



Communication for sustainability: Analysis of the Influence of Communication on Peoples' Attitude towards Lassa Fever Prevention in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, always receives the huge collaborative support from international donors, government agencies, and organisations for its public health communication programmes. Many positive results have followed such programmes in almost all fields of public health practices, such as Lassa fever. This paper examined how sustainable communication can influence people's attitude towards Lassa fever disease prevention in Nigeria; the basic elements of sustainable communication needed for the prevention of Lassa fever; and the communication channels needed for Lassa fever sustainable communication. The qualitative research method was applied in order to answer the stated objectives. The researchers searched for pertinent materials on Google Scholar, with 300 useful results produced. However, 15 papers, including journal articles, web pieces, and others, were ultimately chosen for the study. Findings from the study show that the foundations of sustainable communication are clear ambitions, substantiated claims, compelling messages, transparent communication, and accessible information. Also, behavioural change communication, advocacy communication, participatory communication, and communication for structural change are communication strategies used to achieve sustainable communication. After a critical analysis, it is suggested that NCDC must engage audiences at all times, offer clear and captivating information, and must receive feedback. The paper concludes that, health communication experts should introduce a cost-sharing approach with the donor nations and agencies in order to achieve a desirable goal.

Key words: communication, sustainability, Lassa fever, effective, behaviour.

Introduction

Communication is essential in almost every field of life, from home to work (Genç, 2017). Although people are trained in particular specialisation areas, in economics, in management, or whatever it is, they do not acquire any communication skills directly. It is a social process that starts from babyhood to death for us as human beings. This implies that communication is pivotal to human existence (Amuseghan, Ayenigbara & Orimogunje, 2010). It is the avenue through which members of a society are "informed." It is pertinent to note that the word "informed" here has two semantic interpretations. People are informed when they get to know about the happenings around them. On the other hand, people are informed when they receive information that influences or modifies their attitude, opinion, or behaviour (Fee, 1987).

Okeya-Olayinka and Adegboye (2021) sum up the societal impacts of communication in different ways as oil, glue, and dynamite. Okeya-Olayinka and Adegboye (2021) assert that communication keeps the world running smoothly by helping individuals adjust to the reality of their lives. They keep society alive and healthy by suggesting solutions that are socially acceptable. As with glue, social cohesion is maintained by communication. Okeya-Olayinka and Adegboye (2021) contend that communication gives all of us, including strangers, something to talk about by setting an agenda of discussion. And that, over the years, communication builds up and reinforces the fabrics that hold a society together. They also describe communication as dynamite that can rip society apart. According to Asogun, Okokhere, and Okogbenin (2010, p.12),

The weightings on communication understanding reversed the approaches of communication power on receivers to the power of information use by the audience. The ideas that determined the mass audience could not be supported as possible; the homogenous responses of the communication audience (responses such as exposition, interpretation, learning the media suggestions as well as behavioural change). Other designations that better expressed the audience's reactive capacity gradually replaced the idea of an audience that acts uniformly in the face of powerful communication. The relationship between the audience and the media should be approached as a multi-semantic process. The mass media can influence the thinking of members of the public through their court of public opinion.

Sustainable communication in epidemics builds upon social science principles by listening to what people say, think, and do about disease. Engagement with communities is key to achieving positive behavioural change as it proactively incorporates the aspirations, concerns, needs, and values of citizens and communities into decision-making processes and establishes ongoing partnerships with communities to ensure that the community's priorities and values continue to shape services and the service system. This partnership process aims to make better decisions that are supported by the community and result in better outcomes for both the community and the agencies. It is in the light of this that the paper examined preventing Lassa fever disease in Nigeria through effective and sustainable health communication.

