The Role of Participatory Communication in Enhancing Members’ Involvement In Organizations: A Case Of The African Women’s Development And Communication Network

by

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APPROVAL

THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN ENHANCING MEMBERS’ INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION NETWORK

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In accordance with Daystar University policies, this thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

AA: Associate of Applied Science Degree in Nursing
AU: African Union
AWD: African Women’s Decade
FEMNET: The African Women’s Development and Communication Network
HIV/ AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IGOs: Inter- Governmental Organizations
NFPs: National Focal Points
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
PASW: The Predictive Analytic Software
PC & GA: Programming Conference and General Assembly
UN: United Nations
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNFPA: United Nations Fund for Population Activities
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
WACC: World Association for Christian Communication
WID: Women in Development
ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of the one-way communication versus the participatory communication approaches on members’ involvement in organizations. It looked at the African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) as a membership organization facing difficulty in keeping members involved in its communication activities. The study was guided by Paulo Freire’s liberation theory which is based on the fact that the only type of communication that leads to development is the one that facilitates dialogue between those involved in the communication process.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The sample was equal to the accessible population which was comprised of FEMNET members based in Nairobi. The findings of the study revealed that all respondents were inadequately involved in FEMNET communication process, as 25% said they were not involved at all and 75% said they were minimally involved but they kept on thinking they should do better. On the one hand, FEMNET’s staff said they were doing their best to serve members and they wondered why members were not responsive. On the other hand, members said they were not involved in FEMNET’s communication process and they felt FEMNET did not care enough about them, hence their lack of motivation.

The findings of the study revealed that this problem is mostly caused by FEMNET’s communication approaches. As a way forward, it recommends strategies that FEMNET should adopt in order to facilitate members’ involvement in its communication process.
DEDICATION

To God I dedicate this work, just like everything else I own. He is my song, my strength and my salvation. Without Him, I would not have even started this master’s program, leave alone finishing it.

To my very dear husband, Gordon Stanley Odira, that I call my hero because of numerous reasons I would not finish listing. He is my love, my role model, my brother and my friend. I thank him for going many extra miles to ensure that I did complete this process.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The thought of a world void of communication, where people would not share meaning on anything helps one appreciate the importance of communication. Regardless of reasons that lead people to communicate, such is a very important activity of day to day life. Without it, almost all other disciplines would be handicapped. Education would not take place; lawyers would not be able to share meaning with their clients; doctors and patients would not understand each other; pastors or priests and their church members would struggle to fellowship. Without effective communication, even organizations would not come into existence because people would not share their needs and there would be no opportunity to share values and carry any vision as a group. No wonder Nyirenda (1996) rightly says that the world of human beings is a world of communication.

Very often people say, “we just can’t communicate,” or “we are having communication problems.” These expressions appear regularly in everyday conversations as people struggle to solve a problem, start a relationship, manage a conflict, or find a new way of connecting in an established relationship. Such struggles occur in all areas of life, in classrooms and offices, at kitchen tables, and on athletic fields. In our society people of different backgrounds come together to solve problems or make things happen, and in those situations they can find themselves frustrated because of “communication breakdowns.” Although these dissatisfactions are not new, they are heightened by the fact that we live in an
information age in which effective communication is expected and valued in all areas of life. (Galvin & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 4)

Deductively, it is not that people cannot communicate when they are faced with misunderstanding of various breeds— rather, they often do not know how to communicate effectively. It is therefore important for communicators to acquire skills that promote effective communication.

Communicating effectively, establishing and maintaining relationships with people can lead to a whole host of benefits including healthier communities, reduced misunderstanding and personal growth (Neuliep, 2009). Moreover, Kraut, Fish, Root and Chalfonte (1990) appropriately say that most of the work that people do in organizations requires some degree of active cooperation and communication with others. Thus, a number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) emphasize on the right to communicate with some focusing on the right to communicate and people's ability to strategically chose the most appropriate medium of communication (ActionAid, 2006). Others support the right to communicate even during times of coercion as a way of promoting democracy through dialogue and debate (WACC, 2005). Yet others consider the right to communicate as a fundamental human right (APC, 2010). Thus Freire (1970) is right when he argues that it is only through communication that human life can hold meaning.

In organizations, the fact that communication has taken place is not in itself sufficient. For example, one-way communication might not go a long way in facilitating development because this type of asymmetric information exchange often translates into a missing sense of ownership (UNFPA, 2002). Therefore, members of a community should be allowed to partake in communication processes so they can feel involved (Linzer & Kowalski, 1997) because it is crucial in a communication
process for the sender and the receiver to learn and enrich one another mutually without one feeling that one’s input is not valued.

As much as participatory approaches would be considered the ideal for facilitating effective communication, behaviour change models have been the dominant paradigm in the field of development communication. In these models, different theories and strategies share the premise that development problems are mainly caused by a lack of knowledge, hence interventions need to provide people with information in order to change their behaviour (Dagron & Tufte, 2006).

In earlier days, information sprung from the developed countries to the Third World, a linear top-down approach which assumed that the receiver’s mind was empty and ready to be filled with information from the sender (Freire, 1970).

The model below from Foulger (2004) illustrates the linear communication model as presented by Shannon:

![Shannon's (1948) Model of the communication process](image)

The problem with the linear models of communication is the tendency to treat information as if it is an entirely physical entity which can be moved around like other material objects (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981).
Therefore, when Weiner (1972) realized the shortcomings of the linear model, he introduced the model below which added the element of feedback as a tool for establishing what the message has created in the receiver’s mind, as illustrated in the interactive communication model below (Foulger, 2004):

Rogers and Kincaid (1981) also argue that as much as feedback helps in revealing to some extent the state of the receiver’s mind, there exists the need to establish whether the sender and the receiver decipher the message in an analogous manner, hence the introduction of the convergence model of communication.
This model as illustrated by Fielding (2005) below aims to show the communication progression in a convergence model of communication:

![Convergence Model of Communication](image)

Figure 3: Basic Components of the Convergence Model of Communication

Information and mutual understanding are the dominant components of the convergence model of communication. Collective action of any group is based upon enhanced information sharing, mutual understanding and mutual agreement (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981). It has been particularly popular among the proponents of development communication and it is based on the argument that even though the sender has some information to share, the receiver’s mind is certainly not blank (Freire, 1970). Therefore, effective communication could be said to have taken place when the receiver is able to grasp what the sender meant to share. The sender has to
appreciate that communication takes place over time and is influenced, either positively or negatively, by various factors.

Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani and Lewis (2002) explain that the convergence model aims at reducing the level of diversity to the point where there is a sufficient level of mutual comprehension and conformity to engage in collective action and often solve mutual problems. Each communicator should be allowed to contribute to the process as Christians (2009) argues that denying any communicator the right to have a say in the communication process is ethically wrong.

With the understanding of how communication approaches mentioned so far in this study work, it is therefore important for organizations to carefully decide on the communication approaches that best facilitate the stakeholders’ involvement. Since the linear model does not pay enough attention on what is in the mind of the receiver, consequently the receiver is likely to behave in ways that might be contrary to the desire of the sender. That is often caused by the fact that misunderstanding or any other type of noise might have distorted the meaning of the message.

The African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), the case of this study, is a regional membership organization that aims to strengthen the role and contribution of African Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) focusing on women’s development, equality and other human rights. It also aims at providing a channel through which these NGOs can reach one another and share experiences, information and strategies so as to improve their work on African women’s development, equality and other human rights (FEMNET, 2011).

The researcher got an opportunity to do her internship at FEMNET from January to May 2009. As she carried out her duties, which mainly focused on communication between FEMNET and its members, she realized members were not
adequately involved in this communication process. There was insufficient response to information, which mostly flows from FEMNET to its members. For example, despite numerous efforts from FEMNET such as offering enticements to members and sending them volumes of informative publications, at times a simple request like that of filling a questionnaire from FEMNET can be ignored by more than half the number of members. This organization publishes regularly and periodicals are sent to members through post office. Though there is an evaluation form that is usually inserted in the package so the receiver can share thoughts in reaction to the specific publication sent, most of them do not do so. But over time, the organization has continued to send those publications to its members. The organization spends a considerable amount of money, effort and time to produce and disseminate information but receiving feedback from members concerning dispatched information remains a challenge.

After realizing the inadequate involvement from its members, FEMNET started working with identified National Focal Points (NFPs) which are supposed to serve as a point of contact between the organization and its members (FEMNET, 2010). However, NFPs” difficulties in getting continuous feedback from its constituency at the national level, what can also be called loose linkage between FEMNET and NFPs, was identified as one of the weak points for FEMNET during its fourth (FEMNET, 2007) and fifth (FEMNET, 2010) Programming Conference and General Assembly (PC & GA).

The mentioned issues can serve as an indication that there exists a gap in members” involvement. According to Fearn- Banks (2007), such concerns can be referred to as warning signs that notify of a pending dilemma. An organization
should not overlook them, rather they should be considered as problems that need to be solved in order to prevent negative outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

FEMNET’s mission is to facilitate the sharing of experiences, ideas, information, and strategies for human rights promotion among African women’s organizations. The organization meets its objectives through networking, communication, capacity building and advocacy at the regional and international levels (FEMNET, 2011). Its core program is communication because, evidently, one cannot carry out effective advocacy and capacity building without first making sure the communication process is effective.

At FEMNET however, efforts to create a two-way type of communication with members were often hard for the researcher and often fruitless mainly because feedback from members was scarce. Only few members would show interest in the network’s communication activities while others remained complacent. The scarce feedback from members is an issue that FEMNET should not ignore because it has the potential to hinder the organization from achieving its goal to a satisfying level. Wertheim (2008) argues that feedback gives direction to organizations and enables them to evaluate the effectiveness of their messages. Consequently, insufficient feedback is often the root of a large number of organizational problems which can negatively affect FEMNET’s image, reputation or performance.

Development projects such as FEMNET depend on effective communication in order to succeed (Gudykunst & Mody, 2002). Therefore, insufficient feedback from FEMNET members is a problem that the network should address because feedback promotes efficient communication (Wiener, 1972; Mory, 2001; Costa, 2006; Adendorff, 2007) and its scantiness blurs the direction the network should take in 8
order to achieve its mission of working with members to fight for women’s rights in Africa. In addition, Erven (n.d.) says that it is feedback that allows the communicator to adjust his/ her message and be more effective. In his view, without feedback as the mirror of communication, there would be no way of knowing if meaning has been shared or if understanding has taken place. He also asserts that a communication problem may soon become a crisis or it may linger on for years and that is why it should be addressed before it turns into an emergency.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to identify and examine the causes and corollary of the inadequate involvement in the communication process from FEMNET’s members and to find out ways to enhance members’ participation in its communication- related activities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine how FEMNET carried out its communication activities;
2. To find out the extent to which members were involved in FEMNET’s communication process;
3. To identify other communication strategies that FEMNET can use to enhance members’ involvement in its communication process.
Research Questions

1. How did FEMNET carry out its communication activities?

2. What did members think about FEMNET’s communication approach (es)?

3. What were the causes of the inadequate involvement from FEMNET’s members in its communication activities?

4. What strategies can FEMNET use to facilitate members’ participation in its communication activities?

Assumptions

This study made the following assumptions:

1. FEMNET was using some type of approach to communicate to its members other than participatory communication;

2. The use of participatory communication approaches would cause members to engage more with FEMNET’s activities;

3. Respondents would be willing and able to take part in the study, and would truthfully answer all questions;

4. Permission from FEMNET to carry out the study would be obtained.

Limitations and Delimitations

1. FEMNET members are spread throughout Africa and the researcher could not travel to 37 countries of Africa where FEMNET has members to collect data. Therefore the researcher selected her sample from the accessible population which was made of FEMNET members based in Nairobi;

2. Some respondents were reluctant to take part in the research due to fear that negative answers from them might not be taken well by FEMNET. The researcher
ensured respondents of the confidentiality of the research and they finally agreed to be part of the study except for 2 organizations which completely declined.

Rationale

The participatory approach is commonly known as a process that starts where the real needs and problems like hunger, poverty and the lack of health facilities exist in rural areas, urban slum and other depressed sectors (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). This study sought to explore a different angle where the members of FEMNET were referred to as the community rather than a group of people in a rural setting. Based on Paulo Freire’s liberation theory, the researcher inferred that participatory communication would play a crucial role in enhancing members’ involvement in a membership organization, an area that the researcher identified as new and relevant for investigation.

Significance of the Study

In order to grow and achieve its vision, FEMNET would appreciate a study that can help achieve and sustain a vibrant relationship with its members. This study sought to identify causes of FEMNET’s members’ inadequate involvement and to suggest recommendations that would help remedy the situation.

This study would be of importance to FEMNET because there is no need for an organization to invest resources in activities that do not produce desired outputs. This suggestion does not mean that FEMNET should let go its membership status because it is through this way that the network can make impact throughout Africa. It is only to say that if different results are expected then the network cannot continue doing the same things in a similar manner yet expect different results. As Farrell (n.d.) argues, “in today’s changing and volatile world, organisations are continually looking
for ways to improve performance and satisfy the demands of all stakeholders” (p. 2). In order to provide this satisfaction, change is almost inevitable and it is the pivotal dynamic for success.

