring, feedback and analysis
- Communication platform: For taking suggestions and resolving conflicts
- Communication Flow: Downwards, upwards and horizontal
- Change management

6. COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT:

SD as a term seems to be a jargon and is difficult to communicate because of its abstract nature in comparison to concrete environmental goals. 'communication has to make people understand SD. Otherwise, the attitude of people may change but they may not feel encouraged for action. Experts in this field such as the WWF-UK campaigns director, therefore, have labeled the term SD a communication problem.'13 Thus integrated communication management needs our attention.

Communication management, here, refers to organized communication efforts to bring social, economic and environmental improvements. It is focused, planned and well-structured use of communication for timely and right decision making, effective policy framing, implementation and evaluation process geared towards all aspects of sustainable development.

Generally, communication is taken at a superficial level and is perceived in generic terms but there is a need to consider it explicitly with reference to specific issues. Regarding this, certain terms

have already been coined long ago. i.e. Development communication(Dev Com) and Environment communication (Env Com). Development communication refers to the use of communication to facilitate social development. Development communication engages stakeholders and policy makers, establishes conducive environments, assesses risks and opportunities and promotes information exchanges to bring about positive social change via sustainable development.14 Its relevant significance is highlighted by Rogers EM "Development communication is not merely a matter of transmitting information about how things can be done better by using available resources and facilities --- it also involves generation of psychic mobility or empathy, raising of aspirations and willingness to work hard to meet those aspirations."15After Rio Conference in nineteen nineties the term Env Com, became popular . 'The term 'sustainable development' became popular with Harlem Brundtl and report 'Our common future', published in 1987.

7.IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT:

7.i. Communication and Participation:

The social welfare initiative like SD can be a reality through stakeholder participation(SP)at every step: decision making - planning – execution – evaluation. To encourage the public to support development-oriented projects, the usual pattern for conveying message is - informing the population about projects, illustrating the advantages of these projects, and recommending that they be supported.

But Public participation takes its own time and needs much more in terms of communication. For example, it requires motivation, formal and informal education and training, you attitude, listening, to bring changes in traditional practice. Communication is the missing link between the subject matter of SD issues and the related sociopolitical processes of policy making and public participation. These requirements are voiced by many environmentalists as well. They seek social sustainability in conservation and regard public participation therein a pre-requisite for sustainable development.16

7.ii. Create Awareness: The first step to make public participate is to create awareness among them.The important strategic components of awareness process are :

- Survey of target groups
- Information dissemination
- Channel - Mass media, social media and interpersonal communication
- Change management of stakeholders

- Change management of influencers

SD is a welfare initiative. Obviously, it is a programme' of the people, by the people, and for the people.' Hence, people must be aware of the programme. For awareness programmes, the basic strategic prerequisites are - survey, audience analysis - for whom message is devised and from whom support, cooperation and change is expected. They must be aware of the concept and how it is going to benefit them as well as the posterity in the long run. The sustainable development agenda, therefore, needs to be communicated to people at all levels as "Without information, there is no participation.17

7.iii.Right; Channel and Right Time of Communication :In the modern era of advanced communication and information technology, to strengthen implementation process, various kinds of channels are available for communicating messages .For example, the programme and its advantages can be broadcast on radio , telecast on TV or sent through WhatsApp etc.; but media selection for communication should be based on the information-seeking lifestyle of the stakeholders- their favorite sources of information, the particular time of the day ,they devote to it ,their communication networks and the like. 'While mass media playas key role in the awareness and interest phase, interpersonal communication with neighbors and friends takes over when it comes to evaluation, trial and adoption or rejection.'18as"The process is consumer-driven, not expert-driven."19Hence, information dissemination, followed by interpersonal communication is essential.

Can the results of SD programme be achieved by only policy making and the information dissemination? No. programme has to be mobilized and facilitated. For this positive, cooperative and active change in attitude of concerned people is mandatory. Effective communication can help people not only think in the changed direction but also change in their real practice. This, however, requires effective communication strategy as it is a challenging task to make people change their environment related practices unless they realize its value and become a part of the whole process from planning to action for change. Consequently, OECD and UNDP regard communication and awareness raising as one of nine core mechanisms to support strategy.20 Besides, this change is to be brought,not only in the attitude and practice of practitioners but also in the mind set of those as well who influence their decisions and behaviours. The strategy requires that for the smooth flow of this task, 'Effective communication programmes need to target "influencers" – whether they be health providers, village elders, or members of a person's family.'21

7.iv.You Attitude: The communication needs to be done in terms of you attitude. Before formulating strategy, proper information about and problems and requirements of stakeholders must be collected and analyzed. Instead of imposing the programme, it should be communicated in terms

of how it can benefit them in the short as well as long term as 'Sustainable development means absolutely nothing to most people and never will. But – people do relate to SD, once the term is translated to ,my life, ,my work, ,my investments, ,my health or ,my future.22Besides, Segmentation and Analysis of target audience with reference to their choice of information sources, their preferred information consumption style, time and pattern, is imperative to make the programme a success.

8. MATTER AND MANNER:

The matter(content) and manner of presentation of the message - both are integral part of messagedesignand need to be crafted carefully. In the present day digital world, "Information overload, usually characterized by an over- abundance of information, is a major cause of concern for general information users, researchers and information managers.23Hence, unless message is carefully and strategically designed,it may escape the attention of the target stakeholders. Certain models of content design, already suggested in different areas can be used here:

7 Cs of Communication: Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Coherence, Completeness, Consideration, Creativity

'KISS AIDA' model

*KISS:***K**eep **I**t **S**hort (and) **S**imple

AIDA: Draw **A**ttention, arouse **I**nterest, instigate **D**esire and finally lead to **A**ction Besides, not only the **information** that we want to convey but also the information that the audience want should be made accessible to them. All the information should be transparent, and relevant and should be conveyed timely.