Statement of the Problem

Worldwide, an estimated 2 million people are infected each year, resulting in 5,000 to 10,000 deaths (McCormick, 1999). It has been estimated that 300,000 to 500,000 cases and 5000 deaths from Lassa fever occur yearly across West Africa (Ogbu, Ajaluchukwu & Uneke, 2007), with an endemic and high seroprevalence rate reported in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia (Kerneis, Koivogui, Magassouba, Koulemou, Lewis, Aplogan, Grais, Guerin & Fichet, 2009). In Nigeria, outbreaks of the infection have been reported in Edo, Ebonyi, Ondo, Taraba, Plateau, Anambra, Nasarawa, Yobe, Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, and recently Rivers (Ogbu et al., 2007; Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, 2012). Earlier studies have shown that the seroprevalence in Nigeria is about 21% (Tomori, Fabiyi, Soningbe, Smith & McCormick, 2009). Thus, the disease is present in virtually all the geographical regions of the country. Within the first quarter of 2012, 525 suspected cases of Lassa fever, 96 laboratory-confirmed cases, and 54 deaths (CFR 10.3%) were recorded in 16 states as of March 9th, 2012 to 2015 (NCDC, 2012). However, health organisations and NGOs such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Federal Ministry of Health and Information have carried out health interventions and programmes on Lassa fever.

Moreover, the fire brigade approach used by the health workers to control the rapid spread of the Lassa fever epidemic is not helpful. As a result, the local populace seem to have suffered heavy casualties. Lassa fever outbreaks can have substantial health, economic, and social implications. The health imperative is to control the spread as quickly as possible in order to minimise the effects of morbidity and mortality. The risk of an epidemic of Lassa fever spreading over a whole community is because of complex factors such as the attitudinal disposition of the respondents. Any community that is found to have an outbreak of infectious disease is because of an inability to prevent infection. The behavioural response predisposes them to infection. Research has also indicated that after targeted health communication interventions, people with low education and income remain less knowledgeable and are less likely to change their behaviour than highly educated ones (Healthy People, 2010). The differences in this disparity have shown that people with low health literacy are more likely to report poor health and have an incomplete understanding of their health problems and treatment. This study intends to find out how sustainable communication can influence people’s attitudes towards Lassa fever disease prevention in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

This study sought to:

1. Determine the need for sustainable communication to prevent the Lassa Fever Virus.
2. Ascertain the basic elements of sustainable communication needed for the prevention of Lassa fever.
3. Establish the foundations of sustainability communication in Lassa fever prevention.
4. Determine the communication channels needed for Lassa fever sustainable communication.

Communication and sustainability

Communication plays critical roles in sustainability strategies. Where there is a lack of strategic communication, it would be pretty hard to drive or even implement any change with respect to efforts made by the government or any organization. Also, communication with the people, work partners, and the community a fundamental ingredient for sustainability strategies, otherwise the organisation engaging in disease control is very likely to face setbacks in executing disease control or preventive measures. Hence, there is an increasing contemporary need for community involvement towards sustainability on a global scale. The reason for this nature of communication is fundamental for sustainable development and can be explained by considering the nature of sought sustainability. First of all, societal discourse is fundamental to providing legitimacy to sustainable development (Newig *et al.*, 2013). Second, sustainability is a highly complex issue that requires overcoming specifics with regard to societal communication (Newig, Voß, and Monstadt, 2008).

Typically, issues that have to do with sustainability are typically characterised by high levels of complexities and uncertainties, so that communication plays a strategic role in delivering information to relevant publics. Because of these high decision stakes, Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) proposed new modes of science, such as high levels of communication and dialogue; stakeholder involvement for broadening the information base; and involving an increased amount of societal values. Furthermore, sustainability goals appear unspecific with respect to taking care of conflicts of interests and conflicts of values. At this rate, communication becomes so critical for developing shared understanding of societal values regarding sustainability and for establishing specified concrete goals that must be met.

Implementation of measures for sustainable development is slightly more difficult since the capacities to govern sustainable development are not centered, highly dispersed among various the various actors in society, and it involves multiple layers of decision-making. Therefore, coordination based on network-like form would be useful to allow for effective argumentation and social learning, which, in turn, will contribute to effective implementation of sustainable development strategies.