The findings of this study, if appropriately used, would help FEMNET and other membership-based organizations to create and preserve members” involvement in communication processes.

Definition of Terms

This section defines terms that are pertinent to the study.

Communication

In this study, communication is considered to be a process that facilitates the sharing of meaning between the sender and receiver of information (Rogers, 1976). In the context of organizations, communication is more than an important organizational function, it reflects the organization’s values and it can build or discourage key stakeholders (Goodman, 1994). The researcher considers communication to be a powerful tool that can strongly influence, either positively or negatively, FEMNET”s members” involvement in the organization”s communication process. And since information is a crucial commodity in any organization, then the way in which it is conveyed can either help or hinder organizational goals (Wood, 2004).

However, communication is a discipline that is not to be confused with talking. People have always talked but communication is still considered an infant discipline (Carmen, 2011), and that is why scholars are still making attempts to provide more specific and in-depth definitions of the subject. For the purpose of this study, communication is defined in the same words as Lundstrom & Smith (2000), to be a process by which participants create and share information with one another in order 12
to reach a mutual understanding. The study will also strongly take into consideration Shannon (1948)’s observation that the problem that occurs often than not in the communication process is reproducing the message either exactly or approximately from the sender’s mind to the receiver’s. People do not only need to communicate, they also need to do so efficiently.

*Membership*

In this study membership is defined as an agreement that two or more organizations that have a similar vision enter into as they seek to strengthen their voice and impact by way of solidarity in order to achieve a common goal. These organizations are called members but the organization they adhere to is called the mother organization (Puusa & Tolvanen, 2006). A membership organization refers to an association or corporation established for the purpose of providing services, on a non-profit basis, to members who own and control it (West’s Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008).

*Participatory Communication*

In this study participation refers to a process that would involve FEMNET members in all stages of decision making so that it does not solely practice the top down approach using its status as the mother organization. Indeed, Singhal, Cody, Rogers and Sabido (2004) counsel that in participatory communication there should be some kind of impartiality among parties involved in the communication process.
Organizational Communication

Salwen and Stacks (1996) define organizational communication as the course of sending and receiving messages that create and maintain a system of consciously coordinated activities of persons. They further conjecture that organizational communication occurs within a specific social system composed of interdependent groups attempting to accomplish commonly recognized goals. Also, Goodman (1994) defines organizational communication as an effort to effectively and profitably communicate to internal and external members of an organization. Therefore, in this study communication is considered a discipline that goes beyond the mere exchange of information to a process that should be carried out effectively in order to facilitate the achievement of an organization’s mission.

Development Communication

Development communication has been defined as the strategic application of communication technologies and processes to promote social change (Mody, 1991). Waisbord (2001) discusses further that the present aim of development communication is to eradicate constraints for a more equal and participatory society. Equal participation in this study means that members of FEMNET would take part in communication processes as much as internal staff members directly involved in the communication process do.

FEMNET’s Members

FEMNET members are made up of African feminist organizations; organizations or individuals that share FEMNET’s vision; and organizations dealing with women’s rights issues at national, regional, or international levels (FEMNET,
2011). These organizations or individuals have willingly joined FEMNET as members, and they pay an annual fee determined by FEMNET.

*Members’ Involvement*

In this study, members’ involvement means a situation where members and the mother organization share understanding on issues they are concerned with in their work, and they act together to achieve certain goals they have set themselves to achieve. Since this study has a specific focus on communication, members’ involvement is perceived as the availability of prompt feedback from members after receiving messages from the mother organization, and prompt responses to any call for action (Puusa & Tolvanen, 2006).

Individual members or groups need to communicate with each other to achieve social functions; within organizations, groups need to communicate with other groups (Kraut, Fish, Root & Chalfonte, 1990). In the context of this study one would say that besides FEMNET having a vibrant relationship with its members, its members should also be able to communicate amongst themselves.

Heerden (2004) notes that members of a system are interdependent. Consequently, if a member or many members of FEMNET fail to play their various roles or simply become uninvolved, it affects FEMNET’s achievement of its goal as a membership organization. This emphasizes the fact that communication is a process and it could be affected by events that occurred prior to the actual message transfer. For instance, if a member has not been feeling valued enough even before information is distributed, when it is eventually disseminated the feeling of detachment from the member’s part might affect the type of feedback the member sends. The researcher
actually argues that the lack of involvement from members is a strong type of silent feedback which signals a broken relationship that needs to be attended to.

Members’ Inadequate Involvement

Since members’ involvement has already been defined as the availability of prompt feedback from members after receiving messages from the mother organization; members’ inadequate involvement is therefore defined as scarce or even delayed feedback from FEMNET’s members to its Secretariat. Hence in this study, the words „inadequate involvement” and „insufficient feedback” are akin.

Dialogue

Dialogue is defined as a discussion between people in which opinions are exchanged. It is a constructive debate on common problems and its features include mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment (Nelissen, 2007).

Feedback

Researchers (Baroudi, 2007; Bower, 2011, Muller, 2011) define feedback as the information about the disparity between how things are and how they should be— that information is then used to alter that gap. Costa (2006) notes that feedback influences people’s awareness of whether they have been successful or not, and that has the potential to shape how they think and act in the future. Moreover, Torokoff (n.d.) says that best possible use of feedback largely diminishes difficulties to valuable communication. But communicators should make sure that feedback is revealing enough (Brinkman et al., 2007), so that it can be used to improve the communication process. Since feedback gives direction (Wertheim, 2008), its scarcity is therefore a problem that FEMNET cannot afford to overlook because it should be
used as an ongoing management and learning tool to improve an organization’s effectiveness (Martinez, 2005). In addition, Erven (n.d.) advises that prompt feedback is more effectual than feedback saved up till a later time set for evaluation.

Women’s Development

Women’s development is the sustainable improvement of women’s lives in every aspect of their lives (Reeves & Baden, 2000). As such they gain capacity to work by building awareness, skills, knowledge, confidence and experience (Miller, 2000). And that kind of empowerment allows them to take part in the process of change by enabling them to assess their own lives and make their own choices (UN, 2004).

Communication Network

Communication networks are based on ongoing data transmission where the task is exchanging information between different participants within a system (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981). Therefore, FEMNET should ideally be a facilitator of information exchange from members to FEMNET, from FEMNET to members and from members to members.

Summary

This chapter presents FEMNET as a regional membership organization which is experiencing difficulties in creating a strong tie with its members who are inadequately involved in its communication activities. The researcher assumes that the lack of members’ involvement is related to the type of communication model that the organization uses in its sharing of information, which hinders members from
taking active part in the communication process. The researcher introduces the participatory communication approach and seeks to compare it with the top down one in order to highlight the strength and shortcomings of each of them. The following chapter reviews literature with the aim to allow an in-depth understanding of the study topic while highlighting key issues which have shaped this work. The third chapter covers the methodology used by the researcher in order to collect data which is discussed, analysed and interpreted in the subsequent chapter. The final chapter deals with discussions, conclusions and recommendations based on the objectives of the study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review involves the systematic identification, location and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem being studied. It aims to determine what has been done already related to the research conundrum being investigated (Mugenda, 2003). The theoretical framework of this study focuses on the participatory communication approach. It discusses Freire’s pedagogical theory and his framework of liberation, as well as participation models developed by Sadnandan Nair and Shirley White. The theoretical review is divided into three sections: the first consists of the general overview of existing literature about the topic of the study. The second covers the theoretical framework and conceptual framework, and the third section is a conclusion that offers a brief summary of the literature review.

Brief History of FEMNET

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) was founded in 1988 with the aspiration to share experiences, information and strategies among African women’s NGOs. FEMNET does its work through advocacy, capacity building and communication so as to advance African women's development, equality and other human rights. Since its inauguration, FEMNET has played a leadership role for African women's NGOs at Regional and International decision-making levels. FEMNET has gained recognition as the convenor of African women’s movement in strategic circles, including the United Nations agencies, African Union, and other women’s NGOs (FEMNET, 2011).
FEMNET’s core values include commitment and passion for women’s advancement, integrity, credibility, transparency and accountability, unity in diversity, solidarity, inclusiveness, respect and tolerance, professionalism, effectiveness, creativity and responsibility, justice, equality and democracy. The network also facilitates collective action by African women's movements in order to engage in regional gender issues. It works under five focus areas which include HIV/AIDS, women’s economic empowerment, women in leadership, women in media, and sexual reproductive rights (FEMNET, 2011).

FEMNET has members from different countries of Africa namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Comoros, Cote d’Ivoire, Congo Brazzaville, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

FEMNET as a Membership Organization

FEMNET currently has a total of 200 members: 97 organizational members and 103 individual members spread throughout African sub-regions (Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western and Central Africa). The membership annual fee is 20 American Dollars ($ 20) for individual members; $100 for national organization members; $200 for regional organizational members; and $ 300 for international organizational members. Membership is open to African women’s organizations; organizations that share FEMNET’s vision; and organizations dealing with women’s rights issues at national, sub-regional and regional levels (FEMNET, 2011).
Members are entitled to a number of benefits. Member organizations receive FEMNET’s publications on a regular basis and they can be profiled therein. More importantly, FEMNET engages in capacity building for member organizations and closely works with organizations in advocacy-based campaigns that seek to promote women’s rights and gender equality. Member organizations have the opportunity to host and coordinate FEMNET’s events in their respective countries. Representatives of member organizations that have fully paid their membership dues have the right to vote in the General Assembly (GA) and to contest on any position on the Executive Board or Board of Trustees, once seconded by their organizations (FEMNET, 2011).

Individual members also derive benefits. They are entitled to free copies of FEMNET’s publications and they can participate in the Programming Conference (PC) and General Assembly (GA) even though they cannot vote. They also receive motivational and inspiring news from FEMNET on best practices and breakthrough initiatives that are transforming women’s lives through Africa. In addition, they have access to information resources from FEMNET’s Gender and Development Resource Centre and they can contribute articles for the organization’s publications and for its website. Moreover, they are included in FEMNET’s African Women’s Expert Database so they can be contracted to undertake research or consultancies. They receive regular update on women, gender and development issues in Africa and sponsoring opportunities to regional and international meetings when funds are available (FEMNET, 2011).
FEMNET’s Culture

A culture refers to the common pattern of behaviour and way of life which characterizes a given group and links its members together (Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht & Lindsley, 2006). Usually, each organization has a way of doing things which sets it apart from others and grants it a certain level of exclusivity. Rogers and Kincaid (1981) also submit that the more members of an organization seek to dialogue till they reach a mutual understanding, the more they begin achieving some similitude which can then be referred to as culture. Deductively, the more people dialogue the more they begin seeing in the same direction. In an organizational setting, scholars (Agard, 2011; Kefela, 2010) discuss that organizational communication is a key element of organizational culture. He adds that organizational communication can be defined as the central binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organized behaviour.

From the researcher’s observation, FEMNET’s leadership encourages proper delegation as part of Capacity Building. Employees are often sent to represent the organization at conferences and other meetings. This shows trust and confidence the leadership has in them. Employees are also allowed to share their ideas on how to strengthen the network and if those ideas are approved by the leadership, they get implemented.

There exists management contact as Programme Officers and the Director are within reach and they always seek to offer support to subordinates whenever they ask for it. FEMNET’s employees are usually commended for any outstanding performance. They do not receive promotions very often but they receive other benefits like academic sponsorship, salary increment and trainings.
Internal communication is relatively free. There is an open-door policy and both junior and senior can freely communicate on matters concerning their work.

**Brief Overview of the Feminist Movement**

Carden (1974) discusses that since 1848, women begun realizing that they were being treated as less of humans yet they had strength within themselves that could improve the quality of their lives and that of their descendants. They realized that they were oppressed and they had neither rights nor respect accorded to them. Kanbur (2002) also submits that women are generally more likely than men to suffer from poverty with restricted access to significant education, health, employment, and political resources.

The two first waves of feminism, as Krolokke and Sorensen (2005) put forward, sought reforms on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, voting rights, sexual harassment and sexual violence. They say further that the current or third wave which started in the late 80s to early 90s includes renewed campaigns for greater influence in politics. Moreover, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) note that feminists suggest that the importance of hiring women in senior positions of authority within development institutions should be recognized and not just focus on women as recipients and targets of gender bolster.

Sommers (1995) presents that the feminists’ quest has been to find out why women cannot have equal opportunities with men when it comes to political leadership and other opportunities human beings should enjoy regardless of their gender. She classifies feminists in two categories: equity feminists and gender feminists. She argues that gender feminists hate men and boys, and regard them as oppressors and enemies; while equity feminists are those who care about women.
issues and their development without necessarily attacking men. FEMNET falls under this latter category, since it even has a programme known as *Men to Men* which seeks to involve men in its work.

The World Bank’s third Millennium Development goal is to promote gender equality and empower women as a focal factor to its global mission to reduce poverty and quicken economic growth (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Also, in the 1970s a number of global developments strengthened the new sub-field titled Women In Development- WID (Levy, 1996). In addition, there was increased attention given to women by the United Nations through the sponsorship of the decade (1975- 1985) for advancement of women (Ruto, Mbote & Strachan, 2009).

