

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS AND LOCAL BUSINESSES IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION USAGE FOR INSECURITY REDUCTION IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

Shaibu Leonard^{1*}, Faluyi Janet Ayobami¹, Godwin O. Opaluwa², Haruna Ojonugwa John³

¹*Department of Educational Management and Business Education, Faculty of Education, Federal University Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

²*Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria.*

³*Local Government Education Authority, Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria.*

Corresponding Author: Shaibu Leonard, Email: leoshaibueyi@gmail.com/leonard.shaibu@fuoye.edu.ng

Abstract: The study explores the role of community leaders and local businesses in effective communication usage for Insecurity reduction in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. A descriptive research survey design and a quantitative approach were used. Community Leaders and Local Businesses Communication Usage for Insecurity Reduction (CLBCUIR) served as an instrument. Analysis was carried out by frequency distribution and percentage. The results showed that community leaders and local businesses foster cooperation, collaborate with law enforcement authorities, invest in security training, quick reporting of security incidents and mobilize the community members to combat insecurity. The article concluded that community leaders and local businesses used communication strategies to reduce insecurity in Ekiti State, Nigeria. However, some insecurity challenges such as crimes, violence, and conflicts are still prevalent in the area. It was recommended that security discourse involving other security stakeholders such as law enforcement authorities and Civil Society Organisation (CSO) should be prioritized by the government.

Keywords: Role; Community leaders; Local businesses; Communication use; Insecurity reduction; Ekiti state

1 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria generally with the inclusion of Ekiti State has experienced various forms of insecurity, including crime, violence, and conflicts. These security challenges have adversely affected the safety, livelihoods, and development of communities in the state. Addressing insecurity requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders but this article dwelt essentially on the involvement of community leaders and local businesses as some of the critical stakeholders in the discourse of the insecurity situation in Ekiti state.

Community leaders are influential figures within their localities. Engaging them in security-related communication fosters trust and cooperation between residents and law enforcement. A study by Oluwaseyi et al. demonstrates that community-based communication initiatives create platforms for information sharing and community-driven security solutions[1]. When citizens feel heard and valued, they become active partners in reducing insecurity. Examples are kings, Chiefs, councillors, and market chairman.

Local businesses are affected by insecurity, and their active involvement is crucial in mitigating security threats. Collaborating with law enforcement and other stakeholders, businesses can share information about potential risks and implement security measures. The research of Olajide et al. underscores the importance of public-private partnerships in addressing security challenges[2]. Examples are grocery stores, repair shops, bakeries, Tailor, pharmacies, and restaurants. Most of the groups used communication strategies to regulate and combat insecurity in their areas.

Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings between individuals or groups. It is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, including personal relationships, business transactions, education, and social interactions. Effective communication involves both the transmission and reception of messages. It requires not only the ability to express oneself clearly and concisely but also active listening skills to understand and interpret the messages received.

The effectiveness of communication depends on various factors, such as clarity, tone, context, cultural differences, and the medium used. Good communication skills are essential for building strong relationships, resolving conflicts, negotiating, collaborating, and conveying information accurately. In recent years, advancements in technology have significantly impacted communication. The widespread use of the internet, social media, and mobile devices has facilitated instant and global communication. People can now connect and communicate with others around the world in real-time, enabling new opportunities for collaboration and information sharing [3].

Community leaders and local businesses' participation is crucial in security governance for various reasons, they possess diverse expertise, perspectives, and local knowledge, which can enrich the understanding of security challenges and contribute to the development of effective solutions the involvement fosters collaboration, coordination, and effective resource allocation, leading to more comprehensive and sustainable security interventions.

The place of community leaders and local businesses in security matters cannot be overemphasized. This is because involving them in decision-making processes allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse perspectives, concerns, and expertise related to a particular issue. This inclusivity leads to better-informed decisions that reflect the needs and interests of the stakeholders involved [4]. Baranne et al stated that actively engaging them will create an environment of collaboration and trust[5]. When stakeholders feel valued and included in the decision-making process, it fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the outcomes, leading to more successful implementation). Stakeholders bring unique insights, knowledge, and expertise to the table [6]. The researchers add that their participation allows for the identification of relevant concerns, alternative perspectives, and potential risks or opportunities that might otherwise be overlooked. This comprehensive approach improves the effectiveness and appropriateness of the solutions proposed.