9. BRIDGING THE GAP: Although communication for sustainable development is like other

communication approaches in many ways, it is particularly effective in building bridges across numerous stakeholder groups.[24]S.D. is considered a big communication problem and the gap between 'Said' and 'Done' has been effectively highlighted by Rioplus:

'Said – Done!

Said is not yet heard

Heard is not yet understood

Understood is not yet approved

And approved is not yet done.'25

Let us first analyze the above concise quote.

• "Said is not yet heard" Why? The reasons are:

i.   Terminology – A communication challenge

ii.   Information overload - Escapes attention of stakeholders

iii.   Lack of you attitude in information dissemination and message design – So people lack interest

iv.   Lack of persuasive and convincing content and skills

•   Heard is not yet understood: Why? It is a communication challenge.

•   Understood is not yet approved: Why? Lacked convincing and persuasive content and skills.

•   And approved is not yet done: Why? All- inclusive implementation challenge.

Effective Communication through its numerous components can be of great help here because communication is about bridging understanding towards shared.[26]The basic requirement is clarity of expression. It is well argued by Hardi and Zadan that Functioning of sustainable development includes a chain of activities i.e. guidelines for action, directing and channeling efforts and activities of relevant participant stakeholders. This requires clarity of - the term itself, goals, vision and of what 'should be' done for the decision-making unit in question[27] Gradually, It was realized by policy makers that communication is a 'must have' management tool required for policy framing , its implementation and project management and that "It is the missing link between ' said' and 'done', between policy on paper and its implementation process."[28]

Feedback is at wo-way inter action process is a strategic communication tool to resolve this gap to a great extent. Feedback can help remove the barrier of Comprehension Gap between what the programme and policy say and what is understood by target audience; between the implementers and the stakeholders, between desire and feasibility. Researchers have advanced the view that implementation process which involves several activities like coordination, cooperation and collaboration, is compromised without two-way communication. Through feedback one can find the weak links of the shackle of programme Feedback makes it possible to improve and refine programmes.[29]For this listening with its inherent components – understanding and analysis is a must have requirement. Otherwise, how the needs and interests of the concerned stakeholders can be attended and without catching their interest, it is almost impossible to get their active participations everyone looks first for his/her own benefit and not for in formation.It is rightly said, "For Civil society mobilization - - - initiatives should focus more on how to listen than on how to talk.[30]

These tools can help develop projects in a competent way as is mentioned well in Rioplus report: 'Conflicts of interest were fought by 'stakeholders', not negotiated by 'shareholders', leading to one-way information dissemination disregarding understanding, instead of relying on two-way communication towards 'shared meaning' and 'win-win' situations.'[31]Besides,input from targeted audience , is an elementary requisite for any development programme.

10. COMMUNICATION FLOW:

The functional part of any programme, scheme or initiative involves a lot of formal communication flow in various directions: Upward, downward, horizontal. For Example, downward for instructions and delegation of work; upward for suggestion and discussions related to various implementation issues and horizontal for coordination. Smooth and effective flow of communication in all these directions is the rudimentary requirement for the success of the programme."Effective and efficient Downward, Upward and horizontal Communication helps smooth and efficient flow of work -'Both – bottom up to inform central decision-makers and top-down to inform community groups in various places.'[32]

Right information to right people at the right time is crucial for the success of any scheme or project. In the series of communication flow, first comes the 'process of downward flow of communication to those who must work on this, carry it forward and make it a success. The clear and timely downward diffusion of all the pertinent information is the so far ignored basic requirement for the successful implementation and monitoring of the programmeme.'[33]It's importance is well observed and suggested by researchers: 'Many failed top-down planning decisions testify to the need for a judicious balance of both top-down and bottom-up approaches.'[34]

SD programme, like any development programme involves coordination at every level among – government, society, organizations, companies, and individuals as well as coordination for various activities i.e. raising funds, discussions, and team work where the significance of horizontal flow of smooth, clear, unambiguous and effective communication plays a vital role. The well-coordinated governance among economic, social and environmental concerns is the vital requirement of the implementation process. Other wise the implementation measures for sustainable development become difficult because governing and functional activities are not centralized rather these are highly dispersed among various actors in the society and involve decision making at multiple level. Therefore, coordination may be useful for effective discussions, arguments, bargaining as well as learning, which in turn, may contribute to the implementation of sustainable development.[35]

11. SUGGESTIONS:

Effective communication for sustainable development, there for requires:

- Alignment of SD agenda with stakeholders' needs
- Due attention to You attitude, and feedback
- Shift from speaking and sending to listening and receiving
- Use of 7 Cs
- Selection of right channel and right time

The final recommendation is to make Communication management an integral part of action plan

12. CONCLUSION:

Thus, effective communication management has enough potential to convert sustainable development ideology into successful reality. This tool is essential to steer the programme effectively and efficiently. It can efficiently expedite the whole implementation process of sustainable development from policy formation to implementation to success. Communication is not confined to information on development activities   rather, there is a wide range of components of communication and effective and strategic use of these components has gravitational force to fetch success to the programme.

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