Another women’s decade known as the African Women’s Decades (AWD 2010- 2020) was launched by the African Union on 15th October 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya under the theme: *Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women‟s Empowerment*. Priority areas of the AWD are women’s economic empowerment, women’s bodily integrity, autonomy and dignity; and women’s participation in decision making (FEMNET, 2011).

Women’s Development

A radio preacher was talking about Christian marriages, pondering the meaning of Genesis 2.24 „and they will become one flesh‟. The preacher asked „how can the two become one?‟ then after a moment he answered his own question „only if the woman becomes a zero, because one plus zero equals one!‟ Also, a Korean proverb says: „dried fish and women are both better after they are beaten‟ (Miller, 2007). Such views and attitudes would be mentioned among the various reasons that gave birth to women’s rights movements. FEMNET is therefore listed as one of
numerous women’s rights organizations that concern themselves with women’s development.

Overview of Communication

Approaches Top down Communication approach

According to Singhal (1997), information had to be shared widely in order to get rid of the primeval culture caused by a lack of knowledge which was perceived to be a hindrance to progress. Development was originally perceived to be a process by which Third World societies, which supposedly lacked knowledge, would become like western developed and erudite ones. This would be through a provision of information which would facilitate behavior change (Waisbord, 2001). In this study, the top down approach means a communication process where parties involved in the communication process assume lopsided roles. The sender is well informed and the receiver does not know much and depends on received information to find direction.

Participatory Communication approach

According to Rogers and Kincaid (1981), participatory communication is a process where participants in the communication process take turns to equally share in the course of action. However, participatory communication may not be defined easily because it cannot be considered a unified model of communication (Dagron, 2001). The latter also said that “the eagerness for labels and encapsulated definitions could only contribute to freeze a communication movement that is still shaping itself, and that may be more valuable precisely because of its variety and looseness” (p.8).

Singhal (2003) defines participation communication as the process of two-way communication that encourages dialogue built on problem analysis. While Freire
(1970) looks at it as an educational process that allows all involved parties to freely learn through dialogue. Furthermore, Cadiz (1994) defines participatory communication as a planned activity, based on both participatory processes and interpersonal communication. She posits that its two-sided nature facilitates a dialogue among different stakeholders, around a common development problem, with the objective of developing and implementing a set of activities to contribute to its solution. Likewise, the United Nations (UN, 2005) defines participatory communication as a dynamic, interactional and transformative process of dialogue between people, groups, and institutions. It is surmised to be a process which facilitates people, both individually and collectively, to reach their full prospective and be engaged in their own welfare. Since the common denominator is the element of dialogue, the researcher looks at participatory communication as a process that would facilitate dialogue between FEMNET and its members. The point of departure would be FEMNET’s members as opposed to FEMNET being the lone decision maker and implementer in the communication process. As Freire (1970) puts it, communication is not a privilege of some few people but the right of everyone. Thus no one should claim to know what the other needs and articulate it for him/ her because each individual knows his/ her needs and is best placed to convey them.

Before delving into participatory approaches, a brief discussion on the communication process is of essence especially concerning the element of feedback. Shannon (1948) presents that a communication process consists of five parts: an information source, a transmitter, the channel, the receiver, and the destination. Later, Weiner (1972) introduces the interactive model which appends the element of feedback on the communication process. This element of feedback originated from the study of cybernetics (Littlejohn, 1992; Mindell, 2000). Littlejohn (1992) defines
cybernetics as the study of feedback where information about the results of a process is returned, or fed back, into the process.

According to Mory (2001) feedback is useful in three main ways: first, feedback serves as a motivator or incentive for increasing response rate and/or accuracy. Second, feedback provides a reinforcing message that can automatically connect responses to prior stimuli, the focus being on correct responses. Third, feedback provides information that learners can use to validate or change a previous response, the focus falling on error responses.

Rubin and Campell (1998) say that feedback to a professional is like water to a fish, and this means that just as fish cannot survive without water even a communication process cannot be complete and fruitful without the element of feedback in it. With an understanding of the element of feedback, it is now in order to further discuss participatory communication.

According to Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009), behaviour change models have been the dominant paradigm in the discipline of development communication. Scholars (Rogers, 1976; 1983; Jaffrelot, 2003; Cabrera, 2007) explain that the early generation of development communication studies was controlled by the modernization theory, also known as the development theory. This theory assumed that difficulties in Third World countries were related to the existence of a conservative culture that stifled development. In order for development to take place there was a need for a paradigm shift to a modern stage: changes in ideas would result in alterations in behaviour. The manner in which Rogers (1976) defines communication shows what the role of communication was initially thought to be: a process by which an idea is conveyed from a source to a receiver with the intent to change his behavior. Typically the source wants to alter the receiver’s knowledge of some ideas, create or change his
attitude toward the idea, or persuade him to adopt the idea as part of his conventional conduct.

The modernization theory originated from two communication models: the first is the Shannon & Weaver model of sender-receiver which explains the transmission of information among machines, originally developed in engineering studies (Severin & Tankard, 1979). The second is the propaganda model which was developed during World War II according to which the mass media had „magic bullet” effects in changing attitudes and behaviour— Rogers (1976) referred to it as a left-to-right paradigm. An example of a theory from the propaganda model is the diffusion of innovation by Rogers (1962), which dominated development communication for decades till late in the mid-1970s.

One thing that is clear is that the model of sender receiver and the propaganda model considered receivers to be instruments with no minds of their own, who would receive information and execute its orders just like robots. There was no option for the receiver to question first the received information and probably make suggestions to improve it or reject it.

Thus Rogers (1995) later admits the passing of the dominant paradigm and agrees that participatory theories could be the solution to various problems of the Third World. In the same vein, Nair and White (1993) argue that as much as all participation is communication driven, all communication is not participatory. Servaes, Jacobson and White (1996) add that participation would not be possible without communication but what has not been very obvious is that not just any kind of communication makes genuine participation. Mansell (1982) says that instead of communicating the correct information, participatory communication articulates
processes of joint action and deliberation by relevant stakeholders. Thus, the emphasis is not only on what kind of information but also on how it is communicated.

Scholars like Servaes and Malikhao (2005) discourage approaches that seek to feed people with information because they argue that if knowledge is to be efficiently employed to assist people, it needs to be interpreted and evaluated by those it is designed to help. Deductively, Giving people the opportunity to construe and assess the information they receive facilitates the reception of feedback from them whether it is in favour of the received information or not. Such a process also minimizes postulations as much as possible.

Fielding (2006) says that presuming that people know less than they actually do can hinder effective communication. Mostly because if people realize that their understanding or knowledge is underestimated, they are likely to withdraw or rebel. Congruently, Agunga (1997) argues that participatory communication should be based on scientific research and not speculations in order to yield satisfying outcomes. With facts generated from research findings, one is able to address concerns aired by respondents instead of acting on assumptions.

Singhal, Cody, Rogers and Sabido (2004), propose that there are two major but interrelated approaches to participatory communication. The first approach centres on the dialogic pedagogy of Paulo Freire. The second centres on the ideas of access, participation, self-determination and self-management sharpened during the UNESCO New World Information Order debates of the 1970s.

Although both sets of participatory approaches share many similarities, their grounds of wide application are somewhat distinct. The Freirean theory of dialogic communication is based more on interpersonal and group dialogue and it finds more application in the field of community development, literacy, education, participation
and transformation (Freire, 1970). The second approach also referred to as the community media approach focuses on issues of public and community access to appropriate media, participation of people in message design and media production, and self-management of communication enterprises (Easterly, 2006).

According to Freire (1978), participatory communication requires changes in the thinking of communicators. Often than not, experts tend to shun participatory approaches, possibly because it requires much more imagination, preparation and hard work to have dialogical learning. In the top down planning approach, professionals carry out almost all activities starting from problem identification to planning and implementation with very little or no consideration of the views of stakeholders (Singhal, Harter, Chitnis & Sharma, 2004). Moreover, even though consultations with other stakeholders are occasionally incorporated in the process, professionals tend to be strongly defensive about their own views and in most cases those views are subsequently upheld with little or no recognition of other stakeholders” views (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

Obviously, it is not very easy for persons with some sort of authority to take into consideration suggestions from their subordinates and act upon them. Nonetheless, in the communication process participants need to remember that they are equals and any partaker should be free to contribute to the process as much as necessary.

It is essential to note that in order to ensure participation in the communication process, one should not move too far from the traditional ways of communicating, especially face-to-face interactions (Boafo, 2006) and frequent meetings that facilitate productive dialogues (Sarri & Sarri, 1992). Moreover, Mefalopulos and Kamlongera (2004) are of the opinion that the purpose of participatory communication should not
be to pass a definite message but rather to create the foundation for discussing crucial issues.

As a contribution to the participatory communication discussion, Cammaerts & Carpentier (2007) note that one fact to keep in mind is that participation levels differ and they are divided in two main categories: partial and full participation. On one hand, partial participation is a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions, but the final prerogative to resolve rests with one party only. On another hand, full participation is a process where each individual member of a decision making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions.

One can then infer that even in organizations, efforts to make members feel involved can be made, but at the back the organization will plan and take actions according to the expert’s advice and not from participants’ suggestions and ideas. Few organizations would be willing to wait until all the stakeholders have voiced their concerns and desires before taking actions.

Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) submit that beside the two broad categories mentioned above, participatory communication takes place at four different levels. At times it starts from one level and grows to the other and at other times it remains at the same level throughout a process. The first and least participatory level is the passive participation where primary stakeholders of a project participate by being informed about what is going to happen or has already happened. People’s feedback is minimal or non-existent and their participation is assessed through their contribution to the discussion.

The second level is participation by consultation, an extractive process whereby stakeholders provide answers to questions posed by outside researchers or
experts. In the final analysis, this consultative process keeps all the decision-making power in the hands of external professionals who are under no obligation to incorporate stakeholders input.

The third level is the *participation by collaboration* where groups of primary stakeholders are formed to participate in the discussion and analysis of predetermined objectives set by the organization or project. Even though this type does not result in dramatic changes in what should be achieved, which is often already determined, it requires an active involvement in the decision-making process about how to achieve it. It incorporates a component of horizontal communication and capacity building among all stakeholders though it initially depends on outside facilitators. Cornelissen (2008) recommends the use of the stakeholder salience model which categorizes stakeholders on the basis of the power that they possess and the extent to which they are likely to have or show interest in the organization’s activities.

The fourth level known as the *empowerment participation* is one in which primary stakeholders are capable and willing to initiate the process and take part in the analysis, this leads to joint decision making about what should be achieved and how. While outsiders are equal partners in the development process, primary stakeholders are equal partners with a significant say in decision making. That is why Servaes and Liu (2007) argue that allowing members to take active part at the planning process increases their involvement in the communication process. Furthermore, Fraser and Estrada (2001) say that a project should be by the people and for the people so that they have a sense that they truly own it and want to take part in its activities. In empowerment participation, dialogue identifies and analyses critical issues while the exchange of knowledge and experiences leads to solutions. Ownership and control of the process rest in the hands of the primary stakeholders.
The use of participatory communication is very appropriate for an organization of a Pan-African nature like FEMNET because cross-cultural communication takes place in a wide variety of situations that range from interactions between people in whom cultural differences are extreme to interactions between people who are members of the same dominant culture (Wood, 2004). Mostly, the danger that exists when participatory is absent is to know whether the message was rightly decoded by the receiver or not (Porter & Samovar, 1988). With scarce feedback from members, FEMNET is faced with the challenge of knowing whether its members have deciphered information sent to them or not. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) posit that during a passive participation process, the only means of participation assessment is usually the other party’s contribution to the discussion. Consequently, the level of involvement from FEMNET members is directly proportional to the amount of feedback the network receives. In this case, insufficient feedback is a result of deficient participation.

Due to cultural relativism, which refers to the fact that different cultures have different values, customs and practices (Markel, 2001), participatory communication is of paramount importance so that all parties involved in the communication process can understand each other. Participatory approach— as Servaes, Jacobson and White (1996) submit— stresses the importance of cultural identity and participation of international, national, and local individuals who belong to a community group of people. They also posit that there should be reciprocal collaboration throughout all levels, and that means listening to what others say, respecting the counterpart’s attitude and having mutual trust. Consequentially, Adler and Rodman (1997) present that one is no longer attempting to create a need for the disseminated information, instead information is disseminated for an existing need.
However, Morris (2003) argues that one cannot completely brush out the conventional communication approach because even the field of development communication is dominated by two conceptual models: diffusion and participation. He explains that these models have distinct intellectual roots and differing emphases in terms of program designs and goals, but they are not totally parallel. Thus, the distinction between participatory communication and other communication approaches by Dagron was very much welcomed in the communication field, and a number of scholars subsequently used the table below to differentiate between participatory and non-participatory communication approaches (Singhal, 2001; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory communication strategies</th>
<th>Non-participatory communication strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal lateral communication between participants</td>
<td>Vertical top-down communication from senders to receivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of dialogue and democratic participation</td>
<td>Campaign to mobilize in a short-term, without building capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term process of sustainable change</td>
<td>Short-term planning and quick fix solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective empowerment and decision-making with the community’s involvement</td>
<td>Individual behaviour change for the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific in content, language, and culture</td>
<td>Massive and broad-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s needs are the focus</td>
<td>Donor’s „musts“ are the focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned by the community</td>
<td>Access determined by social political and economic factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness-raising</td>
<td>Persuasion for short-term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participatory Communication Strategies versus Non-participatory Communication Strategies

Theoretical Framework

The diffusion model (Rogers, 1962) focuses on knowledge transfer leading to behaviour change while participation places emphasis on a bottom up approach that involves the community at all levels of decision making (Freire, 1970).
The predominant model that guided development communication planning from the 1950s to the early 1970s was the diffusion of innovation model. It has received numerous critiques grouped in three categories: theoretical biases in its research activities; methodological biases; and social-structural constraints (Rogers, 1995; Singhal & Law, 1997).