Continuing with the role of these stakeholders, Hansson et al. state that their participation helps build social acceptance and legitimacy for projects or policies[7]. By involving those directly affected, it provides an avenue for addressing concerns, mitigating conflicts, and incorporating diverse interests. This inclusive approach can help avoid potential resistance and increase the overall acceptance and support for the initiative. It is on this basis that Baker et al. opined that stakeholder participation aligns with the principles of sustainable development by incorporating economic, environmental, and social perspectives[8]. It allows for identifying potential trade-offs, compromises, and win-win solutions that promote long-term sustainability.

Their communication strategies for insecurity reduction involve implementing effective communication methods to address and alleviate feelings of insecurity and fear within a particular context, these strategies aim to promote safety, build trust, and provide accurate and timely information to individuals and communities affected by insecurity to achieve an effective communication some strategy are needed to be measured [9,10]. UNESCO avers that providing accurate and up-to-date information is crucial for reducing insecurity[11]. Timely communication about potential risks, ongoing security measures, and any changes in the security situation can help individuals make informed decisions and take necessary precautions. McMahan noted that engaging with the affected community is essential for building trust, understanding their concerns, and involving them in decision-making processes[12]. Effective communication channels, such as community meetings, dialogue sessions, or focus groups, can help facilitate open discussions and collaborative problem-solving.

In furtherance of their communication strategies, UNDP established that developing targeted awareness campaigns can raise awareness about security issues, risks, and preventive measures[13]. These campaigns can utilize various communication channels, such as mass media, social media, community radio, or posters, to reach a wide audience and effectively disseminate key messages. McMahan demonstrates that training and Capacity Building[12]: Providing training and capacity-building initiatives can empower individuals and communities to better understand and respond to security challenges. This can include workshops on personal safety, conflict resolution, emergency preparedness, or communication skills to enhance resilience and security consciousness. Daniel contributed that regular coordination meetings and information sharing can help align strategies, share best practices, and address gaps in security provision[14]. WHO reported that recognizing that different individuals or groups may have unique needs and preferences, tailoring communication approaches can be effective[15]. Considering diverse languages, cultures, literacy levels, and accessibility requirements can ensure effective communication for all. However, the study explores the role of community leaders and local businesses in effective communication usage for insecurity reduction in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Engagement of stakeholders like community leaders and local businesses in communication strategies is essential for their effectiveness [6]. It involves the stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of communication initiatives. Such stakeholders' participation ensures that communication strategies are tailored to their needs, preferences, and cultural contexts, it also increases the likelihood of stakeholder buy-in, ownership, and commitment to the communication efforts. However, it is important to start by identifying the key stakeholders who have an interest or are affected by the communication efforts this can include internal stakeholders (employees, management) and external stakeholders (customers, community members, NGOs, government agencies), and analyze their needs, perspectives, and level of influence to tailor the communication strategy accordingly.

Adoptive an environment of open dialogue and encourage two-way communication with stakeholders this provides opportunities for stakeholders to express their views, concerns, and suggestions, and actively listen to their feedback, engage in meaningful discussions, and incorporate their input into decision-making processes [16]. Involving community leaders and local businesses helps develop targeted and tailored messages that address the specific needs, interests, and concerns of different stakeholder groups considering their various backgrounds, communication preferences, and levels of understanding with the use of language and mediums that resonate with each stakeholder group [17].

Adopting transparency by sharing accurate and timely information with stakeholders and keeping them informed about relevant developments, progress, and outcomes of the communication efforts. Be transparent about limitations, risks, and uncertainties, as well as the decision-making processes behind communication strategies. Engaging stakeholders in the co-creation of communication strategies and materials involves them in the design, development, and testing of messages to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in addition to this collaborative approaches foster ownership, build trust, and increase the likelihood of successful communication outcomes [18]. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies and seek feedback from stakeholders to monitor the impact of communication efforts, gather

insights, and make necessary adjustments based on stakeholder input. This iterative process helps improve communication outcomes over time.

Stakeholders such as community leaders and local businesses participation in security affairs in Ekiti State is crucial in insecurity reduction efforts as it promotes collaboration, shared responsibility, and a sense of ownership among the affected individuals and groups.