Sustainability in Health and Health Communication

Sustainability is what many people talk about in this postmodern era. It seems as if one realises that, within the limited resources on Mother Earth, we should manage, conserve, and nurture our own habitat in line with an ecological balance, so that new generations to come can enjoy it as well. That is only one part of the way to sustainability. Apart from having a healthy environment, we should consider a healthy social (social justice) and healthy economy as sustainability as a whole (Cox and Pezzullo 2016). Sustainable development implies five different areas that we need to pay attention to: water and sanitation, energy, human health, agricultural productivity, and biodiversity and ecosystem management (Wallington 2014).

Sustainability in health is to uplift equality in the quality of life for everyone. The underlying assumptions of health inequality are poverty, discrimination, fewer opportunities for

education and employment, living in substandard housing and environments, and less access to primary health care. According to Malikhao (2016, 99),

Sustainability in health is a process of social mobilisation empowered by both stakeholders, some of whom can be health communicators, and health communicators from outside who have empathy toward the stakeholders, to achieve two goals: first, to engage the people in the community in upgrading their health and media literacy status so that they can make an informed choice about their body and health and health care; and second, to build up community capacity and networking with other communities so that the people can solve problems related to community health; achieve social justice in health; prevent diseases; maintain well-being; and third, to build up community capacity and networking with other communities so that they can cultivate health knowledge, good attitude, ethical values, a cosmopolitan worldview, and health behaviors, including advocating for structural change for a local healthy lifestyle and accommodating environment.

Furthermore, there is a need for rights-based health communication, which means that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, should have the same right to primary health care. We should cultivate intrinsic values such as self-contentment to instil inner peace that is the opposite of the short-term pleasure triggered by mindless consumption triggered by the advertising and marketing industry. Moreover, we should economise on natural resources and energy consumption, including the reduction of carbon footprints, to prevent the acceleration of global warming. Extrinsic factors are those that enable people to think, rethink, assess their own and community values, empower themselves to improve their own health and participate in improving community health. Families; schools; communities; the governmental sectors related to public health, energy, and the environment; the NGOs related to health and the environment; the mass media and new media; the man-made environment; and natural habitats.

Health communication advocating for sustainability ought to be operating under the framework of the multiplicity paradigm mentioned above. To achieve the status of "health for all," "rights to health care," and "health inequality reduction," the integration of five different approaches is needed: behavioural change communication, mass communication, advocacy communication, participatory communication, and communication for structural and communication change. According to Malikhao's (2016) suggestion,

1. Behavioral Change Communication for Health for All is concerned with interpersonal communication in the areas of health literacy, health control and management, disease prevention, food and nutrition, wellness and well-being, and so on. The primary goal is to engage the stakeholder in becoming a health agency with autonomy over their own health and the ability to make informed decisions. The media used can be both the mass media and the new media that encourage social support.
2. Mass Communication for Health for All is about using mass media convergence to empower the stakeholders and ease the participation process in addressing a health

problem in a community. Mass media convergence is the ability of the modern mass media, thanks to the new media, to have more platforms that can interact among one another. For instance, a newspaper can have a digital TV channel, a Facebook page, an Instagram page, a Twitter channel, and a website that allows the audience to follow live video/audio clips or stock audio files for podcasts or stock video clips to be watched on a laptop, smartphone, or digital TV screen. Media literacy should be as important as health literacy for health communicators.

3. Participatory-Based Advocacy Communication for Health for All means empowering the grassroots to interact with key decision-makers on health issues aimed at influencing them to support policy changes at all levels (and also international) and to sustain accountability and commitment from governmental and international actors (Servaes and Malikhao 2010).
4. Participatory Communication for Health for All employs both interpersonal communication and multi-community media as well as social media to cultivate community interests and participation by taking diversity and pluralism into account in health-related areas. Participatory social marketing on health is the added value to traditional social marketing to communicate about/on health. That can be both online and offline campaigns using social interconnectedness and face-to-face dialogues to buzz news, information, events, and other social media entries. Self-management and production of the media and access of both media producers and stakeholders are emphasized.
5. Communication for Structural and Sustainable Social Change for Health for All is a combination of all of the above approaches to empower the stakeholders to upgrade and advocate for their own and community's health on correct information on health, health and media literacy, disease prevention, environmental health, health behavior, and access to an affordable and quality health-care system.