Socrates, the famous classical Greek Athenian philosopher who is said to have brought philosophy from heaven, greatly influenced the communication process especially in the development field. He is well-known for his probing question-and-answer style which purposely attempted to arrive at a defensible and attractive definition of a virtue, a method commonly referred to as the Socratic Method. This approach, also known as elenchus, Socratic irony or Socratic debate is a form of inquiry between individuals with opposing viewpoints who ask and answer questions to kindle critical thinking and to elucidate ideas (Wellman, 1966).

Many years later, other philosophers borrowed from the Socrates Method to build various theories. One of them is Paulo Freire, a philosopher educationalist, writer, Marxist, and Christian who was born in Brazil in 1921 (Torres, 1999). Having spent years of his life working with the poor in his community (Maruatona, 1996; Nyirenda, 1996; McLaren, 2001; Gorder, 2007), he developed the liberation theory (Freire, 1970) that has mostly been used in Third World. The theory is also referred to as the pedagogy of the question or the inquiry-learning approach (Kirschner, 2009); critical pedagogy (Bercaw, 1992; Kellner, 1998; Lather, 1998); pedagogical praxis (Crisman, n.d.) and pedagogy of autonomy (Lamb, 2004).

Freire (1970) discusses the traditional system of education which he titles „banking education” where knowledge is a gift imparted by those who consider themselves well-informed upon those whom they consider to know nothing. In this
system, students are empowered to do little beyond receiving, filing and storing deposits. Creativity and critical thinking are dissuaded in banking education because they might result in challenging the status quo and role relations within the system. Freire (1970) insists that education was suffering from narration sickness, yet the teacher could still learn from his/her students, and even in those cases where it is not possible, there is no reason why a teacher cannot learn alongside students, as an equal, posing problems and working with them to solve them.

Freire then builds an argument for a dialogic process of liberation. He argues that communication might be unequal and exploitative or impartial and empowering for all participants. He then suggests that development communication should be a non-exploitative, unrestricted dialogue which is carried out in an atmosphere of sincere love and humility and which increasingly examines milieus and experiences of participants.

While the problem posing approach involves dialogue between the teacher and the student, the banking system proceeds by sending a series of communiqués which have been prepared in advance by others about subjects which they have determined that students should know. In the problem solving approach, the teacher is not the absolute authority on the subject and the students are able to make a valid contribution. This approach to education requires a teacher who can empathize with the students as they enter into inquiry activities because it requires patience and love.

Freire (1970) further argues that dialogue, which he defines as the encounter between men in order to name the world, should be considered the most important element of effective communication. He says that participation is the right for all people to individually and collectively speak their word. Freire’s idea runs against basic principles in the diffusion model, specifically its sender-focus and behavioural
bias inherited from persuasion models. He diagnoses the problem in the Third World as that of communication and not information as persuasion theories proposed. Information is limited to the content of what is sent out to the receiver while communication goes further to include the procedure used to share meaning. Scholars have recognized Freire’s approach as one with the potential to offer answers to development problems hence some call it the pedagogy of possibility (Glass, 2001); pedagogy of hope (Jorgensen, 1996; Bartlett, 2008; Gorder, 2002); revolutionary pedagogy (Arnett, 2002); and the pedagogy of freedom (Stasio, 2010). Moreover, Nyirenda (1996) notes that Freire’s approach is most appropriate for Africa’s development. In the context of this study, the researcher refers to it as the pedagogy of participation, or the pedagogy of involvement.

According to Bessette and Rajasunderam (1996), development communication is not built on message exchange but on emancipatory communication that unshackles people to determine their own future. Blankenberg (1999) in his attempt to combine the Ubuntu concept with Freire’s dialogic and participatory communication says that every person should be considered as a fountain of knowledge that has important information to contribute to the communication process. It is therefore wrong to assume that some people have the ability and skills to enrich the communication process while others can only receive since they have no relevant information to impart. Habermas (1990) stresses that the gauge of moral maturity is the aptitude to enter into the feelings, desires and perspectives of another person and to synchronize aspirations and actions with him/her. If the sender of information could try to figure out how it feels when the receiver is non-verbally told that he/she has nothing important to contribute, it would then help all communicators to realize that this process should be as participatory as possible.
It is from Freire’s arguments that the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by the late Sean MacBride, also argued that participatory communication seeks to overcome stereotyped thinking. It also promotes increased consideration of diversity, with full respect for the dignity and parity of partakers in the communication process (Ascroft, Nair & White, 1994). Indeed, allowing the sender and the receiver to take active part in the communication process is a sign of respect. More important is that participation is made possible in the decision making regarding the people to whom messages are intended (Gomez, 1997).

Some scholars (Nair & White, 1993) sought to clearly define the field of development communication, thus they have developed a transactional communication model which acknowledges neither creators nor consumers of messages. The model tags the people associated with the model as communicators who both create and consume messages. In addition, Ascroft, Nair and White (1994) submit that in the participatory message model, the receiver and the source contribute their knowledge, creativity and energy as co-equal partners. Equality means that suggestions, arguments and even decisions should come from all participants in the communication process.
Nair and White (1994) propose a four-phase process of message which is composed of the definition phase, the design phase, the production phase and the evaluation phase. In the definition phase, both the source and receiver are involved though separately: in the identification of the audience; definition of the problem; assessment of needs; mapping of alternative solutions and selection of innovative solutions. In this phase, the source and the receiver might either be in agreement in all the areas or still hold different opinions on the matters under discussion.

In the design phase, more interactions begin to emerge and intense consultation is expected as both the sender and receiver plan strategies together, define the content of messages, select communication forms and create formats. When it comes to the production phase, the levels of engagement become very high: the source and receiver plan the production process, produce the messages, and do post-production and field-testing of prototypes together. In the fourth phase of transactional communication, the levels of engagement are reduced, consultations are much less but the source and receiver are separately involved in the dissemination of messages; soliciting of feedback; redefining the needs of the target group in light of
the messages developed as well as redesigning messages where need exists. Participation entails that ideas for policy changes are taken into consideration and suggestions from the community are considered before project activities take place (Bessette, 2004).

FEMNET periodically communicates to its members in various ways and whether they respond or not, when time comes there will be another message sent out to them. It is true communication for development requires patience and persistence (Mody, 2003) but it sure does not encourage situations where inputs do not justify outputs and impact.

Five Characteristics of Freire’s Dialogue

White (1994) describes the term participation as *kaleidoscopic* because, according to him, it changes its colour and shape at the will of the hands holding it. However, there are some characteristics that help determine whether an approach is participatory or not (Freire, 1970). In Freire’s opinion, practitioners of participatory communication in development should inquire whether five interrelated attributes of the dialogue are in place if they desire to employ participatory approaches in development. First, the model emphasizes equality between the communicator and audience, with the sender and receiver interchanging roles in a mutually beneficial two-way interaction. Hence, one party cannot assume a superior role while the other is ascribed a subordinate responsibility. Singhal, Devi (2003) and Crist (2009) emphasize that participatory communication for development is a joint learning experience between equals where best practices and insights come out of communicators” joint efforts. Wertheim (2008) also exhorts that communicators
should know when to be silent and give a listening ear to their colleagues so as to allow the flow of dialogue.

The second aspect is that the model shifts the role of development communicators from just serving as disseminators of relevant information to that of facilitators of a process of social change, capitalizing on human learning at the individual and communal level. A communication theory patterned after this model is the convergence model discussed earlier in this study, which presupposes the goal of communication to be mutual understanding. On the same front, Mody (1981) advises that healthy communities are made up of individuals working not just for their own group but collectively for the benefit of everyone, striving to understand, appreciate and acknowledge each member.

The third feature of Freire’s theory is known as praxis, or a cycle of action and reflection translated into communication practice. In development it means that an agent of change desists from lecturing and vouching for development solutions without first identifying users’ needs.

The fourth trait of Freire’s dialogue is conscientization, a free dialogue that prioritizes cultural identity, trust and commitment. It is in this process that participants become part of the social change. Finally, Freire explicitly states that proper dialogue happens in a context of five overriding values: love, humility, hope, faith in development partners’ capabilities, and critical thinking.

From the discussion above, the basic questions FEMNET should be asking its members when engaging in a participatory initiative, as Waisbord (2001) advises are: how do we start? How do we proceed? What are the signposts we should watch out for? What milestones should we aim for? What’s next? What is our ultimate aim?
Critique of Freire”s Theory

Ohliger (1995) says that Freire is difficult to read because he is both a Christian and Marxist, two descriptions that hardly fit together. He also criticizes Freire”s writing as full of jargon and his model as abstract resulting from generalities or pieties. Cadiz (1994) criticizes Freire”s work as one that lacks concrete solutions. She also says that feminist readers may experience difficulty in dealing with the masculine language used throughout the text.

However, the researcher finds that despite the criticism against Freire”s theory, it nevertheless marked a turning point in the field of communication. Other researchers should build on his work, while appreciating that he laid a foundation for a paradigm shift that is considered a solution to various developmental problems. She finds that the sole challenge for researchers would be how to formulate evidence for conscientization and other abstract elements in the model like love, hope or faith.

Conceptual Framework

Building upon the foundation of Freire”s theory, this research adopts the underlining principle of using communication participatory approaches in enhancing meaning and understanding. In such endeavour, a theory is presented as “a series of if–then statements that explain why one would expect the independent variables to influence or cause the dependent variables” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 53). In this study, participatory communication serves as the independent variable while dialogue and face-to-face are intervening variables which result to members” involvement in FEMNET”s communication process as a dependent variable.
The theoretical perspective can be translated into a conceptual framework as illustrated below. This presents a theory as a visual model which helps in translating variables into a visual picture.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

Figure 5: Conceptual Framework

On further exploration, communication approaches that one uses have an effect on the level of involvement participants in the process exhibit. In the top down approach, most media used are of low richness and they do not attract sufficient feedback. But participatory communication emphasizes on the use of dialogue and face-to-face interactions which are media of high richness and have the potential to attract sufficient feedback.

Dialogue and personal interface at each stage will affect the level of members’ involvement and mutual understanding between involved parties. They also increase the level of feedback which helps in establishing whether effective communication is taking place or not. Actually, Cornelissen (2008) argues that at times involvement from members could be missing due to the kind of communication approaches a network uses to communicate to its members. For example, phone calls are more personal and they can enhance effectiveness of communication despite the distance (Bernauer, n.d; Kiesler, 1995) than the “dear all” kind of email messages. Moreover,
Wanyeki (2000) advises that the chosen medium for communication must be the one that permits, enhances and sustains participation from members.

Freire’s (1970) theory of dialogic communication is based more on interpersonal and group dialogue, and not mass approaches. According to Cornelissen (2008), face-to-face communication is ranked most promising when it comes to feedback reception, because one has the advantage of capturing verbal and non-verbal retort. Moreover, Sarvaes (1995) argues that dialogue and face-to-face interactions are intrinsic in participation communication, whenever the two elements are missing then the approach is not participatory. Servaes and Malikhao (2003) argue that there should be emphasis on small and appropriate media.

Summary

This chapter sought to review existing literature relevant to this study. It consisted of a theoretical framework which briefly discussed shortcomings of the dominant paradigm of development. It also discussed the shift to a participatory approach which points up the involvement of stakeholders at all levels of decision making. The theoretical framework was mainly based on the liberation theory by Paulo Freire, which posits that the sender should not assume that the receiver’s mind is blank and the sender’s role is to fill the receiver’s mind with information that is meant to usher solutions to existing problems. Freire holds that dialogue and face-to-face interactions are crucial to effective communication that leads to empowerment which is the beginning of sustainable development. The next chapter discusses the methodology of the research.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research methodology seeks to establish how and from where data will be collected, following a specific structure. This chapter will discuss the research design, sampling design, methods of data collection, data presentation and ethical consideration.

Research Design

The research design is a deliberately planned arrangement of collecting and analysing data so that desired information which answers research questions can be obtained (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This research is a case study based on both qualitative and quantitative evidence. It is a causal research designed to provide information on how the communication approach used at FEMNET affects members’ involvement.