Some important roles of stakeholder participation in insecurity reduction are not to be undermined. For instance, community members, local businesses, and relevant authorities possess valuable knowledge about the local context, including social dynamics, cultural norms, and specific security challenges. Their active participation allows for a better understanding of the root causes of insecurity, enabling more targeted and effective interventions [18]. Stakeholders often have firsthand experience and expertise related to the specific insecurity issues in their communities. Involving them in insecurity reduction efforts allows for the integration of their knowledge and insights, contributing to more contextually appropriate solutions [19].

Stakeholder participation ensures that insecurity reduction interventions are better tailored to the needs and preferences of the affected individuals and groups [20]. By involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, the interventions are more likely to be relevant, accepted, and effective, resulting in positive outcomes. Stakeholder participation in insecurity reduction fosters social cohesion and trust among community members [20]. It promotes collective action, shared responsibility, and a sense of belonging, which can contribute to preventing and mitigating insecurity. It was also reported by Mekonnen et al. that involving stakeholders from the outset helps build sustainable insecurity reduction initiatives [20]. Stakeholder participation fosters local ownership, accountability, and capacity building, ensuring that the efforts continue beyond the initial intervention period [13]. Stakeholder participation can facilitate dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution in situations where insecurity arises from social tensions or conflicts by involving diverse stakeholders, the communication and understanding between different groups can be improved, leading to peaceful resolutions and long-term stability [21].

Ekiti state government has expended many efforts to fight insecurity through military operations and law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, these strategies alone are not enough to actualize a significant reduction in insecurity. One major part that has often been neglected is the proper involvement of community leaders and local businesses in the communication process. Communication plays a significant role in addressing insecurity by enhancing coordination, information sharing, and fostering trust between different actors involved. Thus, understanding and harnessing the potential of community leaders and local businesses in communication usage is crucial for reducing insecurity in Ekiti State.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theoretical frameworks provide insights into stakeholder participation in security governance.

2.1 Communication for Social Change (CSC)

Communication for social change is an approach that emphasizes the transformative power of communication in creating social change and addressing social issues. It recognizes that effective communication is not just about disseminating information but also about engaging stakeholders, fostering dialogue, and empowering communities to participate in decision-making processes. The Communication for Social Change approach has been applied in various contexts, including public health, human rights, environmental sustainability, and community development. It offers a holistic framework for using communication as a catalyst for social transformation and empowerment [3].

Key principles and characteristics of the Communication for Social Change approach include:

- i. Participatory Approach: CSC emphasizes the participation of individuals and communities as active agents in the communication process. It involves engaging stakeholders in dialogue, seeking their input, and involving them in decision-making processes.
- ii. Empowerment: CSC seeks to empower marginalized and vulnerable groups by providing them with a voice, helping them express their needs and concerns, and supporting their efforts to address social issues.
- iii. Bottom-Up Perspective: The CSC approach recognizes the importance of grassroots perspectives and local knowledge. It values the experiences and expertise of communities and ensures that communication initiatives are driven by their needs and aspirations.
- iv. Dialogue and Collaboration: CSC promotes open and inclusive dialogue among stakeholders, encouraging the exchange of diverse perspectives and the building of collaborative relationships. It recognizes that sustainable social change requires collective action and collaboration among various stakeholders.
- v. Context-Specific and Culturally-Sensitive Approaches: CSC acknowledges the importance of understanding the social, cultural, and political context in which communication initiatives are implemented. It emphasizes the use of culturally sensitive and context-specific communication strategies that resonate with the target audience.
- vi. Multi-Media and Multi-Channel Communication: CSC recognizes the diversity of communication channels and media platforms available today. It leverages a variety of media tools, including traditional and digital media, to reach diverse audiences and facilitate effective communication.

2.2 The Specific Objectives Are as Follows to:

- i. Investigate the significance of community leaders as stakeholders in reducing insecurity.
- ii. Assess the involvement of local businesses as stakeholders in mitigating security threats.

3 RESEARCH QUESTION

- i. What is the significance of community leaders as stakeholders in reducing insecurity.?
- ii. What is the involvement of local businesses as stakeholders in mitigating security threats?

4 METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine stakeholders' participation in communication usage for the reduction of insecurity in Nigeria. The research design allows for the systematic collection of numerical data, enabling statistical analysis to determine the relationship between variables.

