Harnessing the Communication Process to Enhance the Diffusion and Impact of Preventive and Incremental Innovations in Sub-Saharan Africa: lessons from Uganda and Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The link between development agencies as purveyors of innovations and intended adopters has been widely discussed in various fields of development. This study attempts to build on the pioneer work on the diffusion of innovations by Rogers (2003) which explains why certain new ideas and practices spread at different rates and why some are either rejected or subjected to a reinvention process. The vigor of this theory derives from its scholarly reputation and robustness in explaining the importance of a communication continuum during the five-stage diffusion process that involves awareness, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. This dissertation makes a unique contribution to existing diffusion studies that address development problems in sub-Saharan Africa and showcases how communication strategies have been applied to enhance the diffusion and impact of preventive and incremental innovations.

The lessons drawn from the study demonstrate that communication based approaches are the common thread that unifies stakeholders during the evaluation of the innovation. They also highlight the importance of multiple communication tools on a continuum since potential adopters vary in their socio-economic characteristics and in how they assess their needs and priorities. The lessons also show that the authority driven linear model is still relevant in situations that require direction and enforcement while interpersonal contacts and networks are vital for allaying fears about innovations and confirming the adoption decision. Contextual factors can facilitate or hinder potential adopters from implementing their adoption decisions, and can also impair information seeking behavior. Failures in the confirmation of preventive innovations are shown to be located in the mismatch between the perceived danger of risk vis-à-vis the perceived self-efficacy and socio-cultural beliefs and practices, while failures in the uptake of incremental innovations are associated with the perceived benefits of the innovation.

The study identifies the need for development agents to go beyond the typical five DOI stages to include a preparatory stage of assessing and prioritizing needs and a sixth stage of consolidating gains in terms of adoption particularly in preventive innovations; the need to valorize endogenous knowledge; and the need to shift focus towards the structural, environmental factors within which diffusion occurs.

Keywords: sub-Saharan Africa; development communication; diffusion of innovations; incremental innovations; preventive innovations; food security; HIV/AIDS; poverty reduction

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