Through qualitative method, the researcher explains in a deep and exhaustive way the effect of FEMNET’s communication approach on members’ involvement (Creswell, 2003). This study emphasizes on the qualitative approach because its ultimate aim is to offer an in-depth understanding of the inadequate involvement of FEMNET’s members. In other words, its aim is to examine the causes of the weak bond between FEMNET and its members and assess how respondents feel or think their participation could be enhanced. But a quantitative approach is also used in order to respect the triangulation method, so that the resulting mixture can allow complementary strengths and no similar weaknesses hence an excellent research (Robson, 2002).
Research Tools

Data collection is a process of preparing and collecting data with a purpose to obtain information to keep on record; to make decisions about important issues or to pass information on to others; and more importantly to provide information regarding a specific topic (Creswell, 2003). The use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches usually helps researchers to extract details and meaning from respondents as well as obtain precise data measurements (Cooper & Schindler, 2007).

Data was collected following three strategies: questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions, observation and in-depth interviews. Questionnaires were used to obtain important information about the population with each item in the questionnaire developed to address a specific objective or research question of the study (Kothari, 2004). Interviews helped in collecting in-depth, sensitive and personal data which could not be gathered via a questionnaire.

The Sample

The researcher used the convenient sampling method, a technique which involves selecting a sample which is reachable to the researcher. The main aspect of this method is the accessibility of the sample (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). It proved to be the most appropriate sampling method for this study because the researcher perceived that dealing with members based in Nairobi would increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate responses for the study by virtue of face-to-face interactions. Moreover, since the population is comprised of members who often do not fill and return questionnaires, the researcher figured out that face-to-face interaction would positively affect the response rate as other long-distance communication methods have not been effective in attracting feedback.
The population of the study was composed of all FEMNET members but members based in Nairobi constituted the accessible population of the study thus its sample. The researcher was therefore able to reduce physical distance hence increased response rate and reliability. She was also able to use observation as a tactic of collecting data.

The sample was equal to the accessible population of the study. The information that flows from FEMNET to its members is usually sent to all members through e-mails or courier and the content of the message is the same. Therefore, the study is replicable and it did not suffer from over or underrepresentation since members receive the same treatment as far as communication is concerned.

At the time of the study, FEMNET had 32 members based in Nairobi, 14 individuals and 18 organizations. However, the researcher was able to locate and allocate questionnaires to 12 individual members and 14 organizational members because 2 organizational members could not be found, 2 others declined to be part of the study and 2 individual members could not be traced. Four program staff at FEMNET Secretariat who are directly engaged in gathering and disseminating information were interviewed. The researcher received the response from 26 members (out of 32) and 4 FEMNET staff members thus a total of 30 respondents (83%).

The four FEMNET program staff were given in-depth interviews because they hold leadership positions and are directly involved in FEMNET’s communication process from planning to dissemination. They were able to give information on how communication activities are carried in the organization. Executive Directors or Communication Officers of organizational members filled questionnaires on the organizations’ behalf.
Pretesting of the questionnaire was done on 3 members: one organizational member from Tanzania; one individual member from Uganda and one organizational member from Uganda. Pretesting is usually intended to establish whether the research instruments will measure what they were intended to measure and if they can be generalized. After the pretesting process, research tools were slightly modified especially on wording so that they could help in answering the study’s questions and achieve its objectives.

Data Analysis

After data collection, information processing, analysis and interpretation were done. Before entering data in the software, coding was done where numerals were assigned to filled questionnaires so as to facilitate the procedure of sorting them. Processing of data consisted of editing, coding, sorting, entry in software, and tabulation before data analysis could be done.

The Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) was used to generate the output. Findings out of questionnaires were presented through frequency and percentage distribution tables. Findings from interviews were organized as per the specific research questions they answered.

Ethical Considerations

Generally, there are many ethical issues to be considered while carrying out a study. The researcher sought permission from the Executive Director of FEMNET before carrying out the research. She also consulted with different Heads of Departments especially those relevant to the study before using the organization’s various documents and publications.
Further, the researcher was careful to first secure actual permission from respondents before collecting data. She made sure respondents clearly understood the purpose of the study before proceeding to data collection. The obtained information was only used for research purposes and the researcher protected the sensitivity, privacy and anonymity of the respondents (Markel, 2001).

The researcher respected respondents’ concerns (Johannesen, 1990) such as time constraints or lack of preparedness during data collection. She sought to adjust to their timetable and other requests that saw her waiting for them to avail themselves or paying them more than one or two visits before they could fill and return questionnaires.

Summary

This chapter has looked at the research methodology. It has discussed the sample which consists of FEMNET’s members based in Nairobi. It has also tackled data analysis and ethical issues that the researcher kept into consideration while carrying out the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the respondents are presented and interpreted. The researcher received the response from 26 members and 4 FEMNET staff members thus a total of 30 respondents out of 36 members (including the 4 FEMNET’s staff) based in Nairobi (return rate of 83%). The questionnaire for individual members was different from that of organizational ones hence analysis will consist of findings from individual members, organizational members, interviews and observation.

Findings from Questionnaires

Individual Members

*Age of Respondents*

![Bar Chart: Age of Respondents](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-36</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37-42</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-above</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Age of respondents
Although FEMNET Secretariat assumes that age is one of the factors that influence members’ involvement, the study revealed that all members, regardless of their age bracket, were not sufficiently involved in FEMNET’s communication process.

**Duration of Membership**

![Figure 7: Duration of Membership](image.png)

The question on duration of membership was designed to establish the exact period of time the respondent has been associated with FEMNET. This was key in highlighting issues of consistency and predictability in regard to the second objective of the study. The results are presented in figure 6 which shows that 91.65% of the respondents had been involved with the organization for more than a year at the time of the study. The researcher posits that a year is an adequate period of time for assessing the communication trends within the organization. This is based on the premise that by the virtue of its goals FEMNET carries various communication activities within a year which requires members’ participation. As identified and argued earlier, Neulip (2009) submits that effective communication plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining relationships with people in order to build
healthier communities, reduced misunderstanding and personal growth. It is consequently viewed that one year involvement should give a true reflection of the situation on the ground. This base then offers an empirical framework for objective interpretation of the findings as envisaged earlier in the study.

*Level of Education*

![Figure 8: Level of Education](image)

From the study findings in figure 7, a total of 66.3% respondents had first degrees. Nonetheless, interviews with FEMNET program staff who were directly involved in gathering and disseminating information assume that most members would not be able to understand information from international bodies. For that reason FEMNET usually receives information from those bodies and processes it before sending it to members, because FEMNET assumes that members would not decipher it in its original version. Yet Kennon, Howden and Hartley (2009) recommend that program leaders should not work on untested assumptions while dealing with their stakeholders, otherwise they can cause them to detach themselves
or to get uninvolved. It can have a de-motivating effect if a member perceives that FEMNET presumes she is illiterate.

**Members’ Profession**

![Bar Chart](image)

Figure 9: Members’ Profession

The study sought to identify professional occupations of FEMNET members and found that communication specialists and journalists represented a total of 58.3% of all respondents. Whilst members from professions other than communication would give various reasons for not offering feedback, there must be a tangible reason for a communication specialist not to take active part in a communication process because he/she most likely understands better the importance of feedback.
What is your nationality?

From table 4.2, it is clear that respondents’ nationality did not affect their involvement in FEMNET’s communication process. The findings emerged from an attempt to find the reasons that caused the inadequate involvement of FEMNET’s members in its communication activities.

Frequency of Communication from FEMNET
Findings in figure 9 show that members received communication from FEMNET on a regular basis. These findings were essential in verifying whether members actually received communication from FEMNET and if so, on a regular basis. Subsequently, the insufficient prompt feedback from its members cannot be associated with a delay or absence of communication from the Secretariat.

*Timeliness of Communication from FEMNET*

![Figure 12: Timeliness of communication from FEMNET](image)

Though some respondents (42%) said they found communication from FEMNET irregular, majority of respondents (58%) received communication from FEMNET on a regular basis.
Members Readership of FEMNET’s Publications

Most respondents (83.3%) agreed that they took time to read FEMNET’s publications. Consequently, one would not say they did not offer feedback because they did not read information sent from FEMNET Secretariat. From this question, the researcher needed to verify whether members did not offer feedback because they did not receive communication from FEMNET or they did not offer feedback due to other reasons which the study would then have to uncover.

Participation in FEMNET’s Communication Process

Figure 13: Readership of FEMNET’s publication

Figure 14: Participation in FEMNET’s communication process
In an effort to establish whether FEMNET’s members took part in its communication activities, most individual members (75%) said they were not involved. Thus findings in figure 14 show that FEMNET did not use the convergent approach in its communication process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering information</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating information</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not involved at all</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: What is your level of involvement in FEMNET communication process?

Concerning the level to which FEMNET members were involved in the communication process, there were no respondents involved in deciding on what FEMNET communicates about. This goes against participatory communication principles and practices that mandate involving stakeholders at each stage of the communication process (Msibi, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would like to participate in capacity building projects</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to be involved in selecting communication topics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like to be involved in gathering information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No desire for involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Do you desire to be involved in the FEMNET communication process and How?
One of this study’s objectives was to identify other communication strategies that FEMNET should use to enhance members involvement. Most respondents (66.7%) said they would like to be involved in selecting communication topics. Others, except 8.3%, expressed a need to take active part in gathering information or being part of capacity building projects. Findings in table 3 confirm Muturi’’s (2006) conclusion that members should be involved in the design and implementation phases of a project in order to be actively involved in it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant to me</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well researched</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not well researched</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: How do you Rate FEMNET”’s communication?

Generally, FEMNET’’s communication content was favourably rated by respondents with 41.7% saying it was relevant and 50% saying it was well researched. Only 8.3% said it was not well researched. A confirmation that the trickle down communication approach wrongly assumed that as long as messages are well crafted and the audience is adequately targeted (Servaes & Malikhao, 2003) then nothing should stop effective communication from taking place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not involved at all but would like to be</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am minimally involved but I keep thinking I would like to do better</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Are you involved in FEMNET”’s communication activities?
The findings in *table 5* confirmed that FEMNET’s members are poorly involved in the network’s communication activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No opportunities to attend conferences and contribute ideas.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMNET does not care about me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get information about activities late</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: What are the possible contributing factors to your poor involvement in FEMNET’s communication activities?

When respondents were asked to reflect on factors that contributed to their poor involvement in FEMNET’s communication process, 25% said it was because they did not get a chance to contribute their ideas. Another 8.3% said that they received information about activities late, while 16.7% said they were not involved due to lack of time. These findings confirm Maxwell (2002) assertion that people do not care about how much one knows till they know how much one cares, a statement which explains why although 91.7% of respondents found FEMNET’s publications to be well researched and relevant to them, a majority of them still did not feel motivated enough to give feedback and be actively involved in the communication process (50%).
Most members (83.3%) belonged to other organizations as members and this finding helped in comparing their involvement with FEMNET and that with other organizations. Consequently, the researcher was able to objectively identify the causes of the insufficient involvement from FEMNET’s members as well as to offer recommendations to FEMNET based on how other organizations keep their members involved.

*More Involvement with the Other Organization Compared to that with FEMNET*
The researcher investigated whether the inadequate involvement of members in FEMNET’s communication process was a problem other mother organizations were experiencing with their members. Most respondents (83%) said that they were more involved with the other organizations than with FEMNET. Therefore, the findings in figure 16 confirmed that FEMNET wrongly assumed that one of the reasons its members were not involved was a lack of capacity to do so because they are able to be involved elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involved at all levels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted in decision making</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More forums for dialogue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent face-to-face interactions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More relevant to own field</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More benefits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Why are you more involved with the other organization than with FEMNET?

Respondents who were more involved with other organizations than they were with FEMNET said that it was because the other organizations involved them at all levels (16.7%). The others said that they found the other organizations’ activities more interesting (8.3%); they were consulted in decision making (16.7%); they had more forums for dialogue (16.7%); they enjoyed more face-to-face interactions (25%); they found those other organizations very relevant to their fields (8.3%); or found that the other organizations offered more benefits (8.3%).