In order to achieve sustainability, health communicators should possess essential knowledge and skills in intercultural communication. Malikhao (2016), adapting the framework of Martin and Nakayama (2010), elaborates on intercultural competency in health in five aspects: First, understand personal and contextual ways of communication. Health communicators should be able to discern personal health behaviours (such as brushing teeth two times daily) from behaviours that are results of social construction (such as sharing syringes among prisoners).

Second, understanding the differences and similarities between cultures is crucial. People from different cultures may have different ways of verbal and nonverbal communication. Pain expression, treatment options, or healing rituals can be different from culture to culture. The similarities are obvious: everyone needs respect, kindness, and a nonjudgmental attitude.

Third, understand the local cultural context in which we are operating. If the health communicators could speak the local language, it would be a plus to create rapport between them and the stakeholders. Understanding one's own culture and biases in one's own culture, but at

the same time having sensitivity to other cultures and appreciation for the differences, should be the characteristics of health communicators (Galanti 2008).

Fourth, comprehending societal privilege and disadvantage. Health communicators have advantages in the sense that they may have good connections with community leaders and policymakers and they may already know the strengths and weaknesses of the community. But they may face resistance from the stakeholders. They may need to step back and assess the situation.

Fifth, history and past understanding Knowing the history of the health situation of the unit of analysis is important to assess the present situation and plan ahead. The unit of analysis varies from small to large: individual, family, ethnic group, group, community, institution, or a country.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Media System Dependency Theory as proposed by Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976). Media System Dependency Theory supposes the existence of an integral relationship that exist between the audience, the media, and the larger social system. The theory argues that an individual will, per force, depend on the information sourced from the media outlets to meet certain routinely and critical needs or take particular decisions to achieve specific goals.

The theory identifies two basic reasons which explain the reason an individual would expectedly rely on the media for relevant, sundry information. First, a person would very likely become more dependent on the medium that meets a number his or her needs than another that only provides a few. Second, dependence on the media may be imperative for social stability, especially when the propensity of social changes and conflicts is high and the established institutions, beliefs, and practises are challenged. Following the foregoing assumptions, this study can further be explained on the premise that folks would ordinarily depend largely on the media for relevant information on Lassa fever, particularly tips on preventive measures and requisite information they need to stay uninfected by the disease. It also assumes that a reliable source of information for people on the disease would possibly play a key role in determining their level of awareness and knowledge of the disease. Media System Dependency theory has however been criticised for the gap of not considering other categories of information sources, such as interpersonal, grape vine or group communication, which are likewise linked relevant and capable of influence. It has also been critiqued for not taking into consideration probable challenges that may occur during the processing of media messages, like distortion, noise.

Methodology

The documentary research approach (qualitative method) was used to produce the necessary information for the empirical review of the use of sustainable communication to change people's attitudes towards the prevention of Lassa fever outbreaks in Nigeria. Documentary research is a type of research that entails carefully examining documents for information pertaining to the subject topic, subfield, or other pertinent information (Ahmed, 2010). It necessitates a thorough and methodical examination and analysis of documentation, including textual text, visual data,

and graphical data (Agbo, Lenshie & Boye, 2018). According to Apuke and Omar (2020), conducting documentary research entails a procedure in which the researcher conducts a meticulous search for materials or data that are pertinent and contain facts and proof.