4.1 Population Size

The population of this study consists of all security stakeholders in the Ekiti state, The population size was gathered from the State secretariat community, leaders 278, registered local businesses, law enforcement 79, government agencies 11, and civil society 683.

4.2 Sampling Technique

The target population for this study includes community leaders and local businesses involved in addressing insecurity in Ekiti state. A combination of purposive and stratified random sampling techniques will be employed.

4.3 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select key community leaders and local businesses who possess significant knowledge and expertise in the field of insecurity reduction and communication strategies. These stakeholders will be identified through a thorough review of relevant literature, expert recommendations, and consultation with key organizations working in the field.

4.4 Stratified Random Sampling

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the representation of different stakeholder groups. The population was stratified based on stakeholder categories, such as government officials, security agencies, community leaders, civil society organizations, and citizens, 10respondents were selected from each stakeholder category which sum to 50 respondents in total.

4.5 Data Collection

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire survey tagged Community Leaders and Local Businesses Communication Usage for Insecurity Reduction (CLBCUIR) administered to the selected stakeholders. The questionnaire was designed based on established scales and validated measures related to the role of community leaders and local businesses in effective communication usage for insecurity reduction. The questionnaire included items related to community leaders' and local businesses' engagement, communication channels, and perceptions of effectiveness.

4.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, and percentages to summarize the responses of the participants.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and the protection of their privacy and confidentiality. The study complied with relevant ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

5 RESULTS

Table 1 What are the Significances of Community Leaders as Stakeholders in Reducing Insecurity?

SN	Items	Strongly Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Strongly Disagree (SD)		Disagree (D)		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Community leaders play a crucial role in fostering cooperation and unity among community members to address security challenges in OyeEkiti .	15	30%	35	70%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100
2	Community leaders effectively mobilize community resources and support to combat insecurity in OyeEkiti .	10	20%	25	50%	5	10%	10	20%	50	100
3	Community leaders act as intermediaries between the government and community, facilitating effective communication and collaboration for security improvement in OyeEkiti .	5	10%	36	72%	9	18%	0	0%	50	100
4	Community leaders actively engage in community policing initiatives, promoting vigilance and reporting of security concerns in OyeEkiti .	3	6%	47	94%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100
5	Community leaders provide guidance and support to community members, empowering them to actively participate in efforts to reduce insecurity in OyeEkiti .	35	70%	15	30%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table examines the significance of community leaders in reducing insecurity: 30% strongly agree that community leaders foster cooperation and unity among community members, with 70% in agreement. This highlights the perceived role of leaders in building community solidarity.

Community leaders' effectiveness in mobilizing resources to combat insecurity sees 20% strongly agreeing, 50% agreeing, 10% disagreeing, and 20% strongly disagreeing. This mixed response suggests variability in their resource mobilization impact. Acting as intermediaries between the government and the community receives 10% strong agreement, 72% agreement, and 18% strong disagreement. This indicates a general agreement on their mediating role but also some reservations. Active engagement in community policing and promoting vigilance shows 6% strongly agreeing and 94% agreeing. This underscores the recognized value of community leaders in enhancing security awareness. Providing guidance and support to community members for active participation garners a strong agreement from 70% and agreement from 30%. This points to their role in empowering community involvement.

Table 2 What are the Involvements of Local Businesses as Stakeholders in Mitigating Security Threats?

SN	Items	SA		A		SD		D		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
6	Local businesses actively implement security measures within their establishments to mitigate security threats in OyeEkiti .	41	82%	9	18%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100
7	Local businesses collaborate with law enforcement authorities and community leaders to share information and prevent security incidents in Oye Ekiti	43	86%	7	14%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100
8	Local businesses actively support community initiatives and programs aimed at reducing insecurity in OyeEkiti .	16	32%	34	68%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100
9	Local businesses invest in security training and awareness programs for their employees to enhance security measures in OyeEkiti .	47	94%	3	6%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100

10	Local businesses actively report security incidents and cooperate with law enforcement authorities in investigations to mitigate security threats in Oye Ekiti State.	33	66%	17	34%	0	0%	0	0%	50	100
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Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table examines the involvement of local businesses in mitigating security threats: Local businesses actively implementing security measures see 82% strongly agreeing and 18% agreeing. This indicates a widespread recognition of their proactive role in enhancing security.