The findings in table 7 are in accordance with Pederson’s (2006) advice that when stakeholders feel that they have the ability to affect the constitution, practice,
and results of a project, their commitment will increase. But when they sense an imbalance of power, they will be less committed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: FEMNET does not need my involvement for its progress

When asked whether they thought FEMNET did not need them for its progress, most respondents (75%) answered negatively. So, members’ lack of involvement was not due to a misconception that their involvement was not called for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: No Benefit from being Involved

The fact that a total of 83.3% found that being a FEMNET’s member was beneficial to them was helpful in the process of distinguishing between the actual and assumed causes of the lack of members’ involvement. However, benefits alone are not enough to ensure members’ involvement in a communication process. That is why Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani and Lewis (1993) state that it is important to use the convergence model in communication processes so that a sufficient mutual
comprehension and conformity to solve common problems can be reached. At times, it is not what people get from communication but what they offer to it that motivates them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: I would like to be more involved in communication activities but I have no time

On whether respondents would be more involved if they had more time, most of them declined. Yet, interviews with FEMNET’s program staff revealed that the network assumed that members were not adequately involved due to time constraints.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: My opinion would not matter to FEMNET

Most members (83.4%) knew that their feedback would be important to FEMNET even though they did not offer it. However, interviews from FEMNET’s staff revealed that the network assumed that members were not sufficiently involved because they did not know that FEMNET Secretariat needed feedback from them.
That is why the researcher has suggested, throughout the study, the need for mutual understanding between FEMNET and its members in order to establish and maintain a vibrant communication process where members and FEMNET will equally participate. Through this way, misunderstandings will be considerably minimized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: I used to be an active member of FEMNET then I stopped

All the respondents answered negatively on ever being an active member of FEMNET. Therefore, the findings in *table 12* helped to establish that the insufficient involvement had nothing to do with a possible gradual loss of excitement from members. The problem of the study is a result of a communication approach that FEMNET continued to use over time, without evaluating whether it was yielding desired results or not so that adjustments would be made to suit members” needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: I find the content of FEMNET communication far from my needs

All respondents confirmed that FEMNET’s communication met their information needs. However, that is not enough because Blankenberg (1999), in his
attempt to combine the Ubuntu concept with Freire’s dialogic and participatory communication, says that every person should be regarded as a fountain of knowledge with precious information to contribute to the communication process. Members might be fed with information to their satisfaction, but their involvement would be enhanced by the opportunity to also feed back into the communication process rather than being always asked to provide feedback at the end of the communication procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: I don’t like receiving too much information

The findings in table 14 revealed that respondents desired different amounts of information. Some did not mind much information while others would easily get an information overload. Thus FEMNET needs to categorize members according to their levels of information appetite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: I usually tell myself FEMNET is self-sufficient and my contribution is not needed
Most respondents (58.3%) regarded FEMNET as a self-sufficient network that did not need their contribution. That is why Freire (1970), as discussed in the literature review, says that no communicator should assume a superior role while the other is attributed a subordinate one. Because, when such inequalities occur, the demeaned party begins to feel invaluable. Deductively, the top down communication approach that FEMNET was using to reach to its members made most members reach a level of interpreting the approach as a sign to show them they were not important to the network and as a reaction they also bothered less about its communication activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare of women &amp; children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in communication,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capacity building and Advocacy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate about women</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: What are the reasons that made you join FEMNET as a member?

The study revealed that members had joined the network for acceptable (or not selfish) motives. Thus the findings in table 16 gainsay the assumption from FEMNET Secretariat that members might have joined it for the wrong reasons hence the lack of motivation to be involved in its communication activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow up phone calls</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing training and capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building workshops</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication should be more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: How would you like FEMNET communication process to be like so you can become more involved?
In the search of other strategies that FEMNET can use to enhance members’ involvement, respondents (41.7%) said they would like to be receiving follow up phone calls; to take part in organizing trainings and capacity building workshops (33.3%) and 25% said the communication should be made more interactive for them to be more involved. That way, information would not trickle down to members but would rather spring from them. In this light, FEMNET members should be the ones proposing the kind of information they need to receive and not the other way round. Thus, FEMNET needs to review the communication approach it has been using by incorporating members’ suggestions on the kind of communicational relationship they covet.

Organizational Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: How long have you been a member of FEMNET?

Compared to individual members, organizational members seemed less volatile as 35.7% had been FEMNET’s members for 3 years at the time of the study: and 42.9% for 5 years. Although most respondents have stayed in the membership agreement with FEMNET for at least three years, they declared to be poorly involved and that they had never been more involved than they were at the time of the study. Therefore, unlike some communication processes that grow from conventional to convergent, FEMNET’s has been consistently asymmetric in its communication and such has hindered members’ involvement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace building &amp; conflicts resolutions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media &amp; gender equality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering women</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child rights</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young women leadership and development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: What’s your organization’s focus area?

FEMNET, like most participants, focuses on women’s empowerment, women and media, gender equality and women’s leadership. Therefore members’ inadequate involvement cannot be linked to communication irrelevance.

**Reception Frequency of Communication from FEMNET**

![Figure 17: Reception frequency of publication from FEMNET](image)

Most respondents confirmed they received communication from FEMNET on a regular basis. Or borrowing from Freire (1970) terminologies, FEMNET sent out a series of communiqués to its members on a regular basis.
Readership of FEMNET’s Publications

The majority of respondents (92.9%) said they took time to read publications from FEMNET. Thus, the inadequate involvement of FEMNET’s members in its communication process could not be mainly linked to poor readership from members.

Participation in FEMNET’s Communication Process

In addition to receiving and reading communication from FEMNET, most organizational members (64.3%) agreed that they took part in FEMNET communication process. However, the researcher realized that what organizational
members referred to as participation was different from the kind of participatory communication this study focused on because these members meant that they distributed publications received from FEMNET to other people or organizations. This study considered participatory approach to be a process that involved members from the start throughout the communication process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating information</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the PC &amp; GA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: At what level are you involved in the FEMNET’s communication process?

Respondents who said they took part in FEMNET communication process were further asked at what level they were involved and 28.6% said they were involved at the dissemination of information. By dissemination they meant that after receiving communication from FEMNET, they share the same with their own members. The others (35.5%) who said they were involved at the evaluation process meant that they filled evaluation forms when they received them. The remaining 35.7% said they were only involved during the network’s PC&GA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am not involved at all but would like to be</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>am minimally involved but I keep thinking I would like to do better</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Which of the following statement best describe your involvement in FEMNET’s activities?

At face value, findings in table 21 which show that all respondents were inadequately involved in FEMNET’s communication process looked like they
contradicted findings in *figure 19* where 64.3% said they took part in FEMNET’s communication activities. However, the researcher appreciates that „being involved“ and „taking part“ do not have the same meaning in this study as already discussed above (p. 71).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggesting publication topics</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22: If you are not involved, would you like to become involved in FEMNET’s communication process and how?

A comparison of findings in *table 20* and *22* shows that members were not doing what they would like to do, which explains why they were not involved the way FEMNET would like them to. As discussed in the literature review, communicators should work together through the definition phase, design phase, production phase and the phase of transactional communication (p. 40).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMNET does not involve me in her activities</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get information about activities late</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication from FEMNET</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: If your involvement is poor; what are the contributing factors?

Most respondents (64.3%) said they were poorly involved because FEMNET did not fully include them in its communication activities, 14.3% said they received information from FEMNET late, and another 21.4% said they lacked communication from FEMNET so they could not tell what was going on within the network.
Table 24: How do you rate the content of FEMNET’s communication?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant to me</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well researched</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not well researched</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the fact that 64.3% of respondents said FEMNET’s communication content was relevant, while 28.6% said it was well researched—they were nevertheless not involved in FEMNET’s communication procedure.

*Membership with other Organization(s)*

Out of all the organizations that took part in this study, 92.9% were members of networks other than FEMNET. The question on whether members were affiliated to any organization other than FEMNET was essential in clarifying whether members lacked capacity to take part in any communication process. The findings revealed that the problem was not that members were not able to offer feedback (because they offer it elsewhere) rather they were not motivated to do so as far as their relationship with FEMNET Secretariat is concerned.
More Involvement with other organizations compared to that with FEMNET

From respondents who were in membership agreement with organizations other than FEMNET, 78.6% confirmed to be more involved with the other organizations than they were with FEMNET. These findings are thus at odds with FEMNET Secretariat’s assumption that members were not involved because they lacked the capacity to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am listened to</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am involved in annual events that bring members together</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25: Why are you more involved with the other organization (s) than you are with FEMNET?

When asked why they were more involved with other organizations they were affiliated with, 71.4% said they were listened to while 28% said they were involved in annual events that brought members together. This confirms Lawry’s (2010) findings which reveal that members expect effective organization listening in order for them to be more involved in organizational activities.
Table 26: FEMNET does not need my involvement for its progress

All respondents were aware that FEMNET needed their involvement to progress yet all of them were inadequately involved in its communication activities. Thus findings in table 26 presented another inconsistency between FEMNET and its members because interviews with FEMNET Secretariat’s staff revealed that the organization assumed that members did not understanding that the network needs its members” involvement in the communication procedure.

Table 27: FEMNET would be interested in my involvement but I don’t see any benefit

Though one would quickly assume that FEMNET”s members were not adequately involved in its communication process because they did not count the membership agreement useful, findings revealed that most members” found their association with FEMNET beneficial.
Table 28: I would like to be more involved in communication activities but I have no time

Contrary to FEMNET’s assumption, most organizational members did not rate time as their biggest constraint to involvement. These findings helped in establishing what were the actual causes of the inadequate involvement of FEMNET members in its activities since there was yet a conflict as FEMNET assumed that members lacked time to offer feedback.

Table 29: I used to be an active member of FEMNET then I stopped

At no time were respondents actively involved in FEMNET’s communication process. Therefore, FEMNET should go back and ask the questions earlier discussed in the literature review to its members: how do we start? How do we proceed? What are the signposts we should watch out for? What milestones should we aim for? What’s next? What is our ultimate aim?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30: I find the content of FEMNET’s publications irrelevant to me

Majority of respondents (78.5%) found FEMNET’s communication content relevant to them. However, relevance does not guarantee members’ involvement even as Bessette and Rajasunderam (1996) argue that participatory communication is not based on message exchange even if it is well done.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Table 31: I would like to receive publication from FEMNET more frequently

Most members (71.4%) would like to receive even more publications from FEMNET, and more frequently which shows that there is a likelihood that they appreciated information they received from FEMNET.
Table 32: I usually tell myself FEMNET is self-sufficient and my contribution is not needed

Unlike individual members in table 16, organizational members did not find FEMNET to be self-sufficient, which shows that organizational members had a clearer understanding of FEMNET’s vision compared to individual members.

Table 33: What are the reasons that made you join FEMNET as a member?

All respondents seemed to have joined FEMNET for the right reasons. Therefore, the findings in table 33 challenged FEMNET Secretariat belief that some members might not be involved because they joined the network for wrong reasons.

Table 34: How would you like FEMNET communication process to be like so you can become more involved?
Most respondents (57.1%) said members should be asked for contributions from all areas in order for them to be sufficiently involved in FEMNET’s communication process. Just as discussed in the literature review, Singhal, Devi (2003) and Crist (2009) emphasize that participatory communication for development is a joint learning experience between equals where best practices and insights come out of communicators joint efforts.

**Interview Analysis**

A total of 4 out of 5 FEMNET program staff was interviewed. The findings of the interview are presented below.

*Question 1: What is the significance of members” feedback to FEMNET?*

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on how important feedback was to FEMNET. All of them said that it was through members” feedback that FEMNET can reach out to its African constituency. Feedback is very important to FEMNET because it is a membership network so it is always vital to make sure that the organization is well informed on what is happening with its members based in various countries. Especially because it is a Pan-African network so the situation is very different in West or East Africa than it is in North or South Africa thus feedback is the only means to help FEMNET know the relevance of its work and to know what needs from members it should meet. In other words, feedback gives direction to the network.

The organization receives feedback from its members but those who are involved in the creation and dissemination of information say they would like to receive more feedback since the amount of feedback currently obtained is not sufficient. FEMNET needs feedback in order to effectively carry out its work, members need to be fully involved in FEMNET”s communication process and this is
not only when feedback is needed. Such a practice would be in line with Chitnis (2005) advice that a communication process can only be called participatory when there is a considerable level of interdependency between all parties involved. Therefore, FEMNET should meet its members’ needs so that members can in return reciprocate. In this way, Mbiti’s (1970) definition of ubuntu: I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am—can be adapted as FEMNET is, because members are, and since members are, therefore FEMNET is.

**Question 2: How do you decide on the topic of FEMNET’s publication?**

FEMNET looked at issues prevailing at the moment of gathering information for its publications. But also, when there was a United Nations (UN) or African Union (AU) summit, FEMNET disseminated information related to their themes so that women would be prepared to influence the process of those international or regional bodies. There were also instances, though rare, when members proposed a topic or theme to be written about. When they did, their request was taken into account. But often the organization found that what members had suggested was besides its focus area or untimely, and as such their demand would not be granted.

Currently, since the AWD was launched, there is a topic for each year which was decided upon by the AU and discussions must fit into the pre-selected topic. A new journal called the African Woman Journal was launched and its topics are aligned with the AWD yearly topic. The AWD themes were listed in the literature review section, and for this year the theme is: “maternal health, child mortality and HIV/AIDS”. FEMNET does not consult on every document because it has a strategic plan which is developed in a consultative manner with its members, and that happens during the PC&GA once in every three years and in which discussions on what is
going to happen in the following three years take place. However, members said they get informed on what is going to happen rather than being allowed to be part of the decision-making progression.

The Secretariat’s work is then to elaborate on the topic and determine the strategies to use to transfer information concerning the subject at hand. The Secretariat acknowledges that the communication process currently being used is not the most efficient way of working as the ideal would be having members determine the subject of communications but the network at least allows them to input into publications so that all the sub-regions can be represented.

