Chapter 80

Knowledge Sharing between Local Government and Rural Remote Communities in Tanzania:
Technology Strategies and Cultural Practice Can Work Together

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ABSTRACT

Social, economic, and cultural factors are known to influence the knowledge sharing process between governments and rural communities. There is evidence that the success of ICT for development partnerships depends on a broadly identified "local context" and involvement of local communities. This chapter describes a survey of citizens about their information needs and modes of reception as well as a pilot study of Village Information Officers. Utilizing new technologies such as mobile phone communication and community radio broadcasting in local languages is identified by remote and rural study and survey participants as a valuable alternative to traditional government methods for communicating with citizens. Rural people identified gaps in knowledge related to health, education, and economic activities. These three broad categories of knowledge are important for effective poverty reduction efforts of government. Due to the poor reach of newspapers or other forms of print and broadcast media, face-to-face communication and cell phones were mentioned by more than 60% of the respondents in Kilosa district as techniques used in accessing government information. The positive results achieved by Village Information Officers in responding to gaps in knowledge regarding government services and support for development efforts has led to further demand for replication of the pilot study to support pastoralists, emergency preparedness, and wildlife conservation.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is among the basic ingredients for production and economic growth (Opara, 2008). It is an important resource for preserving increased valuable heritage, learning new things, solving problems, creating core competences, and initiating new situations for both individual and organizations now and in the future (Liao, 2003). A rational decision on any production process depends much on the availability of knowledge and information services.

Demiryurek et al. (2008) describe knowledge to help people decide on how to allocate inputs; production depends on having an edge on information on how to efficiently allocate the available resources (Fedale, 1987). For knowledge to be used it must be created and shared. Strictly speaking, only information can be transmitted (van Aalst, 2009). Siyao (2012) describes information as the carrier of knowledge. When knowledge is transferred from a sender to receiver knowledge is shared. According to van Aalst (2009), knowledge sharing involves the transfer of information and ideas. Shared knowledge is used for solving problems and constructing understanding of concepts, phenomena and situations (van Aalst, 2009). However, as knowledge is used new knowledge is created. Knowledge creation refers to the initiatives and activities undertaken towards the generation of new ideas or objects (Styhre et al., 2002).

Knowledge creation and sharing are interlinked processes; they both depend on social interactions between people in a particular society. Nonaka and Konno (1998) state knowledge creation and sharing depends on an individuals' socialization, internalization, externalization and combination of knowledge. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) facilitate communication among people, storage of information and its wider dissemination.

The current chapter assesses how the government and rural communities in Tanzania share knowledge. Specifically the chapter identifies the factors influencing knowledge sharing between governments and local populations; and determines the discursive arenas which provide the ideological context for poverty reduction through knowledge sharing. The chapter investigates the cultural practices that support and hinder change in systems of knowledge sharing. Lastly, the chapter determines the strategies and policies that support innovation by marginalized populations, including women, through culturally embedded systems of knowledge sharing using appropriate digital technology.

Factors Influencing Knowledge Sharing between Governments and Rural People

The first objective of the chapter is to describe the relationship that frames knowledge sharing between governments and local populations. In the case study of three villages in Monduli District, the focus is on the following question: what information do the people living here need to make decisions for themselves about their livelihood strategies? The populations of these villages are predominantly Maasai semi-nomadic pastoralists who have been seriously affected by drought in recent years and whose participation in all levels of education is significantly below national averages. The Maasai are commonly regarded to inhabit the margins of the society (Homewood et al 2009). Maasai livelihood patterns are now slowly transcending pastoralism to involve also agriculture, trading of livestock, tourism and urban based activities especially as watchmen (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, 1994; Hodgson, 2011).

In Kilosa, a survey was undertaken where the rural communities were of small scale farmers and pastoralists. In most cases farmers live in villages while pastoralists move from one place to the other in search of pasture. It is a particular challenge to develop a relationship for knowledge sharing between government agencies and populations, such as the Maasai, who historically have

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