Collaboration with law enforcement authorities and community leaders for information sharing garners strong agreement from 86%, with 14% in agreement. This underscores their contribution to collaborative security efforts. Supporting community initiatives aimed at reducing insecurity receives 32% strong agreement and 68% agreement. This indicates varying degrees of support from businesses for community-based security efforts. Investing in security training and awareness programs for employees sees a strong agreement from 94% and agreement from 6%. This highlights their commitment to improving security measures. Actively reporting security incidents and cooperating with law enforcement authorities for investigations receives strong agreement from 66%, with 34% in agreement. This reflects their willingness to assist in maintaining security.

6 DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that community leaders foster cooperation and unity among community members, are effective mobilizers of resources to combat insecurity, intermediate between the government and the community, have an active role in community policing and promoting vigilance, and empower community members for active security participation. This highlights their role in creating a sense of solidarity, which is vital for community-based security efforts. Their recognition as mediating role suggests their potential to bridge communication gaps and facilitate collaboration for security enhancement and their acting role in community policing and vigilance signifies maintenance of a watchful community and reporting suspicious activities. This finding is cognizance of Mekonnen et al who reported that Stakeholder participation in insecurity reduction fosters social cohesion and trust among community members[20]. Ojo et al buttressed this finding when reported that community members played significant roles in funding and reporting threats and incidents of insecurity to security agencies to be proactive in their combat[22]. This shows that the effectiveness of partnership and victory is based on a comprehensive participatory process with the community. It is in line with these strategies that Njambi established that When communities are dedicated to the joint venture procedure they will achieve sustainable peace and security[23]. Nweke and Nwankwo reported concerning the active role of community leaders in community policing and promoting vigilance that community policing plays an important role in reducing various security threats in the eastern region, including armed robberies, kidnappings, cults, sheep raids and social problems[24]. Oyibokure et al substantiated that the inefficiency of the police force absolutely and drastically impacts human insecurity in the country[25].

The finding also highlights that local businesses actively implement security measures, collaborate with law enforcement authorities and community leaders for information sharing, support community initiatives aimed at reducing insecurity, invest in security training and awareness programs for employees, and active reporting of security incidents and cooperation with law enforcement authorities is acknowledged. Their active implementation of security measures showcases their role in enhancing security within their establishments. Their support of community initiatives indicates their level of engagement with broader security efforts. Their investment in security training signifies their commitment to enhancing security measures and their active report of security incidents shows their willingness to play a role in maintaining overall security. The finding aligns with Ojo et al who highlighted that local businesses usually report threats to security agencies and equally participate in decision-making about security issues in the community[22]. The finding exemplified by Bryson et al. who aver that their active engagement allows for a better knowledge of the root causes of insecurity, enabling more targeted and effective interventions[18]. Mekonnen et al. corroborated that their engagement promotes collective action, shared responsibility, and a sense of belonging, which can contribute to preventing and mitigating insecurity[20].

7 CONCLUSION

The study underscored the intricate web of stakeholders actively engaged in reducing insecurity in Oye Ekiti. Each stakeholder group contributes distinctively to the multifaceted landscape of security enhancement. The collaborations, roles, and responsibilities of these entities play a pivotal role in building a safer community.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations was proposed:

1. Stakeholders should prioritize collaborative efforts, fostering partnerships that leverage collective resources and expertise.
2. Encourage increased community engagement through community policing initiatives and programs that empower residents to be proactive in reporting security concerns.
3. Advocate for enhanced transparency and accountability across stakeholder groups, ensuring that information sharing is prioritized.
4. Support capacity-building programs for law enforcement and community leaders to strengthen their roles in security efforts.
5. Promote private-public partnerships where local businesses actively collaborate with authorities and community leaders to enhance security measures.

9 LIMITATIONS

It is important to acknowledge some potential limitations of this study.

1. The use of a quantitative approach may limit the depth of understanding compared to qualitative methods.
2. The representativeness of the sample could be influenced by the availability and willingness of stakeholders to participate.
3. The self-report nature of the questionnaire may introduce response bias.
4. The findings are based on perceptions, which may not always accurately reflect actual practices.
5. The study's scope focused on a specific geographic location Ekiti State potentially limiting the generalizability of the results.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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