**Question 3: How do you segment your target audience?**

The broad target audience is made of African women’s organization in Africa. Depending on the organization’s activity or project, FEMNET picks from an already existing database, and relevant information is sent to members who are likely to find the communication content relevant and useful to their work. Members receive information that suits their needs, according to FEMNET’s research and environmental scanning. The organization mainly targets policy makers, media houses and its members. The first two audience groups receive brief documents since they are assumed to lack time to go through long documents, but the third category receives lengthy reports, journals and articles.

**Question 4: How would you describe FEMNET’s communication approaches? i.e:**

*top down, down up or horizontal. Kindly explain your answer in a broad way.*

FEMNET’s main role is to ensure that women actively participate in discussing issues that concern their rights both on regional and international levels.
The network’s work is to facilitate the exchange of information between the Secretariat and members. FEMNET believes there are few women’s organizations that have the capacity to process information from international levels like UN bodies, World Bank or at regional level like AU. Therefore, FEMNET gets information, processes it in a way that women organizations are supposedly going to understand and be able to share it with their grassroots organizations. FEMNET is governed by the executive board and the board of trustees, who are legally elected during the GA. The Secretariat formally receives information from board members, through the Executive Director who passes it to Programme Officers so they can work on it and disseminate it to members. Other times, information comes from the Executive Director to Programme Officers and then to members. Alternatively, a request can come from a member to the Secretariat which will offer feedback. But most of the time, communication from members often consists of funding or sponsorship requests.

The other way information moves can be from members to the Secretariat which will disseminate it to other members. The example could be when members have been sponsored to attend an international conference (like the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women- UNCSW in New York), and write reports which the Secretariat disseminates to other members.

*Question 5: What do you perceive to be the cause(s) of the insufficient involvement of FEMNET’s members?*

Respondents declared they were trying to change a prevailing habit of getting in touch with members only when they needed members to do something for the organization such as responding to a certain issue or participating in Monitoring and Evaluation activities. At times, up to a year could elapse with the members only
receiving publications and evaluation forms asking them if the published content was relevant and how they used it, then a reminder to pay membership dues would follow. It is obvious that in such circumstances, the element of dialogue and any sense of ownership are likely to vanish. The perceived *drop everything you are doing and send feedback because we urgently need it* attitude can make members feel exploited by FEMNET.

Respondents asserted that issues from international or regional levels might be too technical for members. Another potential hindrance to members’ involvement could be that in Africa the computer culture is not nearly as widespread as in developed parts of the world. FEMNET assumes that some members are very unlikely to use electronic media channels or other internet-based communication software application services like instant messaging and internet calls. Similar assumptions are based on either because such technology is still foreign to them or because they are underfunded and cannot afford private internet connection so that their only option is to use cyber cafés to give feedback. However, no respondents from FEMNET’s members mentioned capacity as their hindrance to involvement. Those who were members to other organizations besides FEMNET were asked whether they were more involved with the other organizations than they were with FEMNET and 83% responded positively while 16.7% answered negatively. Therefore, members’ inadequate involvement cannot be attributed to their lack of capacity.

Another issue that was mentioned was the lack of capacity from both FEMNET and its members. FEMNET has various activities to run and it was understaffed so that its few employees were overloaded with work and could only give limited attention to members.
Most organizational members also lacked human, time or financial capacity and their involvement was likely limited by one or more of these constraints.

The nature of FEMNET itself might hinder involvement from members because it is not a thematic network like other educational or research network, it is a communication network that seeks to disseminate information on a host of issues that concern or affect women. As a result, members tend to engage when there is a topic relevant to them and then to disengage when they do not feel particularly concerned.

According to FEMNET’s staff, the other cause of the lack of involvement could be language barrier. While members were mainly from English and French-speaking countries, there are others who used Arabic or Portuguese as their official language. Francophone members often said that FEMNET was an Anglophone network because there was a weak francophone presence at the Secretariat. However, that would not be considered as a strong variable in this study because even English-speaking members who comprised the sample of this study were not sufficiently involved in the communication process.

An alternative explanation to the limited members’ involvement was a possibility that members did not understand FEMNET’s role as a network. They might have joined the organization for idiosyncratic reasons whose lack of fulfilment could have caused their gradual disappointment and a diminished inclination to be involved.

FEMNET had a list of benefits that it promised to members and a part of membership forms required members to indicate what their contribution to the network would be. However, there is a possibility that the Memorandum of Understanding between FEMNET and its members was not clear enough on such issues as communication involvement, especially with respect to giving feedback.
Also, there could be a gap between vision and image: FEMNET’s vision of a network with members that were actively involved in its communication activities was a priori at odds with some members’ perception of FEMNET as merely a source of individual benefits. Some members confused FEMNET and its Secretariat, they failed to see that they— and not the administrative office— were the organization’s backbone. They might not have really understood that they formed FEMNET and that their involvement was highly valued by their network, and this usually translates into a missing sense of ownership. Indeed, until recently, even a failure to pay membership dues did not take away membership status since defaulters continued to be treated as members in good standing as a sign that they were more important than their financial contributions. However, generalizations are not warranted given that there were members who seemed to understand the mission and vision of FEMNET and how their involvement plays a role in the organization’s success. They would take great pride in contributing to its achievements.

It is important to note that in the case of FEMNET, members were neither chapters nor branches. As such they were under no obligation to adhere to some terms and conditions from FEMNET’s central administration. FEMNET’s members—especially organizational members—already had their own structure, culture and mandate. Giving feedback to FEMNET might not be on their list of priority. Moreover, the change in organizational leadership can also impinge on members’ involvement.

The age may well be another limiting factor since older members tend to prefer face-to-face or receiving courier, while the younger generation prefers social media or „young technologies“. The network recognizes a need for younger members because they are likely to inject vibrancy into membership. The few young members
offer more prompt feedback than do older ones. However, these young members are at times merely asking for job opportunities or scholarships, inquiries that cannot be termed as the kind of dialogue this study has been discussing.

Though members based in Kenya could be assumed to be more involved than others, this is not the case. Indeed, all respondents said they were either not involved at all or minimally involved with FEMNET’s communication activities.

Another reason of members’ inadequate involvement is members’ perception of FEMNET as a regional network that is not really concerned with Kenyan issues on a national level. Despite the physical presence of its Secretariat, FEMNET is alleged to be removed from the members’ activities on the ground. Conversely, Muthoni Wanyeki, Executive Director of FEMNET from 1999 to 2006, remarks that there are also internal structural challenges emanating from the diversity in terms of capacity among FEMNET's constituency. FEMNET's mandate focuses on advocacy concerning regional and international policy. It does not, and should not, advocate or provide services beyond strategic information at the national level, the assumption being that this should be the work of its national members. However, she goes on to say that adherence to this mandate is hard to maintain across the continent, given the differing status and strengths of the various national women's movements. In practice, this necessitates constant management of the membership's expectations of FEMNET, ensuring that it remains relevant to its members' expressed needs without doing in one country what it cannot do in all of them (Wanyeki, 2005).

Question 6: What would be the possible remedies to the insufficient involvement from members?

FEMNET program staff suggested some ways they thought would help increase members’ involvement in its activities. They said the first step would be
building capacity for members because one reason for the lack of involvement could be that they did not understand the area of focus. However, no single member said that a lack of understanding was one of the causes they were not sufficiently involved.

Specifically, the process through which the organization carries out its communication activities should be made more consultative so as to foster in members a sense of ownership. FEMNET members should be helped to understand that FEMNET’s Secretariat is working for them, not the other way round.

One of the practices that should be maintained is FEMNET’s staff visit to members during an official trip to a country that hosts some members in order to show them the network cares enough. If the organization has some written materials, the visiting employee could bring some of them so they could be part of FEMNET’s resource centre. From the visit, a small article is captured and placed on FEMNET’s website so the organizational member could realize how valuable it is to the network.

In order to effectively manage communication, FEMNET would need to invest more time and money in the process. On this issue, FEMNET’s Secretariat acknowledges being challenged because of time constraints and limited resources. The network has many thematic list serves, some of which are quite active while others are dormant and would need moderation. This means that someone would be charged with regularly communicating with certain groups to keep them involved, solicit their input and feedback so that there is an on-going conversation as opposed to the current practice of relying on one-time exchanges.
Question 7: What are the opportunities for dialogue between FEMNET and its members?

FEMNET has provided space on the website where members can ask questions or make requests such as for catalogued books. FEMNET also asks members to use its monthly E-bulletin to publicize jobs and other career prospects. In addition, the general assembly provides members with the opportunity to offer ideas that can shape the direction of the network.

According to respondents, FEMNET has provided many opportunities for dialogue but they were not being fully used by members. FEMNET felt it was giving the best it could in terms of bridging the communication gap in providing information from international or regional levels to its members. However, members were not so responsive in terms of giving feedback. FEMNET’s main question is “why are members not responsive yet we are doing our best to provide them with information?”

Question 8: How do you evaluate FEMNET communication impact?

The organization carries out surveys to evaluate its communication impact, but it struggles mainly because feedback is insufficient or missing. Where possible, the organization relies on the word-of-mouth comments to self-evaluate though the ideal would be for members to directly say what they think about FEMNET’s communication process.

The network also inserts evaluation forms inside each hard copy of its publications before mailing them to members, but almost no one takes time to feel and return them. This method has been proven almost ineffective but the organization continues to use it with the hope that members would start responding some day.
Yet, Kennedy (2008) advises that in participatory communication one should be committed enough and willing to try different approaches and settle for the one(s) that work(s) best, even if it means investing more resources.

At times when there is an opportunity to have a face-to-face interaction with members, they often say they are very appreciative of the coordinative role that FEMNET plays, even the information it sends to members. While this is not formal feedback, it is nonetheless very helpful to the organization. A lot of people are intimidated by the idea of giving formal feedback— they are more comfortable making informal suggestions. When members receive communication from FEMNET, some may fail to respond because they fear it will be involving. They would rather have a face to-face interaction believing they can express their thoughts, without it being an extra burden. Nevertheless, formal communication and feedback-seeking efforts should not and must not be overlooked.

Observation

The researcher was able to observe the inadequate involvement of FEMNET’s members even while requesting them to feel questionnaires. Obviously, members seemed to highly regard FEMNET but most of them were not eager to fill the questionnaires. Some sent the researcher back for a later appointment, others postponing even up to twice. There were two organizations that categorically refused to take part in the study. Also, the fact that some members had changed their physical location and FEMNET was not aware so it could update its membership database was a sign that the relationship with its members was not vibrant to a satisfying level.

The researcher also observed that having face-to-face encounters with members highly affected feedback from them in a positive way. Normally, very few members
fill questionnaires received online or along publications but the physical presence of
the researcher served as a transient solution to that phase of communication
breakdown.

Summary

This chapter has provided and analyzed study findings. Questionnaire and
interviews have been presented and interpreted. Moreover, the researcher has
presented her own observation gathered during data collection from FEMNET”s
members. The following chapter concludes on the findings of the study in light of the
research, and discusses recommendations drawn from the study. It as well makes
recommendations for further studies.
CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter includes discussions of the findings according to the objectives of the study. It also consists of conclusions of the study, recommendations and suggestion for further studies. This study aimed at finding the causes of the lack of involvement from FEMNET members, as well as to suggest possible solutions to that problem. The purpose of the study was met through identifying ways FEMNET used to communicate to its members and how members perceived this process and would like it to be.

Discussions

The first objective of the study was to determine how FEMNET carries out its communication activities. The findings of this study revealed that the FEMNET communication process was not as participative as it should be. All members said they were minimally involved because, according to them, FEMNET had not done much to motivate them to become more involved. The Secretariat acknowledged that it had not been sufficiently involving members due to lack of capacity. From the literature review on levels of participation, FEMNET”s communication process can be classified under passive participation where primary stakeholders of a project participated by being informed about what was going to happen or has already happened. As a result, members” feedback was minimal or nonexistent. Indeed, a passive participation communication process where members participate by being informed about what is going to happen or has already happened has the potential to decrease feedback.
The study revealed that while FEMNET put a lot of efforts in gathering and disseminating information to its members, it often used the linear top-down approach which has not proved very effective. The network assumes that most members could not access information from international bodies or that they lacked the capacity to understand and that was why FEMNET had to distil and interpret the information before disseminating it. Since feedback is insufficient or even missing in some cases, the organization continues to carry its communication activities with the hope that it has an impact.

Even though FEMNET worked with the assumption that most members lacked the capacity to decipher information from international bodies, this research revealed that most members were fairly educated. Actually, from the study’s findings, it emerged that 33% of the respondents had bachelor degrees, 33.3% held master’s degrees while 8.3% held postgraduate diplomas.

The second objective of this study was to find out the extent to which members are involved in FEMNET’s communication process. The study revealed that most of the communication work was done from the Secretariat, and this included gathering information, tailoring it according to the perceived needs of the members, sending it to them and seeking feedback. Some members said that after receiving and reading information from FEMNET, they shared it with other women’s organizations or individuals who were not FEMNET’s members. But apart from a few who sent articles, others were not involved in the communication process as they had not been given the opportunity to do so.

The third objective of this research was to identify other communication strategies that FEMNET can use to enhance members’ involvement. The study found from respondents a number of ways FEMNET should use to make its communication
approaches more participatory. The sub-section on recommendations discussed each one of them in detail.