As a result, the researchers started looking for pertinent materials on Google Scholar, a search engine that facilitates the discovery of scholarly literature on a variety of topics or disciplines. Sustainable communication, communication for health sustainability, communication for health sustainability in Nigeria, Lassa fever, sustainable communication, and instruments utilised for sustainable communication were the search terms used. The search was not, however, limited by publication date or year by the researchers. The search produced 300 useful results that, when looked at broadly, may be regarded as related to the subject. Accordingly, to classify and then choose the final data set that was afterwards used for this study owing to its relevance, the researchers carefully analysed the substance of the articles based on their abstracts, research findings, and conclusions. Additionally, several of the items were omitted since they had no bearing on the subject matter. As a result, 15 papers—including journal articles, web pieces, and others—were ultimately chosen and analysed for the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Need for Sustainable Communication for Lassa fever Outbreak Prevention

In view of many impediments to healthy life brought about by the outbreak of Lassa fever, what Nigerians need is a systematic health communication strategy with a view to re-orientating and conscientising them so that they can move with the tide of time and jettison their counter-productive age-long beliefs (Amuseghan, Ayenigbara, and Orimogunje, 2010). Nigerians must be guided in making decisions that will ensure their well-being as individuals and members of society. Communication, at all levels (personal, family, community, and mass media), therefore plays a major role in that decision-making (United Nation Population Fund, UNPF, 2005). Essentially, communication is a tested and trusted process of enhancing changes in knowledge of safe contraceptives, fertility control, new ideas, and new health behaviour, to mention a few. Communication can be spontaneous or deliberate. Here, we are making a case for deliberately planned and systematic communication strategies. This planned communication can initiate, accelerate or reinforce change (Winslow, 2013).

Communication can convey the advantages and disadvantages of smaller families, for example. It can inform people of their greater role in protecting their family against contracting the Lassa Fever Virus by abiding by the prevention rules. Communication can help to legitimise discussion on abstinence from bush meat and present it as a positive behaviour with rewarding consequences. From the foregoing, therefore, the role of communication, especially through the mass media, cannot be overemphasised. The major reason that broadcast mass media were not considered important in the early 1970s was that they were not yet accessible in most developing countries. There has been a dramatic change in the last 25 years in the area of the global telecommunications revolution (Amuseghan, Ayenigbara & Orimogunje, 2010). Interestingly, the number of radio and television receivers in developing countries has grown at a rapid rate. Today, health broadcasts benefit from increased capacity to reach people via mass media,

particularly television. In functional terms, according to Piotrow et al. (1997), a systematic communication strategy must make provision for the following to be effective:

1. An assessment of the communication needs of society
2. Relevant training, communication skills, and management.
3. Special seminars, workshops, symposia, and conferences.
4. Specific products like posters, videos, brochures, etc.
5. Technical assistance to communication and community mobilisation projects.
6. Development of national communication strategies and campaigns.
7. Evaluation of communication interventions

The Basic Elements of Sustainable Communication Needed for the Prevention of Lassa Fever

A strategic and sustainable communication programme for the prevention of Lassa fever is expected to be one that is a result of serious planning and having specific elements spelt out for the achievement of its goals. The studies by Chaffee (2012) and Piotrow et al. (1997) identify essential elements of sustainable communication. These include:

1. A scientific or empirical approach that builds on conceptual models in behavioural sciences, persuasion theory, social learning, and social marketing to achieve realistic objectives.
2. To recognise that behavioural change is as much a societal process as it is an individual decision-making process and to identify and evaluate changes at the levels of the individual, couple, family, village, and nation.
3. **use of mass media and multimedia channels, as well as new horizons in mass media and electronic communication such as e-mail and the internet, to raise awareness, influence community norms, and provide specific information, legitimacy, and cues to action for individual behaviour**
4. **Emphasis** on audience involvement and participation throughout the project planning, implementation, and evaluation process.
5. **Appreciation** of the crucial role of entertainment, through mass media and at a community level, in capturing the attention, interest, and emotions of the audience.
6. Increasing focus on sustainability for communication activities through sharing costs with other donors and through institution building and skills development.

In Nigeria, it is expected that, with adequate funding and priority attention, progress in Lassa fever intervention communication will continue. The Lassa fever communication is expected to reach the grass roots as a result of demographic, political, and technological changes. However, it is expected that health communication programmes will face certain challenges in this century.

