

Effectiveness of Informal Channels in Disseminating Developmental Information by NGOs in Kerala

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Abstract – *Developmental information disseminated by NGOs through various channels is an indispensable resource of rural communities. Informal channels are effectively functioning intentionally or unintentionally between NGOs and the rural communities, through which developmental information is distributed. In this study an analysis is done on the types of informal sources through which developmental information is disseminated among the rural community. The efficiency of different informal channels in reaching out information to the people is measured.*

Key Words: *Informal Channels, Information Dissemination, Developmental Information*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The development of a society depend highly on the accessibility and exploitation of information required for their economic and social wellbeing. So, the developmental information is to be transmitted among the society at grass root level for enabling them to move further on social and economic development. Today, information is recognized as an indispensable resource, which is disseminated in various forms through different transmission channels. Formal channels are the official communication modes, which are employed by organizations and institutions for disseminating information. However, out of the official channels, information is getting disseminated intentionally or unintentionally through informal sources and networks created and maintained through social relations. In these social relationships, various kinds of individuals become a node for transmitting information from one person to another.

Information dissemination is the act of spreading news, information, ideas, etc. to a wide group of people. In the dissemination of developmental information, NGOs are the sources for transmitting messages about various developmental programmes and social and economic welfare schemes. Therefore, information dissemination is one of the unavoidable activities, which is carried out by every type of social service NGOs. For this purpose, they use both formal and informal sources. In this study, types of informal channels through which developmental information is disseminated and its effectiveness are investigated.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the survey of literature, no study is found to have been conducted in Kerala similar to the current topic. A few number of studies could be identified in the context of information dissemination. Such titles have been identified and briefly described here. Fisher and Urich (1999) have investigated the dissemination of information about watersheds in the Philippines. In this study, it is found that newspaper and radio are the channels used by the stakeholders for disseminating information. Uhegbu and Okereke (2006) have studied dissemination of HIV/AIDS information among the rural women. In this study, it is explained about the community intergroups for disseminating information informally. Okiy (2015) conducted a survey about the rural development information. Nagarajan and Albores(2010) has proposed an agent-based simulation model to simulate the warning message dissemination among the public considering both official channels and unofficial channels. George (2009) has done an investigative study about community information service provided by NGOs in North Malabar districts of Kerala. Thus these studies are not mentioning the significance of informal channels, but only about formal communication methods used.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In disseminating developmental information, NGOs use formal as well as informal channels. As regards NGOs, informal disseminators of developmental information are Social Workers, Local People and

Knowledge Brokers. The present study intends to examine the types of informal sources through which developmental information is disseminated among the community. Therefore the problem of the study is based on the assumption that informal channels are effectively used by NGOs in disseminating developmental information among the rural community.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the current study are;

- i) to identify the informal channels through which disseminating developmental information among the beneficiary communities of NGOs.
- ii) to identify the locations where informal dissemination is taking place.
- ii) to identify the effectiveness of informal dissemination of developmental information.

5. HYPOTHESIS

In developmental communication, information is disseminated either formally or informally. In formal dissemination, channels are predetermined and information is transmitted through them. But in informal dissemination, information is passed on to others through orally which takes place casually. The focusing area of the current study is the effectiveness of informal channels in disseminating developmental information. Therefore, the following inferences are made in this study.

- i) It is assumed that developmental information is disseminated from NGOs through various informal channels.
- ii) It is supposed that informal channels are effective in disseminating developmental information among the communities.

6. METHODOLOGY

In a descriptive study, primary data are usually collected from the respondents by way of questionnaire or interview or observation or the combination of any of these. In this study, primary data from the respondents of NGOs are collected through questionnaire methods. The data are measured by using percentile analysis and the variables to be measured in this study are informal channels of Social Workers, Knowledge Brokers, and Local People, locations where it is likely to be taking place and effectiveness of channels.

7. SAMPLE SELECTION

In order to conduct a survey, those NGOs working in Kerala for socio-economic development of the rural society have been identified. The research identified

62 NGOs are found to be working across Kerala for the social and economic upliftment of the rural communities. Among these, 40 NGOs having more than ten years working history have been selected randomly for the study.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

Since this study is focusing on the informal dissemination of information, data regarding the informal channels, the places where it is taking place and its effectiveness are analysed. The results found are discussed below.

Table :1

Informal Channels through Which Dissemination of Information Taking Place

Informal Channels					
Social Worker		Knowledge Broker		Local People	
Yes	32 (80%)	Yes	6 (15%)	Yes	30 (75%)
No	8 (20%)	No	34 (85%)	No	10(25%)
Total	40	Total	40	Total	40

The Table1 reveals that there are three types of informal channels that become helpful for reaching out developmental information from NGOs to the people at grass root level. As per the data in this table, 80 percent of NGOs have answered that Social Workers are acting as informal channels through which developmental information is getting disseminated. At the sametime 75 percent of the NGOs have answered that Local people are the informal sources through which information about socio-economic programmes reach at the grass root level community, since they are getting contact with the NGOs very frequently. But, there have been only 15 percent of the NGOs which responded positively that information is transmitted informally through Knowledge Brokers. Knowledge Brokers are meant for making information more edible for the audience (Fisher 2010). The data in this table depicts that the majority of the developmental information disseminated from NGOs to rural society is through Social Workers.