Conclusions

With the application of Freire pedagogy of liberation in the field of communication, the researcher was able to establish that the communication approach that FEMNET was using to reach its members was a substantial factor contributing to their lack of involvement in its communication process. Just as Srampickal (2006) argues, people hardly own a project or program that they are not fully involved in or one that does not actually meet their needs. This can happen when someone else purports to figure out what members’ needs are then attempts to suggest solutions on their behalf.

FEMNET cannot and should not stop sharing information with its members because that is its mandate. Both bottom-up and trickle down approaches are important to its success (Singhal, 1987). However, the organization will have to increase on its down-up communication activities in order to create room for a trickle-up influence (Romanow, 2005) so as to achieve a balanced professional and participatory communication procedure. Ramirez and Quarry (2004) asserts that in participatory processes people have tendencies to assume that hierarchies should be overlooked in order for people to participate as they please. They then advise that participation should not substitute professionalism rather professionalism should inform participatory methods and approaches.

Therefore, FEMNET will have to consider the basic components in the convergence model like dialogue and face-to-face communication. The transactional model also helps in reminding FEMNET that in participatory communication process, all parties involved are communicators and none should be regarded as a sole sender.
while the other only receives. Freire (1970) contends that individuals have the internal aptitude to develop themselves on their own terms, but need relationships to identify and act on this capacity. He goes on to say that a strong bond between people is never instantaneous but requires a process of communication which involves shared meaning between people. However, borrowing from the Battelle Memorial Institute & Environmental Resources Management (n.d.) idea, FEMNET will not have to accept all members’ suggestions but members will always need to know that their suggestions were thoughtfully heard and considered.

The findings confirmed the main assumption of this study that the lack of FEMNET’s members’ involvement in its communication activities was caused by the use of a top-down communication approach. However, the conclusion of the study is that as much as participatory communication would help increase the speed to which members provide feedback and take active part in FEMNET’s communication process, it would not be realistic for FEMNET to limit itself to using the bottom-up approach alone.

Recommendations

In 2009 the network had 291 members (FEMNET, 2009) which have now decreased to 200 members (FEMNET, 2011). The significant decrease in the membership size shows the need for a revision in the ways FEMNET relates to its members and carries its communication activities in order to avoid losing more members. The findings of the study have revealed that members’ inadequate involvement which can lead to membership fall out is directly linked to FEMNET’s communication approach.

However, it should be encouraging for FEMNET to note that though all respondents said they were insufficiently involved, 75% of them said they were
minimally involved but they kept thinking they should do better. It means they are willing to be involved, but FEMNET should put into consideration reasons that hinder members’ involvement as discussed throughout this study, then work on the following recommendations in order to facilitate their involvement.

1. FEMNET has been using communication means that do not require feedback and expected members to respond. Members, on the other hand, have been thinking that the network was only sharing information with them and since it mostly uses media of low richness, members find it unnecessary to keep on giving feedback. Therefore, FEMNET should start using media that allow rich information exchange in order to facilitate immediate feedback between communicators. This will also provide the opportunity to express and articulate messages in different ways. It is worth noting that members who usually do not bother to answer emails from FEMNET or offer feedback, accepted to fill questionnaires because of the researcher’s physical presence. In other word, face-to-face interactions have a great potential to promote feedback.

2. FEMNET needs to engage its members in a long-term relationship. Often than not, organizations opt for exchanging information about some pressing issues and once they are solved, connection is suspended. One of the findings of this study is that FEMNET had at times fallen in the same trap due to various constraints. Therefore, FEMNET should be consistently communicating with its members and forgo the one time exchange it has been using to reach to its members. There is also a need for regular meetings between FEMNET and its members, which can be
best facilitated by NFPs in collaboration with a Membership Officer who would be based at the Secretariat.

3. Some urgent actions that FEMNET would need to take include engaging a staff who would be solely charged with creating and maintaining a relationship between FEMNET and its members. The membership staff or liaison officer would be equipped with communication skills which would help FEMNET understand its members and members to understand their network. This would help FEMNET to be well informed concerning the needs of members and their thoughts, and these needs would be taken into consideration right from the planning process. It would be helpful for FEMNET to facilitate more frequent meetings with members, other than the PC&GA which takes place only once in three years. In order for such meetings to be cost effective, NFPs would organize annual or biannual FEMNET members meeting on a national level. That way, by the time the PC&GA takes place, members from the same country would have met not less than twice. Obviously, it would be necessary for the membership officer to attend most of those meetings.

4. It is important to note that all FEMNET members might not become actively involved in the communication process, as its communication officer rightly noted during an interview session. Therefore FEMNET needs to identify members who are interested in cooperation and those who have the prospective of becoming involved, and closely work with them. FEMNET should hold onto those members that have been actively involved, but also work on making many more others active. The network would then concentrate its efforts on maintaining each of them so that it
can still achieve its agenda to be felt throughout Africa and avoid inputting too much in members who are not interested in being more involved.

5. FEMNET should consider reducing the number of hard copies of publications it sends to its members, and only send them to those who cannot access soft copies or prefer hard ones. That way, the organization would be able to save some money which it would spend on phone calls since a number of members (41.3%) have expressed the desire for increased telephonic communication from FEMNET to them. The network will be able to receive prompt feedback and help members feel individually cared for.

6. FEMNET should learn how to be a good listener and stop talking at times, in order to give an ear to its members. The fact that 71.4% of respondents said they were not involved with FEMNET activities because they did not feel listened to should serve as an indicator that the network should learn how to listen to its members and this should be done through frequent interactions.

7. FEMNET should not consider evaluation as a snapshot of outcomes at the end of a project. There should be an ongoing process of information exchange which allows continuity and improved involvement as a result.

8. Interviews with FEMNET program staff revealed that the network held the assumption that members would not be able to understand information from international bodies; this alone has the potential to hinder involvement. FEMNET should rely on scientific studies like this one and other forms of feedback from members and not suppositions in identifying members’ needs.
Recommendations for Further Studies

From the study’s findings, the researcher has made recommendations for other studies that would foster involvement of organizational members:

The researcher proposes a study that would involve other members of FEMNET in all African sub-regions. That way, a comparative study would help in determining whether some regions are more involved than others. It would also help FEMNET to segment its audience more appropriately.

The researcher also suggests that FEMNET carries out a study that would involve members who quit membership so as to identify the reasons that made them leave the network and the shortcomings that the network should curb in the future to avoid losing more members.

In addition, there is need of a study that will identify other regional membership women’s organizations so that a comparative study can help FEMNET solicit insights from them.

General Conclusion

This study answered the main problem that the researcher sought to answer. The dilemma was that FEMNET, which is a communication-focused membership organization was not receiving adequate feedback from its members. Therefore, FEMNET needs to review its communication approach which has been identified as the main hindrance to its members’ involvement in its communication process, particularly in giving feedback to the network.
REFERENCES


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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for FEMNET’s Individual Members

My name is Nice Fidelite. I am a student at Daystar University, pursuing a master degree in the school of communication and performing arts; development communication is my concentration.

I am conducting a study on how participatory communication is likely to enhance members’ involvement in organizations and I am using FEMNET as a case. The overall objective of the study is to identify the cause (s), if any, of the lack of members’ involvement in FEMNET’s activities.

I kindly request you to be part of this study. As a member, you will be of great help in sharing your thoughts and feelings concerning your experience at FEMNET. Rest assured that the information you will share with me will only be used for the purpose of this study and it will be kept confidential. Each response you are going to give is valuable because it will help in answering research questions and the findings of the study will be used to strengthen the relationship between FEMNET and its members. Thanks!

PART I- Please tick inside the box that best describes your answer

1. For how long have you been a member of FEMNET?

2. What’s your level of education?
   - Diploma
   - Undergraduate
   - Master’s degree
   - PhD
   - Other. Kindly specify _______________________

3. What’s your profession? ____________________________

4. What’s your age bracket?
   - Below 24
   - 25-30
   - 31-36
   - 37-42
   - 43-48
   - 49- above

5. What is your nationality? ________________________

6. For how long have you been involvement in women’s rights activities?
   - Less than 1 year
   - 1-3 years
7. How often do you receive communication from FEMNET?
   - On a weekly basis
   - Once a month
   - Quarterly
   - Biannually
   - Once a year
   - Other ___________________________

8. How timely is communication from FEMNET?
   - Very timely
   - Irregular

9. Do you take time to read FEMNET’s publications?
   - Yes
   - No

10. Do you take part in FEMNET’s communication process?
    i) If yes, at what level?
        - Deciding on what to communicate and how
        - Gathering information
        - Disseminating information
        - Evaluation process
    ii) If not, would you like to be involved in the process and how?
        ___________________________________________________________________
        ___________________________________________________________________
        ___________________________________________________________________

11. How do you rate the content of FEMNET’s communication?
    - Relevant to me
    - Irrelevant to me
    - Well researched
    - Not well researched
12. Which of the following statements best describe your involvement in FEMNET’s activities?

- I am not involved at all
- I am minimally involved but I keep thinking I would like to do better
- I am minimally involved and I have not thought about doing anything to improve
- I want to quit
- Other. Kindly express yourself

13. How do you rate your involvement in FEMNET’s activities?

- Poor
- Average
- Fairly good
- Very good
- Excellent

i) If your involvement is poor; what are the contributing factors?

ii) If your involvement ranges from very good to excellent, what motivates you?

14. Are you a member of any other organization?

- Yes
- No

i) Are you more involved with the other organization than you are with FEMNET?

- Yes
- No
ii) If yes, how involved are you in the activities of the organization compared to your involvement at FEMNET?


15. If you are not involved as you feel you should be, what are the reasons for that?


16. To what extent do you agree/ disagree with the statements below?

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17. What are the reasons that made you join FEMNET as a member?


18. How would you like FEMNET communication process to be like so you can become more involved?


THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
Appendix 2: Questionnaire for FEMNET’s Organizational Members

My name is Nice Fidelite. I am a student at Daystar University, pursuing a master degree in the school of communication and performing arts; development communication is my concentration.

I am conducting a study on how participatory communication is likely to enhance members’ involvement in organizations and I am using FEMNET as a case. The overall objective of the study is to identify the cause(s), if any, of the lack of members’ involvement in FEMNET’s activities.

I kindly request you to be part of this study. As a member, you will be of great help in sharing your thoughts and feelings concerning your experience at FEMNET. Rest assured that the information you will share with me will only be used for the purpose of this study and it will be kept confidential. Each response you are going to give is valuable because it will help in answering research questions and the findings of the study will be used to strengthen the relationship between FEMNET and its members. Thanks!

PART I- Please tick inside the box that best describes your answer

1. For how long have you been a member of FEMNET?___________________________

3. What’s your organization’s focus area? ____________________________

3. How often do you receive communication from FEMNET? 
   - On a weekly basis
   - Once a month
   - Quarterly
   - Biannually
   - Once a year
   - Other ___________________________

4. How timely is communication from FEMNET? 
   - On a weekly basis
   - Once a month
   - Quarterly
   - Biannually
   - Once a year
   - Other ___________________________

5. Do you take time to read FEMNET’s publications? 
   - Yes
   - No
6. Do you take part in FEMNET’s communication process?
   i) If yes, at what level?
      - Deciding on what to communicate and how
      - Gathering information
      - Disseminating information
      - Evaluation process
   ii) If not, would you like to be involved in the process and how?

7. How do you rate the content of FEMNET’s communication?
   - Relevant to me
   - Irrelevant to me
   - Well researched
   - Not well researched

8. Which of the following statements best describe your involvement in FEMNET’s activities?
   - I am not involved at all
   - I am minimally involved but I keep thinking I would like to do better
   - I am minimally involved and I have not thought about doing anything to improve
   - In fact, I want to quit
   - Other. Kindly express yourself

9. How do you rate your involvement in FEMNET’s activities?
   - Poor
   - Average
   - Fairly good
   - Very good
   - Excellent
   i) If your involvement is poor; what are the contributing factors?
   ii) If your involvement ranges from very good to excellent, what motivates you?
10. Are you a member of any other organization?
- Yes
- No

iii) Are you more involved with the other organization than you are with FEMNET?
- Yes
- No

iv) If yes, how involved are you in the activities of the organization compared to your involvement at FEMNET?
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

11. If you are not involved in FEMNET’s communication activities as you feel you should, what are the reasons for that?
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

12. To what extent do you agree/disagree with the statements below?

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13. What are the reasons that made you join FEMNET as a member?
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14. How would you like FEMNET communication process to be like so you can become more involved?
________________________________________________________________

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
Appendix 3: Interview Guide

1. What is the significance of members’ feedback to FEMNET?

2. How do you decide on the topic of FEMNET’s publication?

3. How do you segment your target audience?

4. How would you describe FEMNET’s communication approaches? i.e: top down, down up or horizontal. Kindly explain your answer in a broad way.

5. What do you perceive to be the cause(s) of the insufficient involvement of FEMNET’s members?

6. What would be the possible remedies to the insufficient involvement from members?

7. What are the opportunities for dialogue between FEMNET and her members?

8. How do you evaluate FEMNET communication impact?