The Foundations of Sustainability Communications in Lassa Fever Prevention

No matter the type of communication the government chooses to reach the people and create Lassa fever awareness in Nigeria (it is very possible that the approach differs over time or according to objective), it must respect some important nuances if it wants to pass the scrutiny of watchdogs and prevent any potential backlash from the audience (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). Martin and Nakayama (2010) identified five foundations for NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations to follow to start building sustainability communication. These are clear ambitions, substantiated claims, compelling messages, transparent communication, and accessible information.

When NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations dealing with Lassa fever truly want to take up responsibility and embrace purpose, they must be clear about their ambitions. It is important that they clarify what sustainability means for their organisation and what goals they have set for the future (Rattle, 2010). Closely linked to this is the fact that these goals should be relevant and that NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations dealing with Lassa fever talk about sustainability efforts where they can actually make an impact. For example, social media posts about the Lassa fever preventive measures can certainly form part of the NCDC's content calendar. But not if it would serve as a smoke screen to hide the lack of initiative to create an effective campaign.

Substantiated claims: Sustainability communication starts with a declaration of intent. Then, it is a matter of regularly communicating about the status of the sustainability activities and the progress being made (Amuseghan, Ayenigbara, and Orimogunje, 2010). If NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations dealing with Lassa fever want to avoid being accused of green washing, it is important to substantiate any claim they make. They can do so by demonstrating the true impact of their activities on society and the environment.

Compelling messages: NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations dealing with Lassa fever can leverage their sustainability goals by translating them into comprehensible messages that captivate all audiences. It is a matter of adapting the message to different stakeholder groups to ensure that each person understands what they aim to achieve, how it will get there and what that means for them. For example, NCDC presents its sustainability strategy to the people as part of its annual report. Health practitioners get a more in-depth view into the actions per department via workshops and a dedicated intranet page. And the audience gets a more high-level introduction to the strategy by means of a video on social media.

Transparent communication: Sustainable development is never over, so NCDC and other government and non-governmental organizations' communication should not solely focus on accomplishments. Instead, transparently showing progress, even if there is still a long way to go or some areas need improvement, will increase credibility and acceptance by the public (Rattle, 2010).

Accessible information: NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations can further boost credibility and drive involvement by transforming their sustainability stories into

attractive formats that are easily accessible by their target groups. Here, a multi-channel approach, storytelling, and experiences are key. The NCDC, for example, used its sustainability report as the basis for further content development, transforming it into multiple formats for different channels and audiences.

The Communication Channels Needed for Lassa Fever Sustainable Communication

Websites and Social Media: The quickest and easiest way of reaching a high proportion of your target audience will be through social media. NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations ensure that they have a presence on Facebook and Twitter for all their biodiversity activities so that they can connect and share information with people and groups that they want to engage with (Sustainability Exchange, 2022). They may also want to set up a YouTube channel and post videos, as well as explore other channels such as Pinterest, for visual communication, and Google Plus. Keep up the regular posts and aim to build a strong virtual community. NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations should make sure that they have an interactive website for any communicable disease such as Lassa fever as a primary engagement tool. They can link this to all their social media platforms and provide opportunities for comments and ways of getting involved. Make sure that the site is regularly updated and active. A Twitter feed is a good way of doing this quickly and easily. Also make sure that they link key information to their intranet (Sustainability Exchange, 2022).

On-site interpretation: Providing information and visual interpretation in the areas that are being managed for biodiversity is important to tell people about what you are doing, why it matters, and how they can get involved. On-site information boards are the traditional approach. NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations could also link their covered areas by producing a way-marked visit, perhaps even with an audio tour. Ensure that they carefully plan how and what they plan to present so that it is appropriate to their audience, interactive, accessible, and appropriately placed (Sustainability Exchange, 2022).

Internal communication and publications: NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations should identify how they can raise awareness and build their contact community through internal communication channels and publications. These may include institution wide and departmental social media and websites, e-news, student and staff newspapers or magazines, and perhaps the institution's prospective. Include information on how they have brought about benefits to the institution in terms of environmental improvement and reputation and how this is good for students, staff, the local environment, and community (Sustainability Exchange, 2022).