9. STRATEGIC LOCATIONS OF INFORMAL COMMUNICATION

The informal dissemination of developmental information is more likely to be taking place at market places, religious places such as churches and shrines, streets and public libraries etc. Because people gathering at these places who meet together and exchange their regards. During these occasions people perform face to face communications and thus, amid their casual talks they share the information concerned with the developmental programmes with their acquainters. So these places are found to be very significant locations for

disseminating developmental information and knowledge informally between friends and acquainters as people in a locality are more likely to visit such places frequently.

Table: 2

Locations Where Informal Dissemination of Developmental Information Taking Place

Informal Channels							
Market Places		Streets		Public Libraries		Religious Places	
Yes	28 (70%)	Yes	27 (67.5%)	Yes	17 (42.5%)	Yes	21 (52.5%)
No	12 (30%)	No	13 (32.5%)	No	23 (57.5%)	No	19 (47.5%)
Total	40	Total	40	Total	40	Total	40

As per the data in the Table2, there are four locations at which informal communication takes place among the community. They are market palaces, streets, public libraries and religious places. Among these four locations, 70 percent of the NGOs answered market places where dissemination of developmental information is effectively taking place among the rural community through informal channels. Secondly streets are recognized as the hot spot of informal dissemination, because 67.5 percent of the NGOs are supporting this location. The percentage of religious location is found to be 52.5 percent. But there are only 42.5 percent of the NGOs supporting public libraries where informal dissemination of developmental information is occurred.

10. EFFECTIVENESS OF INFORMAL DISSEMINATION

In order to assess the effectiveness, five statements regarding the opinions on advantages of informal dissemination of developmental information were sought from each NGOs. The data pertaining to this have been shown in the below table.

Table:3

Efficiency of Informal Dissemination

Statements Regarding Informal Dissemination		Yes	No
a	Developmental information spread very speedily among the rural community through informal channels.	38 (95%)	1 (5%)
b	No difficulty is confronted in disseminating developmental information through informal sources	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)
c	Since the less educated and less literate people receive developmental information through informal ways, they can easily understand the matters for their socio-economic development.	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)
d	Accuracy and timeliness are maintained in informal dissemination.	8 (20%)	31 (77.5%)
e	Informal dissemination eliminates and overcomes all kinds of communication barriers.	30 (75%)	10 (25%)

From the data available in Table 3, it is found that 95 percent of the NGOs have positively responded that developmental information spread very speedily among the rural community through informal channels. This indicates that free flow of information about

developmental programmes from NGOs to the rural community is taking place in almost all the NGOs. 77.5 percent of the NGOs responded that no difficulty is confronted in disseminating developmental information through informal sources. Also 87.5 percent of the NGOs answered positively that people can themselves understand easily the information received through informal ways.

Accuracy and timeliness are very important in information dissemination. Accuracy denotes how much an information is reliable to be accepted or used for socio-economic development of a rural individual. But the survey reveals that in terms of accuracy and timeliness, only 20% of the NGOs have responded positively against the informal dissemination. Majority are having the remarks that accuracy and timeliness cannot be kept in disseminating information informally.

While taking place communication, barriers are very common which may appear as technological and social obstacles. But in informal communication, technical matters are insignificant as individuals share information known to others orally. In this study 75 percent of NGOs support that there is no barrier existing in between individuals while sharing information informally.

11. DISCUSSION

The overall result of this study is that informal disseminations are found to be effective in reaching out developmental information from NGOs to their beneficiary people. In this study Social Workers are the main constituents of informal dissemination of developmental information, which forms a link between the NGOs and the people at the grass root level. It is followed by Local People. Usually the Local People who come into contact with the Social Workers of NGOs receive information formally or informally. Subsequently they spread it through informal channels to the others who are the acquaints of them at various places where they meet.

The result of this study indicates that places where the informal dissemination of developmental information is taking place are markets, religious places, public libraries and religious places. Since the people in a locality or village are more likely to visit these places, informal ties are established or maintained during their meeting. On these occasions people share the developmental information with their friends or acquainters. The result of the data analysis shows that market place and street are identified to be very hot places of informal dissemination. But informal dissemination is taking place at the lowest level in public libraries, because the people visiting this place are very few in number.

In terms of efficiency, the result shows that information spreads speedily through informal networks. A high majority of NGOs do not find difficulty in disseminating information through informal ways. This is because informal dissemination can overcome all obstacles such as language barriers and technical failures.

12. CONCLUSION

Despite having no authenticity and accuracy given to the informal information, the survey reveals a high majority of the NGOs are promoting this mode of dissemination. Because information disseminated through the informal channels have very potentiality and possibility for spreading widely at grass root level community within a short span of time. Spreading of information through informal channels are relational to the cultural and economic characteristics of a society. People can very easily conceive and digest the information without language and cultural barriers is found to be the main reason for its effectiveness.

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