Local and national media: Health initiatives can provide a good source of wider positive publicity. NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations work with their institutions' press officers to make good contacts within local and national press, radio, and television (Sustainability Exchange, 2022).

NCDC and other government and non-governmental organisations should think about how they can link the Lassa fever campaign to existing events in higher institutions and find creative ways of getting a variety of groups involved. Perhaps they could organise a health walk or maybe even

a concert for music students or a short drama production as part of one of their campaign strategies.

Get people involved: If they are planning a practical project, get people to get involved as much as possible. They should think about the following to help get people active.

- Get a core group of individuals involved that can help recruit people. You could approach student societies, environmental and health academics, estates staff, your grounds maintenance contractors, the student union and volunteer coordinators.
- Invite a well-known person to come to a launch event, such as a celebrity, MP, or a senior staff member.
- Promote the health benefits of undertaking practical conservation work.
- Provide free food and beverages - a sure crowd pleaser!

Influence of Lassa fever communication on attitudinal change

Mass media simply translates to the modern means of giving news, opinion, education, entertainment and agenda-setting to large numbers of people, especially through radio, television, newspapers, magazines and films. According to Dominick (2009), a medium is the channel through which a message travels from the source to the receiver. Mass media will not only include the mechanical devices that transmit and sometimes store the message (television cameras, radio microphones, printing presses) but also the institutions that use these machines to transmit messages.

Ighedosa, Usifoh, Asemota, Daniel and Aighewi (2016) explain that media and other communication means have impact the attitude of people towards the Lassa Fever virus. Ighedosa et al (2016) explain that good knowledge of the virus through effective health communication led to attitudinal change among the students which he studied.

Also, Adesoji, Yinusa, Adijat, Abdulateef, Kehinde and Akindele (2016) state that even with people's fair knowledge of the disease, they have not been able to change their ways of lives. They explain that majority of people have heard about this disease through various media like radio, television, newspapers, magazines and social media, their knowledge is still inadequate being fraught with misconceptions especially in the means of acquisition, transmission and prevention.

Morgan, Amos, Akwaowo, Ibong, Mfon, Anietie, Sylvester and Samuel (2018) explain that the people in Uyo stopped the consumption food contaminated with rat feces and urine including eating poorly cooked rats as well as keeping a clean environment. However, they explain that this information about lassa fever is not same at some rural areas of the state due to lack of exposure to information as well as the rate of illiteracy.

Conclusion

The World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledges the multidimensional nature of health; that health involves complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not just the absence of disease. Moreover, everyone has the right to maintain and enjoy the benefits of being healthy regardless of their socioeconomic-political and religious status. That means everyone has the right to the medical, psychological, and related knowledge necessary to attain health to the fullest capacity. The health inequality caused by unequal development should be attended to by each government. Each government should be responsible for the health of their population by providing appropriate health and social measures. From the constitution of the WHO, it can be drawn that "rights to health care," "health inequality reduction," and "health for all" are essential to devising good communication strategies to achieve the health goal.

Health communication is no longer a top-down fashion commanding the public to listen and act. We must consider the enabling environment that influences an individual's decision-making process, attitude, and health behavior. Empowerment and advocating are the two terms health communicators as social mobilizers should be acquainted with. In order to do that, a health communicator should possess empathy and intercultural communication skills, apart from being media literate and health literate. This requires training and work experience. Apart from knowing public health, journalism, and communication, a health communicator should also have good knowledge of sociology, anthropology, environmental science, and management. Thus, interdisciplinary training would be a plus for a health communicator.

Recommendations

The following are recommended in line with the findings of this study:

1. A wider dissemination of adequate information on Lassa fever through media campaign should be made available by all relevant stakeholders.
2. The media should continue on programmes that create awareness and also give room for audience participation.
3. A good knowledge of Lassa fever was associated with good preventive practices. There is need for a good understanding of Lassa fever among the population, as this will improve preventive practices. Health workers have an important role to play in disseminating information concerning Lassa fever among the population.

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